

Northern lights moving southbound?

A recent Columbia University study suggests a weakening magnetic pole may be pushing the famous Arctic Aurora Borealis sky show closer to the U.S./Canada border.

Dennis Kent from Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory claims the planet's magnetic field is down 10 per cent in the last 20 years according to a recent BBC interview.

This is wonderful news and great start to the new year for us at this latitude considering the bulk of the Canadian population is close to the 49th parallel.

While we may not have the six months of near darkness to enjoy it like they do, the warmer weather gives us the advantage to stay outside longer with darkness all year round. Kent confirms we can expect more auroras appearing in lower latitude regions.

On the opposite side of the planet, the southern lights, or Aurora Australis, could be in the same boat with theirs crawling north. Evidence of this shift has become plain in places such as Ottawa which recently experienced more frequent occurrences in recent years so time will tell if this is the real deal.

Sky watch for the next month:

- New Year's Comet Catalina next to Arcturus — As of Friday, Jan. 1 you can spot this possibly naked eye object but better seen through bins for most of the month before dawn.

- Venus and Saturn rise before sun — Just before dawn Friday, Jan. 8 you can catch them rising in the SEE for the next few days with the naked eye.

- Waxing Gibbous Moon occults Aldebaran — Look at the moon Tuesday, Jan. 19 at 7 p.m. as Aldebaran will hide behind it for about an hour.

- Quadrantid Meteor Shower — Peaks Monday, Jan. 4 after midnight going on about a week. Best viewing the Bootes constellation (NEE) with little moonlight to block it.

Public Events for the next month:

Monthly Public Stargazing at the Trek Center. Check out our first stargazing event for 2016 which also happens to be on Jan. 8 courtesy of the RASC (Calgary) starting at 7:30 p.m. Brief indoor presentation followed by stargazing by the 11-inch telescope and binoculars outside (weather permitting). All welcome, no charge and refreshments provided.



Neel ROBERTS
YOUR UNIVERSE

Experts on hand the second Friday monthly at 7:30 p.m. to explain the heavens, teach scoping skills and help you develop your knowledge of our sky. For further information, contact the Trek Center at 403-485-2994 and the website www.vulcantourism.com will be updated regularly.

Happy new year and the best for 2016 and beyond.

Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC)-the nation's leading astronomy club founded in 1849 with more than 4,000 members and 28 centers across Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at 403-560-6574,

Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com. The members meet the second Friday monthly at the Trek Center in Vulcan once a month and you can check them out at <http://calgary.rasc.ca/vulcan2016.htm>.



Photos by Neel Roberts

Above, Wade Williamson of Calgary points to the sky "a la Spock style." At left, students from Brooks warm up inside. The Trek center has a variety of treats free of charge.



Shannon Clarke, tourism assistant, greets a visitor. Most guests are from outside of Vulcan.

