

Maycroft: southern Alberta's convenient dark zone

PBS recently made a documentary called *The City Dark* — it can be watched free online — which should be viewed by those concerned about the diminishing black sky.

Since the industrial revolution of the 1800s, populated settlements have experienced an increasing loss of the night sky that is unprecedented since the beginning of time.

Thanks to recent improvements in Google Earth, dark sky map www.cleardarksky.com now gives a bird's eye view of the bright verses dark zones on our planet. No surprise, the populous and accessible areas do not have the pure view as enjoyed by the ancients, but there are local pockets that luckily escape this.

Maycroft, a campground on the Cowboy trail of Highway 22 just south of Chain Lakes



Neel Roberts

The Sky's the Limit

Provincial Park on the banks of the Old Man River, has the equivalent sky ranking as dark sky preserve Cyprus Hills Park.

A dark-sky preserve is protected from artificial light and maintains the nocturnal environment in its original manner. In these areas, one can see the Milky Way so brightly that it seems like someone painted the sky with a white brush. With a scope, one can hope to observe some distant objects with great clarification. While it doesn't measure up to the Hubble telescope up in space, it's the next thing on Earth near home!

Sky watch for the next month

The waxing moon will rise with Venus on Tuesday, Jan. 28. Look in the southeast-easy horizon before 6 a.m. and the crescent moon comes up with Venus next to it.

A midnight Mars will raise Spica. Look in the southeast-east horizon just before midnight on Tuesday, Jan. 28 as the red planet pulls up the double star Spica.

Venus will pull the morning sun up on Saturday, Jan. 11. Look southeast-east before 8 a.m. as Venus, the morning star, brings up the sunrise in close conjunction.

Public events for the next month

Come check out our first monthly public stargazing session of the new year at the Trek Station this Friday (Jan. 10). The event comes courtesy of the Royal Astronomi-

cal Society of Canada, and starts at 7:30 p.m. An indoor presentation is followed by stargazing with an 11-inch telescope and binoculars (weather permitting). Everyone is welcome. There is no charge, and refreshments are provided. Experts are on hand every second Friday of the month at 7:30 p.m. to explain the heavens, teach scoping skills and help you develop your knowledge of our sky. For more information, visit www.vulcan-tourism.com or contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994.

Happy New Year and the best for 2014 and beyond!

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