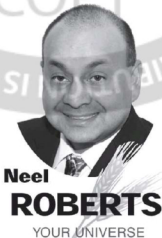


From dark to light: Calgary's Rothney Observatory celebrates 50th Anniversary while facing bright future

BY NEEL ROBERTS

Is light a good thing? Most people do but when it comes to astronomy, the exact opposite is true. Calgary's Rothney Observatory located 10 minutes outside of the city limits is suffering from a loss of dark preserve skies. Built in the early 70s, it just celebrated it's 50th anniversary opening to the public January 07th, 1972. Back then, the city was built up to about Southland Drive on the South end and had a population of about 400,000. Outside of the little hamlet of Midnapore, there was practically no civilization. If you talk to the older people, they'll tell you people would travel that far to camp and make a weekend out of it. Many roads in the area were not paved and cars back then were nowhere as comfortable as they are today.

Built 1 mile south of 22X on highway 22 (the cowboy trail) with land donated by rancher Sandy Cross, it broke ground in 1970. Since it's opening, it has undergone



many upgrades including an on-line sky cam <https://science.ucalgary.ca/rothney-observatory/about/skywatch-and-multimedia>.

You can check out the historic details at <https://science.ucalgary.ca/rothney-observatory/about/history> but with the recent completion of the Calgary Ring Road of Stoney Trail, it's losing more of its natural dark skies each year. With the population easily expected to double in the next 50 years, the city limits are expected to either be next door or to even engulf the area like Spruce Meadows. If a new location was needed, it'd have to be close to a highway for public access and facilities. According to Clear Dark Sky's light

pollution map https://www.cleardarksky.com/maps/lp/large_light_pollution_map.html, pickings are slim within 30 minutes from Calgary. The International Dark Sky Association has a classification for a "urban night sky place" <https://www.darksky.org/our-work/conservation/idsp/unsp/> which would be a good target for the

Rothney's next dark plan. "The Best Is Yet To Come!"

Sky watch for the next month:

Download this month's sky free chart at <http://whatsouttonight.com/Resources/2021MarSkyWOT.pdf>

1. Mars, Venus, Saturn & thin pre-dawn Crescent Moon rising- On Monday March 28th before sunrise look SEE as these four will rise into the morning.
2. Spring Equinox- On Saturday, March 20th at 09:33 am and the days are getting noticeably longer.
3. Daylight Savings here- Set your clock ahead at 02:00 am Sunday, March 13th.
4. Zodiacal Light- is a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or

zodiac. Discovered by the astronomer Giovanni Domenico Cassini in 1683 and later explained by Nicolas Fatio de Duillier in 1684, its best time is from Sunday, March 20th for 2 weeks.

Happy Spring and Longer Days!
Neel Roberts is a local astronomer in Southern Alberta and welcomes your comments at Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com. Tel: (403) 560-6574. Check out his work at www.ptccanada.com.

