

Local hideaway offers riverfront, laidback starwatching with cozy facilities

There's never been anything as the "perfect" stargazing place. Believe it or not, even the pristine Canada-France Telescope located on volcano dormant Mauna Kae, Kamuela, Hawaii (www.cfmt.hawaii.edu/en/) can have unexpected blizzards on the tropical mountain top.

However, there are good ones, even possibly in your own backyard with little or no cost.

The Bow Bench Retreat (www.bowbench.com), which was built a few years ago by owner Nancy Strath on her family farm two kilometres south of Caresland, offers panoramic views on the banks of the Bow River, right next to Wyndham Provincial Park overlooking Johnson's Island. The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) Calgary chapter started the New Year off by joining the monthly meetings, which replicate the Vulcan monthly meeting, on the third Friday of each month. Area expert Roland Dechesne, who lives 10 minutes across the river, gave a presentation on the winter sky.

Telescope pro Karl Ivar-



Neel Roberts
The Sky's the Limit

son Jr., from Champion, also participated to show off Jupiter and more on his four-inch scope. Ivarson lived in the Caresland area more than 25 years ago, so it was old stomping ground for him.

More than a dozen — mostly locals — made the first 2014 meeting on Jan. 17. The meetings were started a year ago by Wheatland County rancher Keith Clayton.

Patricia Marshall commented on Facebook that her husband David "had a great time," and that was the general impression of those who attended.

Gatherings start at 7:30 p.m. with a short indoor presentation followed by gazing overlooking the river. Be sure to watch the RASC Calgary Facebook Page for updates and details. Modern facilities near small

town and amenities are provided. All are welcome and refreshments are served at no charge. For more information, contact the Bow Bench Retreat at 403-934-3491 or bowbenchretreat@gmail.com. The meetings take place two kilometres south of the Caresland turnoff (Range Road 255) from Highway 24. The next meeting is Friday, Feb. 21.

Sky watch for the next month

Spica will follow the moon up on Tuesday, Feb. 18. Look southeast-east at 10:30 p.m. after nightfall. Find Jupiter as the moon rises, and Spica will follow below 25 minutes later.

Jupiter will be 45 degrees up from the moon on Monday, Feb. 10. Look southeast-east after nightfall as Jupiter will follow the moon all night until they both set in the dawn northwest-west sky.

Betelgeuse — the Valentine's star — will be visible Valentine's Day starting in the southeast sky from dusk until setting in the northwest-west sky at 3:30 a.m. Impress your date by showing him or her the easy way to find the red pulsating star,

which is Orion's shoulder.

The Zodiacal Light is a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. It's tough to find and the best time to spot it is from Monday, Feb. 17 for two weeks in the north after evening.

Public events for the next month

Join us Valentine's evening for the monthly public stargazing session at the Tourism and Trek Station and learn about the Valentine's star, Betelgeuse, and more, courtesy of RASC (Calgary), starting at 7:30 p.m. A brief indoor presentation will be followed by stargazing using the 11-inch telescope and binoculars outside (weather permitting). Everyone is welcome — there is no charge and refreshments are provided. Experts are on hand every second Friday of the month starting at 7:30 p.m. to explain the heavens, teach scoping skills and help you develop your knowledge of our sky. Contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994 or visit www.vulcantourism.com for further information.