

### Honorary Treasurer's Report to AGM - 2005

These figures are all provisional as the books have only just gone to the auditors and it will be some time before they come back so we can publish the final accounts in *MNASSA*.

The really pleasing progress is that we have enough money in the Plus Plan account to be able to pay our biggest annual bill which is the printing of the *SkyGuide* costing approx R60 000. This is almost half of our total yearly expenses and we do not have to borrow from reserves or from the trust fund as in the past.

During the past year, notable figures are as follows:

Cost of *SkyGuide*: R59 344  
Income from *SkyGuide*: R95 456  
Cost of *MNASSA*: R39 337  
Income from *MNASSA*: R24 785  
Cost of publishing: R11 000

From this it can be seen that the loss on *MNASSA* has been reduced to less than R15 000, while the *SkyGuide* made an excess of just over R36 000. The success of the *SkyGuide* has been phenomenal and we must thank Auke Slotegraaf for his great efforts which have produced this result. The publishing costs mentioned above are largely computer programs to assist the editor with layouts etc. so they cannot be accurately apportioned between the two publications.

Interest received during the year was R6 100 and donations were R7 600, the latter including R2 500 from the trust.

It is a comfortable feeling to have this source of income to supplement the R21 000 from subscriptions. Funds received for *Sky & Telescope* subscriptions were R22 300 which was just R19 less than the amount we had to pay to the publishers in USA. With the ever changing Rand/Dollar exchange rate, this is a remarkable achievement.

The Scholarship Fund which was started with a grant of R40 000, now has R45 000 at the year end including interest to date and after a scholarship was awarded this year.

Overall, your Society is well-placed financially and can face the future with confidence.

(Cliff Turk, Hon Treasurer)

Bloemfontein Centre  
Chairman's Report 2004-2005

**Thank** you for the opportunity to present the Bloemfontein Centre of ASSA's annual report for 2004-2005.

The main emphasis of the year was on continued growth in the member's proficiency as amateur astronomers and the Centre's active public outreach efforts. The year saw various members acquiring commercial as well as self-built telescopes. The Centre continued to hold official quarterly meetings, as well as workshops, excursions, public programs and practical activities.

Quarterly meetings: Themes presented during the four official Centre meetings (held at Boyden Observatory) included "Hyperspace", "Tour through the *SkyGuide* 2005", "Astrophotography", "Open discussion on actual topics in the world of astronomy and spaceflight".

Workshops and other notable events: The Centre completed the renovation of their clubhouse on the premises of Boyden Observatory after many hours of dedication and effort. The primary purpose of the clubhouse is to serve as a marketing point on the hill to inform visitors of the concept of amateur astronomy. It was first used in October 2004 during the Boyden Celebration event (*MNASSA* vol. 63 no's 11 & 12).

During March 2005, the Centre hosted a Beginners' Day in Amateur Astronomy at Boyden for new and existing members, equipping them for practical activities and a "career" in amateur astronomy.

During April 2005, the Bloemfontein Centre took part in the Scope-X activities hosted by ASSA Johannesburg. Two members exhibited their newly completed 8-inch telescopes and the Centre's stall attracted numerous visitors with informative material obtained from the clubhouse on Boyden.

During the year, the Centre was also awarded the organizing role for the 2006 ASSA Symposium and arrangements began at an early stage.

Public outreach: The Centre continued to assist the Friends of Boyden in their public outreach programs. Members served as presenters, telescope assistants and tour guides during public open evenings and various private group evenings, reaching hundreds of people with their knowledge and skills. Members who acquired telescopes set up their instruments during some of these events to much awe of the visitors.

Two successful public open days were held in February 2005 in association with Boyden, attracting almost 100 visitors (*MNASSA* 64, 37).

In November 2004, an excursion to the Mabula Game Lodge in the Eastern Free State was held for the Leonid meteor shower. Although it was cloudy, the event was still a memorable one. In June 2005, three Centre members hosted an open air show and observation session for a nature society at Barkly-West in the Northern Cape where almost 40 people attended.



The Centre also re-launched its acclaimed *SpaceTides* Newsletter service – a free e-mail newsletter on astronomy and spaceflight to the public [<http://www.assabfn.co.za/spacetides>].

Practical observation sessions:

*Deep Sky Activities:* Deep sky sessions were held in the city at members' houses, at Boyden Observatory, during fieldtrips mentioned above and at De Oude Kraal Country Estate near Bloemfontein. Members all brought binoculars or telescopes, ensuring active participation by all.

For 2005, a set of 17 deep sky session logs were compiled for those members interested in following a pre-defined observation program.

*Solar Activities:* Member Jacques van Delft became director of ASSA's Solar Section and continued his studies on solar and climatic change. He hosted various national presentations on the theme, hosted radio talks, gave a lecture at the 2004 ASSA Symposium and a number of articles appeared in national news magazines relating to his work. Monthly Solar Bulletins continued to be compiled and sunspot counts were performed on a regular basis.

*Comets and Meteor observations:* Mary and Paul Fanner from Kipaberley participated in an informal count of the Eta Aquarid meteor shower. No reported comet observations were made during the year. A presentation on the Deep Impact mission was compiled for Boyden Observatory.

*Historical research:* Member Dawie van Jaarsveldt received a paper copy of

the Centre's history since its establishment (1959) up to 2004 after he worked many hours to digitize and archive the complete Centre history based on minutes and Centre reports. The complete archive is available on the website and is regarded as a great accomplishment for the preservation of the Centre's auspicious history.

*Astrophotography:* Members became more skilled in the use of CCD techniques. The Centre's astrophotography webpage was continuously updated with new photos from members.

In summary, the Centre experienced a stable year in which its identity was fixed as an outpost and base for amateur astronomy in the central region of South Africa. The greatest challenge that now awaits the Centre is to ensure that active new members join the club and become part of the amateur astronomical community.

(Gerrit Penning, Chairman)

Johannesburg Centre  
Chairman's Report 2004-2005

**Thanks** to the efforts of a few talented and dedicated members of the society we have successfully completed another active and rewarding year. I might mention some of the highlights.

In October 2004 we hosted the 6th biennial ASSA Symposium and managed to attract an impressive list of top speakers, both amateur and professional. This 3-day event was thoroughly enjoyed by the 70-odd people who attended. It was the first time in the 12-year history of this event that the Johannesburg Centre has hosted it.

Then for Scopex 2005 we managed to get, as the keynote speaker, Mike Melvill, the first private astronaut who flew the rocket ship SpaceShipOne into space in 2004. Despite having rain for most of the day, an annoying fire alarm and finally a power cut, many attendees regarded this Scopex as the best ever. Thank you to SAASTA and SAA for sponsorship around Scopex 2005.

We have a very friendly relationship with the new owners of the observatory, SAASTA (South African Agency for Science and Technology Advancement) and in 2004 we were asked to contribute some ideas for the development of the site. Which we did.

We had hoped to have some news this year regarding the future of the observatory, but the wheels of officialdom turn slowly and nothing has been forthcoming yet. Proposals around the establishment of a science park have been put for-

ward and if and when this happens, we could end up as part of a larger scientific community.

Because of the uncertainty surrounding the future of the site we deliberately did not embark on any infrastructural work on the observatories and buildings, except for some minor maintenance.

Our secretary Lerika Cross, continues to be the pivot around which the society revolves. Apart from the huge task of organizing Scopex, including organising sponsorship and exhibitors, she also arranges most of the speakers, books the venues, arranges accommodation and transport for visiting speakers, makes dozens of phone calls and sends out hundreds of emails every year. She has also now assumed the duties of our membership secretary. Her wisdom and energy have played a major role in our success this past year. Thank you Lerika.

Also a big thank you to Sharon Tait, who has arranged refreshments at nearly all of our functions, including Scopex. Sharon also attends to most of our PR and media relation needs and it is she who fields those phone calls from inebriated people who want to know "what is that big bright planet in the sky? The one with the flashing red light".

Thanks also to our miserly Treasurer, Dave Gordon, who manages to ensure that our finances are in a sound way. He does this mainly by refusing to reimburse members for the money they have spent on running the society. Not really.



We get refunded. Eventually. Dave has also shared his love of and interest in the planets by presenting a number of short talks at the monthly meetings.

Our mirror making class keeps on rolling along, with a gusto that never seems to stop. Chris Stewart, Dave Hughes, Vince Nettman and others dedicate virtually every Saturday afternoon to helping newer members grind and polish telescope mirrors of all shapes and sizes. They must have supervised the making of more than 200 mirrors over the years. Not all get to be completed but many do and they end up in excellent telescopes.

Chris Penberthy gave up the editorship of *Canopus* after a successful but taxing spell of some 5 or 6 years. Thanks Chris, for the excellent job you did and for the high standard you achieved. The editorship was taken over by Marianne Botha at the beginning of this year, but due to work commitments she has had to pass it on and from July 2005 we will have a new editor.

One of the casualties resulting from moving our monthly meetings to the lecture room down the hill, has been the loss of easy access to the library and we need to devise a plan to make it easier for our members to use the library facilities. Our library consists of over 500 books and many years of magazines and newsletters and we hope to find a means of once again making it accessible to all members.

Much work, mainly by Chris Stewart and Evan Dembsky, went into setting up our website. During the year we decided to update it and move to a new computer site. This is taking time and we need the

assistance of some of our members to set up this web site and keep it up to date.

We again manned a stand at the hobby-x exhibition and a team of volunteers, led by Jerome Jooste, gave up three days of their time to once again ensure that it was a success. Thanks to all those involved.

Talks specifically aimed at beginners were on our schedule for the year, but got lost somewhere along the way. For the upcoming year we hope to revive them, perhaps in a different format. After all we were all beginners at some time and those of us with some experience owe it to the newer members to pass on our knowledge.

Our monthly meetings continue to attract good attendances, thanks to the varied program and excellent speakers we have managed to attract. Attendances have been in the 40-70 range

Monthly meetings and talks were as follows:

Dr Barbara Cunow, "Dust in Galaxies" (2004 August); Richard Wade, "Great Zimbabwe. Archaeoastronomy" (2004 September); ASSA Symposium (2004 October); Etienne van Zyl, "Sutherland Tour - reminiscences" (2004 November); Star Party in Henley on Klip (2004 December); Dave Gordon, "Cassini mission to Saturn" (2005 January); Brian Fraser, "Astronomical events and the Extinction of the Dinosaurs (2005 February); Prof Morris Viljoen, "The Geology of planet Earth" (2005 March); Dr. Chris Engelbrecht "Hot Topics in Physics" (2005 April); Planetarium visit; an informal look at interesting objects

(2005 May) & Brian Fraser, "Variable Stars – How and Why" (2005 June).

In addition we hosted a Saturn viewing evening with the 26½-inch Innes refractor, but unfortunately this was clouded out. The evening was not wasted as Dave Gordon gave an entertaining talk on the giant ringed planet. Although we have the use of this telescope, we seldom do so as it is such a cumbersome instrument to set up and move around.

Membership usually drops off at the beginning of the year as some people don't renew but picks up again steadily throughout the year. Currently we have around 190 members as well as a fair number of family members.

As we close the year there are a number of unresolved issues that will have to be taken care of by the new committee. Arranging secure tenure with SAASTA, completing the new web site and keeping it up to date, and hosting a series of beginners talks are just some of the items to be arranged.

To all the members of the committee who have given of their time, their ideas and their energy to keep this centre running I would like to say that is not a thankless task, for on behalf of all the members I would like to say a big "Thank You".

(Brian Fraser, Chairman)

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### Natal Midlands Centre Chairman's Report 2004-2005

At the end of another busy and successful year in the life of the Kwazulu-Natal Midlands Centre, I am happy to present this annual report. Last year I mentioned the general lethargy that appeared to be afflicting our members, in that there seemed to be very little support for any of our activities other than coming to monthly meetings occasionally. Therefore, it has been good to see an improvement in this regard, even though there is still some way to go! The challenge later this evening is to see the response to my suggestions about serving on the committee in the coming year, due to the fact that 5 of our existing committee are retiring from office, all of them having served the Centre faithfully for years.

One of the signs of a healthy society is a steady increase in membership, and this year has been no exception, with a net increase of some 13 people.

We have also been treated to some excellent speakers and presentations at our monthly meetings, which I'm sure has helped to not only swell the membership, but also to improve the attendance figures. My sincere thanks to all who have given of their time to prepare such interesting and stimulating programmes month by month, and of course, to Frikkie de Bruyn for co-ordinating it all. Maybe your turn will come up in the year ahead?

While mentioning Frikkie, I must also thank him for the efforts he has put in



to preparing articles for *Stardust*, keeping us up to date with developments in the world of Physics and for mounting the recent display on Albert Einstein at the Natal Society Library. If you watch TV on Sunday mornings, you may even catch a glimpse of him as a film star!

Despite the rising costs of running the Centre, you will see later that our financial situation continues to be sound, and once again, it has not been necessary to increase annual subscriptions. Roger Clifford has kept a very tight rein on the purse strings, but has also contributed in many other ways to the well being of the Centre over the past years. As he retires from office, I would like to thank him for all he has done, and to honour him with the meritorious service award for 2004/5.

Briefly to mention some of the other aspects of the Centre's activities, I must thank Johan Hefer for willingly taking on the task of Secretary in the midst of very hectic job commitments, Willem van der Merwe for his PRO work and liaison with the many and various newspapers, and Trevor Morley for looking after the observatory grounds. The Centre's library has been somewhat of a disaster area, as the logistics of carting books and tapes around has proved to be too cumbersome. The recent acquisition of a small cupboard in the Girl Guide hall will hopefully improve the situation.

My continued admiration goes to Rogan Roth for his sterling work in editing *Stardust* every month, but also for his efforts in many other ways, including some magnificent presentations at monthly meetings, and an ever increasing

involvement with our education programmes. I also thank him for his personal support and encouragement during the year, and sincerely hope that you will vote for him to remain on the committee.

The annual Basic Astronomy course was a great success last year, but the applications for this year's course are so few that with only two weeks to go, it may well have to be cancelled for this year.

Our weekly viewing sessions at the observatory will of course continue during the next three months.

In conclusion, my sincere thanks to you all for keeping the Centre alive and for turning out so faithfully on this miserable evening! As I retire from the committee, I look forward to being an active member for as long as I am able. My best wishes to the new committee for the year ahead.

(John Watson, Chairman)

Pretoria Centre  
Chairman's Report 2004-2005

The 2004/2005 year has flown by very quickly. It has been interesting exercise to go through the events of the past year.

At the AGM a year ago, Dries van Zyl addressed us on "South African Weather and Atmospheric Phenomena". His photographs of highveld lightning were memorable. In August the long title of the talk was "Archaeoastronomical Aspects of the Great Zimbabwe/Mapungubwe Cultural Complex", presented provocatively by Richard Wade. Tim Cooper used Beginner's Corner to highlight the encroachment of Light Pollution in our society and proposed a program for us to measure the deterioration of our viewing conditions.

September brought Jorrie Jordaan visit our centre and talk about "Ocean Tide Principles and Prediction". This was the meeting where the new name tags were first distributed.

Who can forget the comet model made by Koos van Zyl at the October meeting? The main topic then was "Interplanetary Transfers" by Michael Poll.

In preparation for the Huygens landing on Titan early in 2005, Neville Young and Mike Haslam presented a talk on the Cassini Huygens Mission in November.

Lorna Higgs kicked off 2005 with an entertaining and novel look at "Bright stars – and their history".

In February we happy to welcome back an old friend, Claire Flanagan (director of the Johannesburg Planetarium) with her talk entitled "What Every South African Needs to Know about Pulsars and the

Square Kilometer Array". Andrie van de Linde made his first presentation to the society with a Beginner's Corner.

The Huygens probe had landed successfully on Titan, so Neville Young and Mike Haslam reported back at the March meeting.

Another old friend returned in April. Brian Fraser spoke about Variable Stars, how we observe them and more importantly, why it is valuable to do so. Wayne's advice on how to Make Observing a Pleasure was an entertaining talk containing some basic but very important observing hints.

A fascinating and eye-opening presentation was made in May by Prof Okkie de Jager who discussed "The Thermal and Non-thermal Universe". The talk made us aware of forefront South African technology being used at a gamma-ray observatory in Namibia. Johan Smit's newfound enthusiasm for telescope making led to the first of what could be many follow-up talks.

In June I was very sorry to miss Robert Groess from Wits University talking about "The South African Large Telescope at SAAO". Beginner's Corner was presented by a beginner presenter at our centre - Peet van der Walt shared his enthusiasm for spotting Messier objects.

Tonight, I am equally disappointed to miss Morris Viljoen's talk.

Additional edification and entertainment was provided in Beginner's Corner, What's Up and the evening's chairman



by Tony, Johann Swannepoel, Michael-Poll, Mike Haslam, Wayne, Lorna, Koos, Andrie, Barbara and Peet.

### Exhibitions

There have not been as many extramural activities as in previous years.

Wayne and Rynhardt organised a Public Day at Kollonades in August 2004. It was well attended, there was plenty interest, but despite the many enthusiastic intentions, we are not aware of any new members from that event. The mother of her blind daughter was able to let her 'feel' what the solar system looks like.

Chris Barnard took a good opportunity and arranged for us to do a star show at the Kyalami Castle in April. The centre was rewarded for this effort with a R1000 donation.

The annual Scopex Exhibition organised by the Johannesburg Centre was on a rainy, cold Saturday on 16th April. Several Pretoria members turned up during the day. Despite the weather, the exhibition was successful.

I know that Wayne has been giving talks to schools and that Gert van Biljon entertained guests at a weekend away.

### Excursions

Nylsvley was the only centre outing for us this year. Early in May, before the cold came in, between 20 and thirty members and families and friends headed for this country venue 100 minutes drive away. The weather was an inhibiting factor, but nevertheless, some good astronomy was done and the weekend away was good for the soul.

### Activities

**Toastmasters:** Over a few months in the 2nd half of 2004, Michael, Neville, Pierre, Smitty, Swannie, Wayne and Koos attended a course in public speaking presented by the Centurion Toastmasters club. Besides learning plenty about the art and getting lots of nerve-wracking practice, we certainly had great fun. Putting into practice what one has learned is the most difficult part. The option of another course has been given to members, but there is no further interest.

**Lunar Parallax Project:** Barbara Cunow used the lunar eclipse last year to do a collaborative project with the University of Wisconsin-Madison to measure parallax to the moon from northern and southern hemispheres. The results can be found at [<http://astro.unisa.ac.za/~cunow>].

### Observing evenings

The monthly observing sessions at our local observatory have become so popular that clouds hardly ever miss an evening. Michael and Smitty have nevertheless kept the evenings running despite the poor seeing conditions.

### Nametags

Centre members now have nametags again, making it easier to remember names and make renew friendships.

### A general perspective

At the beginning of my term as chairman, I expressed my wish in a newsletter article, that our centre become more active and particularly to extend the

activity more widely amongst the membership. It is perhaps a sign of our times that our daily lives are busier than ever and so many of the projects are still waiting for the starting gun.

The entire documented history of the Pretoria Centre has now been archived onto CD. Not only does this make it more available for research, but it means that it is duplicated and protected against loss. The next and most useful step is for some aspiring or retired historian to use that marvellous resource to document the centre history.

A survey of the resources within our membership and their likes and dislikes, would help in planning centre activities. This remains an opportunity for someone with a statistical interest.

Pierre Lourens has steadfastly stuck to his task of gathering articles for the newsletter each month. Adding the finishing touches and an artistic flare however remains a need, and Neville and Smitty have been helping out where they can. We continue to keep an eye open for a computer literate layout artist who can take over this last stage of the newsletter.

Similarly, Mauritz does a marvellous job keeping the Pretoria Centre website updated. The webpage is an important access point to astronomy for local people. We receive very regular enquiries through the website. There are hundreds of hits each month. Here again, the talents of an artistic web page designer would add that finishing touch.

Michael Poll is still at work on his astronomy education certificates. There is a very definite need for a form of document-

ed astronomy education which Michaels course will certainly help to fill.

The Schanskop telescope project is underway but not making the progress Johan Swanepoel had hoped for. We need to maintain the momentum with the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site to build our 14 inch telescope into a new observatory on Fort Schanskop hill.

A Big Bang presentation at the Fort was called off late last year due to some conflicting responsibilities within the Heritage Site organisation. Ad Sparrius had a talk prepared. Hopefully an opportunity will arise where we can make use of his prepared hard work.

#### **The committee**

Five committee meetings were held. Thank you to the committee members for their support and hard work. Besides the committee members I have mentioned earlier, Tony Viljoen as secretary has kept us well minuted all year - a thankless, for-granted task.

Lorna Higgs, besides contributing with talks, makes sure our meetings are advertised in the press.

Michael Poll has stepped in yet again to take over chairmanship when the regular chairman has been away. This in addition to his monthly inputs to the newsletter. Thank you Michael for reading the report in my absence.

My role in the Centre in the new year is uncertain due to changing work circumstances. Whatever role I am able to play, I wish for the the Pretoria Centre a vital and active year ahead.

(Neville Young, Chairman)



Cape Centre  
Chairman's Report 2004-2005

**Introduction**

In some ways, the last twelve months marked the real start of the twenty-first century for the Cape Centre of ASSA. It is symbolic of our new century that our much-travelling chair is the first whose business is software. It is symbolic that Naresh Darjee for the first time produced the Cape Observer ambidextrously, or in the simultaneous parallel quantum world of print & on the internet. It is symbolic that less talks use the OHP or slide projector, than talks which now use a laptop, data projector, & laser pointer.

**Review: The Cape Centre 2004/2005**

At the start of the year we set ourselves some goals under the topic "Back to basics" with the themes "People, Participation, and Education." The key objectives under each of these were: *People*: Increase member numbers through advertising. *Participation*: Increase participation through: (1) good educational talks; (2) an overhaul of equipment; (3) increased electronic communication and resources. *Education*: Provide more education through: (1) An educational talk series, and (1) above; (2) Increased participation in observation, particularly Dark Sky nights and Star Walks; (3) Outreach. In retrospect there was some good progress, but also some areas of disappointment:

**People and membership**

This is the greatest disappointment of the

year. We have very few new members. On the upside, it appears that we are attracting some young new members. Advertising has however not commenced in the way foreseen. A new brochure has been produced, and this will shortly be printed for distribution.

**Participation**

This is the area where great progress was made. The old equipment of the Centre was auctioned off, and the Ron Atkins telescope was rebuilt to a more modern lighter Dobsonian design. Since rebuilt, the scope has been in very frequent use, both at the Observatory on Wednesday, as well as by members. This is a great sign!

We have also had increased usage of the Yahoo! group, and although the Centre still does not have a dedicated website, the announcements, photos and other resources of the group has helped in furthering communication amongst members.

This year the talk formats were modified somewhat. In previous years the responsibility to organise talks was rotated amongst committee members. This meant that a member was often saddled with the job, without actually wanting to do it. This year we decided to do it on a more volunteer basis, and to combine this with a regular educational lecture series (more on this below). The hope is that this produces more informative and interesting lectures. We believe this was successful, but ultimately the members must let us know if this is the case.

Last, but by no means least, the *Cape Observer* was completely redesigned and revamped. This has been a huge success, and the editor has received numerous complements.

The Committee arranged the first ASSA or SAAO celebrations of "Yuri's night", 12 April, commemorating the first human Spaceflight in 1961. We celebrated this as a braai, which also welcomed the incoming Director of SAAO, Dr. Phil Charles. We aim at making this an annual event.

### Education

We were privileged to have Case Rijdsdijk present a series of educational talks on Astronomy and Physics during the year. This was extremely successful, and well attended. Thank you Case!

The Dark Sky evenings and Star Walks were less successful. Star Walks in Kirstenbosch were almost totally rained or clouded out, except for a single poorly attended evening. Our Dark Sky nights were also not very well attended. However, a new potential site for Dark Sky at Silvermine Reserve has been identified, and hopefully this provides easier access for those in the Southern Suburbs and Atlantic. This site has yet to be test driven in earnest.

An initial outreach programme to some schools in the Western Cape was very well received, and this will continue in the next year.

### Finances

The treasurer's report appears elsewhere, but suffice it to say that with the sale of

equipment we are in good financial position.

### Thanks

Finally, I would like to thank the committee for their work during the year, without them none of this would happen. Also, thanks to Karen for the management of the Library, to Karen and Val for preparation of teas, to Naresh for his hard work in editing the *Observer*, and to Lia for her help with this, plus her series on Albert Einstein, with which we celebrated 2005 as the year of Physics.

(Willem van Biljon, Chairman, with additions from the Vice-Chair's report)



**Garden Route Centre  
Chairman's Report 2004-2005**

Mr Peter Henderson reviewed the twelve monthly presentations delivered at meetings of the Centre during the preceding year.

His ill health had seriously curtailed attention which he could devote to the Centre activities and has necessitated his withdrawal from the committee.

He referred to the services rendered by each member of the committee and thanked them for their contributions to the successful running of the year's activities.

The Chairman also thanked the ladies who had provided and served refreshments at meetings, and pointed out that the Centre was fortunate in having the Church hall venue.

Finally he emphasized the need for the retiring members of the committee to be replaced by those who were willing to assist in administration of the Centre.

(extracted from the minutes of the  
Garden Route Centre AGM)

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**Durban Centre  
Chairman's Report 2004-2005**

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Committee for their dedication to duty during the past year. A special thanks is due to Jessica Hudson who in addition to the secretarial duties of the Centre, has also devoted much time in researching and promoting the idea of a planetarium to the powers that be. I would like to say more about that later. Jessica is also an invaluable link to modern electronic communications technology, which has largely outpaced the senior citizens on your committee. Peter Cramb, Dennis Sargent and Stuart Thompson stalwarts of the committee with many useful contacts both astronomical and in the business world. Ooma Rambilass who has run our library for many years in spite of her many other commitments.

Belinda Gordon for collating and preparing the *N'daba* magazine each month and showing the flag of the Centre at various public gatherings with her excellent astronomy presentations. Rob Suberg for his conscientious minding of the Centre's assets and ferreting out some very interesting speakers for our meetings. Geoff Nelson who gave enthusiastic support until pressure of work forced him to scale down his input.

There are many Non-committee members who devote much time and effort to the Centre and here I would like to thank Sheila Begg for posting the *N'daba* magazine to the non-email recipients, Raymond Field for the "At the Eyepiece" articles in the magazine and also for conducting his popular

viewing evenings. We thank Malcolm Keeping for his past efforts in presenting the NASA updates at our meetings and thank Grant Nurden for taking up this mantle when work commitments forced Malcolm to discontinue. I would also like to give special thanks to Hilton Ratcliffe who not only has been the main speaker at two meetings during the year, but is also regular contributor of articles to *N'daba* and to many others who have assisted the society in any way over the past year.

Whilst on the subject of thanks, I extend, on behalf of the society, our sincere thanks to Mr. Tony Akal and the Board of the Marist Brothers College for the continued use of the facilities for our meetings.

And last but not least a very sincere thank you to you all, members of the Centre for your lively interest and support at our meetings and functions

We have enjoyed full and varied programs for our meetings, over the past year with many interesting talks.

August 2004: Nigel Wakefield, Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, gave a most interesting talk on the observatories of southern Africa.

September 2004: Dr Catherine Cress University of KZN spoke on the topic 'The Cosmic Microwave Background: Relic light from the early Universe'.

October 2004: David Long spoke about satellite communications with animations from weather satellites. He also spoke of a schools project where schools are helped to monitor satellite weather data.

At the November 2004 meeting, Bill Hayward gave a report-back on the Amateur Telescope Making class. Hilton Ratcliffe gave a short account of his visit to Sutherland and the main speaker was Peter Dreyer who spoke on 'Ancient Astronomy' with specific reference to the Sumerians.

January 2005: Andy Telfer, Founder/Director of Spirit of Adventure Leadership Training school, gave a talk entitled 'Leadership in Crisis'. He cleverly used the film of Ernest Shackleton's Antarctic exploration to illustrate leadership qualities.

February 2005: Ray Field outlined the astronomical events of interest for 2005.

March 2005: Prof Mike Watkeys, 'The Right Stuff- The Origin of the Ingredients that Make up our World'.

April 2005 In a provocatively titled talk 'Big Bang or Damp Squib', Hilton Ratcliffe queried some of the tenets of the Big Bang theory. Unfortunately we will have to wait for part II for Hilton's ideas on an alternative theory.

May 2005: Andrew Collier gave us fascinating and beautifully illustrated insight into life with 'SA Scientific Base in Antarctica'.

June 2005: Botanic Gardens Star Party. Martin Clements invited ASSA Durban Centre to participate in a public event that took place at the Botanic Gardens. Over 200 people attended the event reaffirming the public's interest in astronomy. The main speaker was Prof Arthur Hughes ('Planets and Geometry') while several members gave supporting presentations including Belinda



Gordon – Constellation, Grant Nurden – ‘NASA update’, and Stuart Thompson who was on hand to demonstrate the SKY GLOBE computer program. Geoff Nelson in his dual role as ASSA Member/Camera Club member showed the visitors aspects of telescope making. The evening was clear and many members of the public took the opportunity to view the skies through telescopes set up by Ray Field, Peter Cramb and Fritz Schoneveld.

I said that I would say more about the Planetarium Project. As you know this is an initiative to get a planetarium sited in the Durban area. It has been mainly driven by your secretary who has spent many hours spent preparing presentations, numerous phone calls and visits to the corridors of power to sell the idea that Durban needs a planetarium. While she has met many ‘brick-walls’ she has managed to ‘get the ear’ of no lesser person than the Mayor himself. I am sure that Jessica’s determination and in-depth researching the project is starting to pay off as more of the political leaders become aware of the benefits that a planetarium would bring the City. The attendance at the Botanical Gardens Star Party was a firm statement of the public interest in matters astronomical. A very big thank you to Jessica for the tremendous amount of work that she has put into this project and when and (if) Durban gets a planetarium it will be largely a result of her efforts.

Our next year promises to be an exciting one with a planned visit to Sutherland and early next year the total eclipse in Turkey. Unfortunately for the stay-at-

homes there is nothing to see here but may be this is the time to throw caution to the wind and make the trip. We look forward with interest to the findings of the Dēep Impact comet probe and further debate on the big bang.

Have a great year ahead.

(R S Bond, Chairman)