

Annual Report 2020 – Vice President Crago, Paul Hatchman

As you might expect, the last 12 months' at Crago have been far from ordinary.

From September through November, we were largely clouded out, with the Christmas party also cancelled due to weather. Then came the bush fires, which resulted in a total evacuation of Bowen Mountain and the cancellation of the December and January observing sessions. The Rural Fire Service made good use of the water tank they have placed on the property, with large pools placed on the observing field to refill the helicopter's fire-bombing buckets.

Then came February with its torrential rain. This caused some water damage to the observatory, and a decision was made to cancel the February session so the damage could be assessed, and some temporary repairs completed.

From March through May we were closed due to COVID 19 restrictions. In June we decided to open again to members with their own telescopes but had to cancel due to cloud. Cloud struck again in July and tomorrow night's August last quarter observing does not look too promising right now.

It is quite a shame as there was a lot of public events planned for this year, with open nights for the Hawkesbury Camera Club, Rural Fire Service and Bowen Mountain Society planned.

The Crago lease saga continues, with the Society still waiting on a ministerial decision on the pending Aboriginal Land Claim. Both bush fires and COVID have slowed things down even more than their usual glacial pace. However, we are back in discussions with the government to try and finally resolve this long and tedious process. We still do not know whether a lease will ever be offered to us.

The construction of the new observatory telescope by Peter Reed (SDM Telescopes) is progressing and we are expecting delivery of the scope by the end of the year.

Given the uncertainty around the lease, a lot of work that needs to be done to the observatory has been delayed. Water is entering the observatory and causing damage to the floor and first floor ceiling. There is also a need to repair issues with the dome and concrete before they deteriorate further. If the lease is not finalized this year, the committee will need to consider whether to proceed with these repairs to stop further deterioration of the observatory building.

New batteries were installed, with new solar panels and other electrical work to be done during the coming year.

For the remainder of 2020, the main scope will remain closed, with the observing field open to members with their own telescopes. We will trial moving to video astronomy for the public sessions until the COVID risk has diminished and sharing of equipment and eyepieces becomes feasible again.

Let us hope for a more successful year in 2021.