

Vice President's Report – Wiruna 2011.

By Joe Cauchi

The last 6 months of 2010 were exceptionally wet with 1170mm of rainfall. As a matter of fact, the whole year showed record rainfall of 1630mm. Our dam was overflowing and this produced a substantial stream of water flowing down the gully. Wiruna and the surrounding countryside were extremely green with these conditions and the wild flowers were stunning.

On the October New Moon weekend 40 new shrubs were planted around the property. The process of becoming accredited to use Wiruna and to use the club's 17 1/2" Dob was carried out for the majority of people attending this month.

Maintenance work was carried out on the 25" scope. The tracks were re-positioned and screwed onto the brick footings. A new section of carpet was laid onto black plastic in between the tracks. Other minor adjustments were carried out. All this work has made using the 25" a lot more user friendly. Another large solar panel was installed on the meeting hall roof to help charge up the battery bank more quickly.

The New Moon weekend at the end of December was the first clear period at Wiruna after 3 months of cloud. Many members took advantage of this clear weather holiday period by staying and celebrating New Year's Eve on the property.

In March preparations for the next month's SPSP were on the go. The usual cleaning of the meeting hall was carried out by one group of volunteers while other groups mowed, whipper snipped around the buildings and on the observing field. The old BBQs scattered around the property were picked up and stored, and overhanging tree branches were cleared from camping sites.

Just in time for the SPSP and after a long wait, a new water heater for the old amenities block was installed by the local plumber.

A couple of days before the start of the SPSP, I discovered that the water tanks were down to about 1/4 full from an undetected slow leak. A quick call to our neighbour got us out of trouble and 2 loads of water were delivered. The company who supplied our marquee in the past had gone broke and didn't pass this vital information on to us, so a replacement marquee was delivered on time after a few frantic phone calls.

After these early hiccups, the SPSP was an outstanding success. The weather was kind to us with a clear Friday night, and partly clear on the other nights. Professional astronomers and amateurs from our Society gave impressive talks on various topics and were all well received. As usual, the photographic competition was well run and produced some stunning entries.

The telescope making competition shows how ingenious telescope makers are. Various workshops, swap tables and vendors' displays and a large range of door prizes all combine to make the SPSP the premier event of the ASNSW's year. All this is capped off with the Kandos Scouts providing an invaluable service, as well as a top roast dinner on the Saturday night provided by the Society.

In April we lost a very close friend and the Society lost a valuable member. Scott Mellish passed away unexpectedly, 2 weeks before Easter. Scott will be deeply missed by all who knew him, and his contribution to amateur astronomy is also something that will be greatly missed. Scott's books have been taken to Wiruna and will be stored there for the library.

The number of clear Friday and Saturday nights of new moon weekends was noticeably lower with 7.5 nights due to unusually cloudy weather during the year, but I hear the forecast for the next 12 months is for clear skies.

Attendance during the past 12 months also suffered with 29.3 people per month. Income from camping and bunkhouse and house fees was \$4380.00. As I don't personally collect the fees for on-site tents and vans, income from this is not included.

Two communal dinners were prepared and served for most attending Wiruna during April and June. These dinners are held on a semi-regular basis and all are invited to attend. The dinners are a great way to socialise in a very friendly environment, at the June dinner we even had great live entertainment.

Throughout the year, several members have set up permanent equipment to fully utilise the property's full potential. Plans for the future include the extension of the kitchen, which hopefully will get underway shortly. A self contained solar heating unit is to be fitted for the 25" building to help keep the telescope moisture free.

A big thank you (once again) to all who helped with projects throughout the year at Wiruna and also to all the movers and shakers and volunteers who helped prepare and run the SPSP.

Wiruna has a strong community spirit, with everyone pitching in and helping. I invite all who have the time and interest to visit the property. You don't need to bring a telescope as the Club's 17 ½" and 25" will be available for sky tours on any clear night. The Milky Way overhead under a clear Wiruna sky is a sight to behold.