

Vice President's Report - Wiruna 2012

By Joe Cauchi.

The weather patterns at Wiruna seem to have gone back to some sense of normality. The rainfall for the year was 996mm and Wiruna and the countryside showed this with greenery and an abundance of wildflowers. Since the Star Party, however, the rainfall has been quite low and the property has become dry and dusty again. On the June new moon weekend, light snow fell for about 10 minutes - quite a novelty.

The process of accreditation to use Wiruna was carried out twice this year for members.

Regular maintenance work has been carried out on the Society's 17 ½" and 25" scopes. Lighting has been installed in the storage shed and a nagging problem of loss of power in the kitchen was finally solved, thanks to Scott Mellish's observatory battery.

Two new steel cabinets were purchased and placed in the meeting hall to house Scott Mellish's vast library of Astronomy books.

Another large capacity solar panel was installed on the meeting hall roof, replacing a small unit that was repositioned on the outdoor kitchen's roof. This extra panel on the meeting hall roof will recharge the large bank of batteries in the breezeway faster, meeting the ever increasing needs of the astroimagers and our own equipment. A new large, heavy duty regulator was also installed to go with this extra charging capacity.

During the year the committee decided to purchase a Husqvarna ride-on mower and trailer, so we could be independent for our grass slashing on the property. In February I delivered this mower to Wiruna, and as soon as it was unloaded it was put to use mowing the observing field before vehicles and telescopes arrived for the new moon weekend. This mower does a neater job of cutting the grass than Barry Moore's tractor when he used to slash the fields for us. We now have a useful complement of tools along with our push mower and whipper snippers to keep Wiruna tidy all year round.

The weekend before the March new moon weekend, Neville Lupton, Judy Cauchi and I made a special trip to Wiruna to give the kitchen floor and walls a clean using a high pressure gurney unit, taking the opportunity to do this job while no one else was using the kitchen. While Neville and Judy worked on the kitchen and breezeway, I fitted bird wire to the top rafters of the breezeway to stop birds roosting there and making a mess on the concrete floor.

The following weekend saw a hive of activity in preparation for the Star Party. Several teams of helpers were organised to clean the hall, do more high pressure cleaning along the walkway and shower cubicles as well as a second go on the breezeway.

Fire wood was cut and stacked, camping areas cleared, more mowing and whipper snipping carried out and a couple of loads of rubbish taken to the tip.

This year's Star Party was another outstanding success. Our attendance was slightly down on last year, but the weather was fantastic. Both Friday and Saturday nights were completely clear, except for about 1 hour of cloud just before midnight on the Friday night. Even Thursday night was clear till midnight for those lucky enough to be there early. It's all in the timing at Wiruna with the weather, because Monday morning was raining for the few who stayed on.

Professional astronomers and amateurs from our Society gave impressive talks on various topics. Telescope making and astroimaging competition, sketching competition, various workshops, swap tables, vendors' displays and a large range of door prizes makes the SPSP the premier event of the ASNSW's year. All this is capped off with the Kandos Scouts providing the invaluable service of catering, and the top roast dinner on the Saturday night cooked by Society members.

Attendance during the past 12 months has increased to 32.18 people per month. Income from camping, bunk house and house fees was \$4,073.00. As I don't personally collect the fees for on-site tents and vans, income from these is not included.

The number of clear Friday and Saturday nights of new moon weekends has increased to 12.5 all clear nights, compared to 7.5 nights last year.

There were a couple of communal dinners prepared and served for most of the people attending during the year. These dinners are held on a semi-regular basis and all are invited to attend. The dinners are a great way to socialise.

A decision has been made to change the original design of the roof for the kitchen extension. The new plans have been sent to the builder and I am waiting for an updated quote. It has also been decided to grade our driveway and add more material along the roadway going past the storage shed to fill depressions that turn to puddles after rain. We have plans to replace the black sealing rubber strips on both the 17 ½" Dob Kennel and 25" observatory.

A big thanks 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.

We have had several overseas visitors throughout the year, who thoroughly enjoyed themselves, and were luck enough to get good weather.

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 Society's 17½" and 25" will be available for sky tours on clear nights. The Milky Way overhead under a clear Wiruna sky is truly a magnificent sight to behold.

