

Land of Living skies – The Dark Side

Even without all the hockey excitement going on around town this year, I am quite certain that I could count on one hand the number of people who would be aware that we're in the midst of International Astronomy Week, with Astronomy Day being Saturday, May 6th. I do not mean to suggest knowing this will be a life changing experience, but hey... what better time to shine a little light on something, by it's very nature, done in the dark.

Astronomy is quite unique among 'hobbies'... it is perhaps the only field of science in which amateurs are welcomed to work along side professionals to further our understanding of the universe. You can do it occasionally for personal enjoyment or you can contribute scientific data in a variety of fields, all without leaving your back yard.

So, what's to see? Visual astronomy can be enjoyed with just your eyes, with binoculars or with a variety of telescopes. With your eyes alone, you can observe brighter comets, meteor showers or even track a few variable stars as they brighten and dim. With binoculars, add the mountains and craters of the moon or a variety of star clusters. With a quality telescope, the sky's the limit (pun intended): Jupiter's coloured bands and moons, Saturn's rings, bright and dark gas clouds, pairs of stars in orbit around each other, globes made up of hundreds tightly-packed stars (I kid you not) and literally thousands of galaxies each with millions of stars. Just the other night, in ten minutes or so, I'd checked out 3 of the planets of our solar system, 5 moons other than our own, 2 star clusters and a comet that's currently passing by. The nice thing is that at least for now, despite the City's current effort to totally pollute the sky with their regressive streetlights, you can still do this from in town.

So, while nothing especially astronomical happens during Astronomy Week or on Astronomy Day itself, what better opportunity to remind people that the Land of Living Skies has a dark side that's far more beautiful and intriguing than the one we are generally familiar with. During the day, our senses show us the world as it is immediately around us, but at night, one can observe the unimaginably vast universe our *Earth* travels in. It can be a very humbling experience.

So, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind people that sunset is not the end of the day, but rather the beginning of the night. Don't forget to look up. I'd also like to remind the City that there's a sky 24 hours a day, and to ask that they adhere to internationally accepted responsible lighting practices so one can continue to pursue astronomy interests from back yards and parks.

My telescope and I plan to spend 9pm-11pm Saturday, May 6th just off the sidewalk on the north side of Columbian Park on Riverview Road in the City's southwest... assuming reasonably clear skies. So, if you just happen to be in the neighbourhood and would like to see Jupiter's moons, Saturn's rings or our moon like you've never seen it before, you are welcome to join me. Astronomy is a hobby that begs to be shared.

Finally, I know that there are many closet astronomers in the area. Regardless of whether you are a total novice or have personally discovered 20 comets, I would very much like to hear your thoughts as to forming a local astronomy organization. I can be contacted at 306-783-5634 pretty much any time or via email at astronomy@myotherlife.net . I also invite all to check out <http://llsds.blogspot.com> where I hope to keep people aware of what's going in the night sky.

Happy Astronomy Week.

Jim Huziak