

Annual Report 2019 – Joe Cauchi, Vice President Wiruna

A much-needed burn-off was carried out at Wiruna last August by the Rural Fire Service on the bush area from the front fence to the fire break just west of the kitchen. Five members arrived on the day and assisted the RFS with this burn that was prepared a couple of weeks prior. The club supplied lunch and refreshments to the crew. This was a very successful burn-off and the RFS returned the following day to tidy up and put out any remaining smouldering stumps.

Probably the most difficult and challenging of all the projects carried out at Wiruna this year was installing roof insulation on the outdoor kitchen. The job was more difficult than the original plan. However, with a concentrated effort from the think tank of members on site, the job was completed successfully and has proved to be quite effective in reducing heat building up in the kitchen during the summer months.

Heavy-duty marine carpet was purchased and installed around the Society's 25-inch and 17½-inch Dobsonian telescopes, to replace the heavily worn trip hazard carpet. The ceilings of the 4 cubicles in the original amenities block were all given 4 coats of paint over a two-month period after spending a whole weekend doing the tedious job of scraping the old paint off.

Another job that required the effort of a think tank was repairing the top of one of our plastic water tanks that had collapsed inwards. Two thick strips of aluminium and many stainless steel nuts and bolts were used to repair the top of the water tank. Draining and cleaning the tank was another job that required serious thought.

The principal goal for 2019 is to complete Wiruna with compliance and planning required by the local council. This process was started early last year by Angus Witherby from Wakefield Planning. Some of his recommendations have already been carried out, with the successful burn-off and a dedicated large metal water tank for RFS use installed. More of his recommendations will be carried out by the end of the year.

Wiruna has become a Designated Observatory Site. An application was submitted late last year, seconded by Professor Fred Watson and approved by the Astronomical Society of Australia Council. Fred supported our application, saying:

For twenty years I have been associated with the Astronomical Society of NSW and recently spoke at one of their evening meetings. Having visited the Wiruna site as a guest speaker at the South Pacific Star Party and on other occasions, I have experienced the observatory first hand and confirm that it serves an important role in building the amateur astronomical community, in education, and in public outreach. For these reasons, I suggested they list Wiruna as a Designated Observatory and am now delighted to support the application to classify this site.

Our library has taken on a refreshing new look. Michelle Elliott has put together several handsome black and glass book cases to house our vast library. Relaxing chairs and a glass-topped coffee table have finished off this project which has taken up a small amount of room in the meeting hall. Peter Moore has wired the library with appropriate lighting for those cloudy nights. Peter has also installed a new PA system in the meeting hall. Stefan Gillard has generously donated a portable generator to the Society which is invaluable for many projects carried out around the property. Stefan also has a website for Wiruna site weather, sky quality and all sky camera data available for everybody going to Wiruna. This information, along with many other details, is at www.wiruna.com.

Two communal dinners have been organised during the year for all those in attendance at Wiruna, including the Christmas dinner, which has become a regular event over the past few years. These dinners are a great way to bring people together at Wiruna over a few drinks and some fine food.

The April new-Moon weekend is always a busy one, leading up to the Star Party preparations and produces the greatest attendance throughout the year outside the Star Party. The Star Party this year was similar in attendance to last year's and a successful event. The weather was not in our favour this time, with the Friday being a wet and uncomfortable day. Thursday and Saturday were half-clear nights and, for those who stayed for the Sunday night, they were rewarded with a fully clear night. The guest speaker talks were well attended, as was the roast dinner on the Saturday evening. These and all the other activities during the Star Party help to bring amateur astronomers together, using and showing off their equipment and sharing ideas. This makes this the ASNSW's premium event of the year. The Kandos Scouts once again provided an ongoing service with great food and drinks during the event.

Attendance was slightly down on last year with 32.7 people per month on average, including new members using Wiruna. Income was also slightly down on last year with \$4350.00 being collected. As usual, this amount does not include any annual fees nor the Star Party income.

Throughout the 12-month period (July to June), rainfall has increased to 644mm, a big jump on the previous 12 months, though there is no mistaking that we are still in a deep drought. However, the number of clear Friday and Saturday nights during the new-Moon weekends has increased to 14.

During the past several months, a number of members have shown interest in getting accredited for using the Society's 17½ and 25-inch Dobs. This will take the pressure off Chris Ross, who normally does Sky Tours when he is at Wiruna. These Sky Tours through the Society's telescopes are for both members and visitors, who are prepared to queue during clear nights to enjoy the night sky.

There are a few projects planned for the coming 12 months, including employing a local handyman to carry out some repair work up at Barry Gerdes Lodge. The committee is looking into providing more accommodation for members and visitors with a separate building in between the meeting hall and the driveway. Wiruna could not operate throughout the year and at Star Parties if it was not for those dedicated members who help and give up their time to make Wiruna the fantastic dark sky site it is today.