



# Winnicentrics

Newsletter of the Winnipeg Centre of the  
Royal Astronomical Society of Canada



## Spruce Woods Star Party

The auroral image was taken from Norway, while on a cruise. The stars are a little trailed because of the ship motion.  
Photo by: Judy Anderson (Winnipeg)

All members and their family are welcome! A special welcome goes to members and their family who haven't attended the SWSP in the past! The SWSP committee is already deep into planning this year's star party and it promises to be a great one! Here are a few items to keep in mind. This year, our annual star party will be held from September 10th to 13th, 2015 at Spruce Woods Provincial Park. (New Moon is on September 13th). Camping is available at the observing area where open and dark skies await you! There is no electricity and water but for those looking at camping with these services, yurts and campsites are available at the Kiche Manitou campground less than a kilometer away. Reservations for yurts and campgrounds start in a few weeks. Yurt reservations start on March 23rd. Campsite reservations start on April 6th. They can go quickly so be ready to reserve on the first day. More information at <http://prspub.gov.mb.ca/>. A provincial park pass will be required. Unlike last year, when the star party fell on a Free Parks Entry Weekend, this year's star party unfortunately does not. If you'll have an annual park pass, do not forget to bring it with you. If you won't have a park pass, a 3-day pass can be purchased at the Kiche Manitou campground office upon your arrival for \$12. Come to the open and dark skies at Spruce Woods and meet other members who share your enthusiasm for astronomy!



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## Astronomy Day

Our annual Astronomy Day will be held April 25, 2015 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and from 8 p.m. until 11 p.m. The daylight events will take place at Chapters on Empress St.: a booth inside to promote astronomy and the Winnipeg Centre of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, and if weather permits, at least one solar scope outside. For the evening session, we will set up in Assiniboine Park at picnic site 15 (east side of the park). We will be looking at the Moon, Jupiter, Venus, the Beehive Cluster, and Saturn if time and weather permit. We would love to see Centre members out with their telescopes to show the public the joys of astronomy and the wonders of the night sky, or just show up to enjoy the sky yourself through other telescopes. The event is free and open to the public!



The view of M84, M86, and the surrounding galaxies was acquired last March. It is a composite of 24 x 5-minute sub frames. M84 is at the top, M86 is in the middle, the "eyebrow" at the bottom is NGC 4438. I count at least 35 galaxies in the field.

Photo by: Jay Anderson (Winnipeg)



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Where to begin...

After being asked a multitude of times to write an article for Winnicentrix I made a note so I wouldn't forget. I'm now sitting at my desk, looking down at my reminder and unfortunately there's no topic on it... apparently I forgot to put one down! Certainly I should write something astronomy related, but what? While looking around me to see if something would trigger an idea I turned my head quickly and a sharp pain radiated between my shoulder blades... I now had my story!

Galaxies. I love them... from the theory of their birth to how they evolve, what they're made of and of course what they look like. Hands down, to me, galaxies are the most beautiful objects in the sky. There's something that resonates within me when I look at the structure and interactions of these amazing objects. But how do galaxies relate to my sore back? Well, spring time is galaxy season, but unfortunately as prairie dwellers know, it's also either cloudy or cold or both. Usually bitterly cold when Leo and Coma Berenices are at their best and the nights are still long. But this spring has bucked that trend and I have been out a number of nights under the stars imaging some of those galaxies I so rarely get the opportunity to. It was on my last such excursion where my story begins.

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Article and photo by: Kevin Galka (Winnipeg)





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The forecast was calling for cold, -16C, with the wind dying down during the night. Dressed accordingly I headed out with a few fellow imagers about 40 minutes outside of the city. When I arrived at our spot the skies were incredibly stable, some of the best I've seen a long time... even the stars on the horizon showed next to no twinkling. This was going to be a great night...

While setting up my telescope the skies began to brighten. At first we thought it was ice fog or thin clouds but after a while some aurora popped up... and not the photogenic kind but a dull green ionization of the whole sky with little bits brightening here and there... boring, boring, boring! I was nearly set up though and crossed my fingers it would soon die out. I began my polar alignment procedure only to kick a wire and knock out the power to the mount... time to start over. Round two, polar aligned I entered the first target of the night into the computer. The telescope slewed to the correct area of the sky but unfortunately pointing accuracy was off and I wasn't quite on my target. Wanting to see how far off I went to visually line up the scope and without thinking I manually nudged it. Unfortunately I forgot to tighten some bolts on the mount and the entire mount moved about 5 degrees east completely ruining polar alignment. Sigh... I had to start from scratch... again! Round three, pointing accuracy was still out. This time I decided to let the computer try and determine where the scope was by a procedure called plate solving. A short exposure is taken and the computer tries to match up stars in the image with a database of star positions. Normally this works great but unfortunately the aurora was causing the images to be grainy and plate solving wasn't successful. Out for nearly 3 hours already and nothing to show besides a single shot of a brief bright aurora flare up, I was cold, tired, and to be honest a little annoyed. With the aurora washing out the sky and the wind still blowing I decided to just pack up. My fellow imagers didn't have the same issues I did so at least someone was having a good time! After taking everything down the wind died and the aurora went away... the stars looked incredible against the nearly black sky. For a brief moment I toyed with the idea of setting up again, but it was a fleeting thought. I just wanted to go home and get some sleep. Saying good night to the others I drove off into the night.

During the drive a fleeting moment passed when I thought I should have just stayed at home... but no, I was glad I went! Though I didn't get a single image of a single galaxy and spent hours in the cold wind messing around with telescopes and computers, I was still out under the stars. A famous man once said "We are made of star stuff" and when I'm under a night sky with the stars shining above I feel a deep affinity for them, a connection, almost a longing. I feel it in my very being... we are star stuff, and a night spent under them is never a night wasted.

Though made of the stuff of stars I'm nowhere near as hardy and it took but a day for me to realize that I caught a chill from that night and said chill is the cause of the pain between my shoulders. Would I do it again? In a heartbeat.

Kevin Galka



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## Upcoming events

- April 4, 2015  
Full Moon
- April 6, 2015  
Uranus in conjunction with the sun
- April 8, 2015  
Jupiter stationary
- April 10, 2015  
Mercury at superior conjunction  
RASC Monthly Meeting
- April 12, 2015  
Yuri's Night  
Manitoba Museum
- April 17, 2015  
Pluto stationary
- April 18, 2015  
New Moon
- April 25, 2015  
First Quarter  
Astronomy Day
- May 4, 2015  
Full Moon
- May 8, 2015  
RASC Monthly Meeting
- May 11, 2015  
Last Quarter
- May 18, 2015  
New Moon
- May 23, 2015  
Saturn at Opposition
- May 25, 2015  
First Quarter
- May 18, 2015  
New Moon

Regular meetings of the Winnipeg Centre are held in the Robert B. Schultz lecture theatre in St. John's College at the University of Manitoba. The theatre is on the lower (basement) floor of the College. Meetings are held on the second Friday of each month from 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. After the meetings, members who wish to do so usually retire to "The Hub" in University Centre for more conversation about astronomical subjects.

The June meeting is not held at St. John's College but is instead a barbeque at either a member's house or at Glenlea. Meeting dates and meeting places may be adjusted during exam times and during Bomber home games or stadium events.

## April Meeting Schedule

- 7:00 – 7:30 p.m. Beginner's Session – Gerry Smerchanski: Celestial Sphere (Part 2);
- 7:30 – 8:30 p.m. What's Up? - Jay Anderson: a review of upcoming events in the sky;  
What's New? - Jennifer West: discoveries from the Universe;  
Hunting Messier – Stan Runge;  
Fort Whyte Astronomy Dinner – Marni Dangerfield;
- 8:30 – 9:00 p.m. Break for Refreshments;
- 9:00 – 10:00 p.m. Eclipse adventures in Svalbard and Norway with Judy and Jay Anderson: see some of the lights they chased in the sky, deep inside a glacier, and from shipboard as the moon, sun, fjords, and magnetic fields wove a wonderful time.
- 10:00 p.m. Pizza at The Hub in University Centre.

## Winnipeg Centre

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