

Minutes of the last meeting at Vincentia Public School (May 1992)

Attendees: David Hawksworth, Steven Holloway, Frank Gross, Noel Welsh, Dusty Jones, Nick Thew, Chris Higgs, David Gardiner, Mark Town, Vicki Rees, Ian Scott, Chris O'Hanlon, Kruno Ratkovic, Robin Cantrill, Jack Apfelbaum and Jim Watt.

All at the meeting wished to continue our informal meeting format where we discuss everything about anything. However, it is now necessary to have some sort of formal membership in order to cover the costs of producing the magazine and to be able to purchase slides and videos. These could then be lent to members and shown at meetings. They would also be available to members if they are asked to present lectures or viewing nights at schools, etc.

It was appreciated that some people could not attend the group's meetings but they might like to still receive this publication in order to keep in touch with what is going on in the field of astronomy. It was decided to have two forms of membership. Full for those who can attend the meetings and associate for those who would like to continue to receive this magazine. Fees of \$20 and \$10 were set respectively. Frank Gross was nominated as collector of all this money so he now is our Treasurer.

The move to the new venue of Falls Creek Public School was discussed. All agreed that this should be an excellent dark sky site and will be very convenient for people to get to. It is much more central for those coming from north or south.

Jim Watt wrote Southern Astronomy magazine to list our group with their list of clubs. He also ctd the Sutherland Astronomical Society to find out what arrangements they have when they hold their public viewing nights. Some concern was raised about public liability insurance at our upcoming Public Viewing Night at Harry Sawkins Park.

Much discussion took place on the Public Viewing Night. A quick check was made and at least twelve telescopes will be available on the night. Vicki Rees offered the use of her utility for transportation of any bulky items on the night. Some of us will examine the site during one evening to ascertain the best area to set up the telescopes on the night.

Some suggested having drinks and sausage sandwiches available as a means of raising money but for now it was decided not to do this.

This was followed by another slide show presented by Frank Gross. This was a series of photos taken from the Voyager 2 flyby of Uranus in 1986.

There were a few members telescopes present on the night including my half finished 330mm Newtonian. The skies were clear and some observing was successfully completed. I think that all present would agree that it was an excellent meeting.

The Parkes Expedition (September 1992) by Frank Gross

In September 1992, I loaded my Datsun 120Y with three tents, food, drink, cooking burners and two other club members: Sean McHue and Kruno Ratkovic. Needless to say, the car was absolutely full. There was NO additional room and I pity the poor sod who had to sit in the back seat! We were heading for Parkes, and the road took us west to Yass after which we turn north and passed through towns I had never heard of before. We stopped in Boorowa at a bakery on the main street for pies and drinks. Then it was on to Cowra. As we passed through the countryside we were met with vast vistas of yellow or purple. The yellow I found out was fields of Rapeseed plants (Canola) growing. The purple happened to be Patterson's Curse which was a main source of pollen for bees out here. These colours

juxtapositioned with fields of green crops made the countryside out here very memorable. We passed through a large area of Cyprus Pine. The pine trees seemed to go on forever. I don't know if this was a plantation or just grew naturally.

Finally, six and a half hours after we left Nowra, we arrived in Parkes. Parkes seemed to be a fairly big, mostly flat town. I remember one hill in the town which turned out to be Memorial Hill, where the War Memorial is located. We travelled there and took a look at the memorial. There were fresh puddles of rain all around the place. The air smelled fresh.

From there we drove out the Newell Highway and when we were 20 kilometers out of town there was the Big Ear in the distance on our right. We found the entrance and drove up to the visitors centre. I forget who we met there but we were told to go pitch our tents out in the paddock next to the radio telescope. Clouds were gathering again.

Someone came and told us campers that a brown snake had been spotted going down into its hole not 100 meters away from our tents. It was a big Brown snake.

However, we met up with a few other members of the club and had the tour of our lives into the base and control room of the telescope. If you have ever seen the Australian movie "The Dish" much of it was filmed in the same control room we were then having a tour of. Then, it was up, up into the scaffolding holding the dish antenna in place. We were escorted through the gangways and rigging making our way to the actual base of the dish itself. If I remember correctly we were allowed to climb one final steel ladder and poke our heads through an opening to see the inside of the dish - the reflecting surface. The view was breathtaking.

After dinner that night we all retired to our respective tents or vehicles to get some shut eye. I noticed a big wind had come up and was whipping the material of my tent all over the place. I fell asleep but then was awoken with the sound of rain. Rain and more rain. Then I heard Kruno talking outside my tent. His tent had collapsed from the rain and he was telling me that the people in charge of the dish had invited us all into the scientists quarters just a few tens of meters away from where we were camped. I was happy to comply because my sleeping bag was a quarter wet. At least now we were dry and had a solid roof over our head even if the wooden floor of the scientist quarters was about 10 times harder than the soft ground of the paddock.

On our final morning at the Radio Telescope we were all invited to see the showing of the short film about Parkes in their theatre. I was much too interested in something else I had found than go see the film. There was this new astronomy planetarium program available called Voyager. I took down as many details as I could about this program and found out the price was a bit much for me to pick up right then and there. When I returned home I negotiated with the wife and for Christmas that year was surprised to find a Planetarium program called Voyager as one of my Christmas presents. Well, I wasn't really surprised because I had wrapped it myself.

There was a disused dish next to the big dish. The smaller dish was about 6 meters in diameter. We found out that people were trying to form a club of interested amateurs to get this smaller dish into operation again. This was back in 1992. I wonder if that smaller dish was ever resurrected and is now operational? In the late 90s I remember going to the great junk yard in Bulli called **Cavion** and spying a cut up radio telescope lying on the ground. I calculated that the diameter would have been around the 5 meter mark. I wonder.....

Anyhow, the trip back to Nowra was almost mystical. Here we were, Sean, Kruno and myself cruising the highways at 100 kph. It was late morning and we tried to get a radio station to listen to. We found the best available but it faded in and out. Driving my car out there was almost dreamlike. For minutes on end the drone of my car's engine disappeared and I remember a song being played, music that I very much liked. It was fading in and out of hearing range. It turned out to be the New Zealand/British band Wang Chung. I will always remember that song - **Dance Hall Days**. Then as we drove a long sweeping

curve we were met with about 150 motorcycles loudly barreling by us in the other lane. In fact some of them were slightly in my lane. This snapped me out my trance quick smart. I got over as far as I could to give them room. I noticed the insignia on some of their jackets - **Hells Angels**.

The rest of the trip back to Nowra was uneventful. Yawn!