

Colonization — are we close to settling other planets?

Neel Roberts

The Sky's the Limit

It seems hard to believe that a year has passed since Leonard Nimoy made history across the world with the famous quote, "I've been away from Vulcan for years now and I figured it's time I finally came home." Meanwhile, around the same time, "By the mid-2030s, I believe we can send humans to orbit Mars and return them safely to Earth. And a landing on Mars will follow. And I expect to be around to see it." This was what President Barack Obama promised a crowd at the Kennedy Space Center on April 15, 2010 as the U.S. congress approved the bill to accomplish this. Two different places, circumstances and directions were discussed, yet the idea of settling other planets has been in the imagination of man since flight became possible.

The obvious obstacles of distance and living conditions are the primary factors as even a radio signal between Mars and the Earth takes over 45 minutes to transmit. Also, the atmospheric pressure

on Mars is so intense that a person's blood would boil the minute bare skin is exposed. Add different gravitation, radiation and a total lack of resources, it seems like an impossible task. Yet it was 50 short years ago that President John F. Kennedy pledged to land on the moon by the end of the decade. While he never lived to see it in 1969, are you betting you'll hang in there with Obama to witness this extraordinary event? Many of us never thought Spock would come home yet it seemed out of the blues Nimoy showed up, so it's OK to pray for a miracle!

Sky watch for the next month

See six planets and the moon before 6 a.m. For all you early risers looking at the moon before sunrise May 23, there will be Neptune, Uranus, Jupiter, Venus, Mars and Mercury coming up before the sun is fully up by 6 a.m., so have a good telescope to catch this Victoria Day marathon.

Impress mom on her day May 8 at the 5 a.m. sunrise as Venus is with Mercury, Mars, Jupiter, Uranus, Jupiter, Neptune and Pluto in the southeast horizon. A

rare treat!

M35 (Open Cluster) sets with the moon on May 6. If you're trying to find M35, focus on the moon after dinner on May 6 as it'll follow it on top as it sets in the northwest-west at about midnight.

The Delta Aquarids Meteor Shower, which is caused by comet 1P Halley, runs April 19 to May 28. It usually produces about 20 meteors per hour and peaks May 5-7 from 3:30 a.m. to 5 a.m.

Public events for the next month

The Saturday Observer's Night at the Telescope Farm, which is hosted by the All Star Telescope (www.all-startelescope.com) just outside Didsbury, takes place Saturday starting at 9 p.m. until midnight. This full facility telescope dealer provides refreshments, has washrooms, and everything is provided for no charge. I am planning to attend, and you are welcome to caravan with a group I am assembling leaving Vulcan around 5 p.m., weather permitting. We stop for a Chinese buffet before heading to the celestial farm for the evening. For further information, contact Ken

From at 866-310-8844, or visit www.all-startelescope.com/index.php/Observer-Nights.html.

Monthly public stargazing at the Trek Station

This will be our fourth monthly meeting at the Trek Station and it's wonderful much interest has grown in these gatherings in such a short time. If you've never come, don't hesitate to get involved, as it's a great family event. We'll check out the full moon rising on May 17 at 10 p.m. as we are about to celebrate Victoria Day. We'll have a fireworks celebration, so don't miss this. Outdoor gazing to follow, weather permitting, and if you come early, you'll catch Saturn in daylight, a real delight to see. Treats and refreshments are provided free of charge, and all are welcome. For further information, contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994, or visit the website www.vulcantourism.com.

Happy Mother's and Victoria Day!

Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at (403) 485-2683 and Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com.