

## Crago Report 2010-2011

Delivered to the AGM of ASNSW on the 12<sup>th</sup> August 2011

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for the opportunity to deliver to the annual report on the current years activities at the Crago Observatory on Bowen Mountain and our plans for the future.

To say the sky conditions this year were disappointing would be an under-statement. We managed only three reasonably clear public nights which were well attended by members, their guests and the general public. On the best nights we had over fifty visitors although there were no major public events as in previous years. Notable was been the welcome use of the facilities by the Tara Anglican Girls school who have a highly active Astronomical section. Paul has been instrumental in founding a strong relationship with the school. I am sure he will be providing more information on this relationship and our plans to assist them in promoting astronomy to enquiring young minds who will have the opportunity to take an active role in answering some of the most significant questions ever posed; namely our place in the universe and how it all works.

It is good to see new and prospective members using the facilities and it is always a delight to show them some the celestial wonders of the Southern sky under the darkest and least light polluted available in the Sydney region. Bowen Mountain is capable of delivering exceptional seeing and occasionally when the serendipitous conjunction of fog and cloud sits below us in the Sydney basin, spectacular transparency. We had one such night recently on a New Moon weekend when Paul, Richard, a new member, Stacey and I had what Richard described as the best night he has ever seen in almost 30 years. As we drove back down the mountain into the 50 kilometres of pea soup fog the blotted out the city lights the reason became apparent. These sorts of nights are available to everyone willing put in the time and I welcome enquiries. Paul will no doubt talk about our plans to upgrade the societies technology base which will provide opportunities to keep members up to date on the favourable conditions likely to greet them should they make the journey, or not as the case may be.

Last year the working bee saw around thirty members join in for the bush clearing, sausage sizzle and dramatic burial of that old pier on the field that was creating an obstacle to the Rural Fire Service Helicopter operations. I am pleased to report that our application for a forty year extension has been accepted and received no objections from the RFS or National Parks and we hope that in about 18 months we will know for sure whether we will be able to continue our lease on the property. Consequently, a lot of plans have been in abeyance until this matter is resolved. We have acquired a substantial set of rings as a gift from Josh Roberts now defunct Mount White Observatory and it is intended to begin a program of remediation and development as soon as the lease extension is approved. The new rings may provide the basis for automating the dome and synchronising its movements with the telescopes' StellarCat control unit.

It was with great sadness we witnessed the untimely passing of Scott Mellish this year. Although not a regular at Crago, preferring his beloved Wiruna, Scott was always there to lend a hand during the

working bees. The committee has discussed and generally agreed that the best place ensure the magnificent 22" 'Darth Vader' telescope gets proper care and use will be the Crago Observatory.

The feasibility study to make this happen is under way and the observatory modifications that this project may require all point to 2013 as the year when we will know if this can proceed. Meanwhile we still have much work to do; to build a new mirror cell for the new Mark Sutching 16" F7 mirror, install new ground board bearing, secondary mirror and focuser. We are planning to provide an extension to the observatory to house the F7 which would allow us to roll it out onto the field for those balmy summer nights when the dome is dripping great plops of sweat and everyone would much prefer to observe outside.

Our next working bee is scheduled for the 1st of October and the participation of members and their friends is encouraged. We should all have a great time and skies permitting, a wonderful nights observing.

I thank you for your time and the opportunity to deliver this report and hope that you all find the time to join us on the Mountain and enjoy one the societies finest assets.

Ian Parr  
Vice President - Crago  
Astronomical Society of New South Wales