

Death Valley Skies come to life at night

BY NEEL ROBERTS

Did you think the Sahara Desert was the hottest place on Earth?

Or maybe 0°x 0° in the Gulf of Guinea?

Nope, it's Death Valley located in the interior of California with a recorded temperature of 56.7°C (134°F) measured on 10 July 1913 at Greenland Ranch according to Guinness World Records. Located on the same latitude as the Island of Cyprus, it's 190 feet below sea level with arid landscape making it the best candidate for the fieriest place in the world.

Having recently returned from there, it is one of the greatest astronomical journeys I've been on as they have some of the darkest skies near civilization on main highways in North America. While the temperatures are unforgiving in the summertime, winter is a modest 15° Celsius during the day, so perfect for Canadians.

Also, off season prices apply with little crowds. The night skies near the 2 main resorts of Furnace Creek and Stovepipe Wells are impressive but there's still a bit of light from the locality.

I travelled further West to the 1 horse town of Grant, California which is hours from any city lights and that was the showcase of night viewing. With 12 hours of dark skies at moderate temperatures, you can stay out a long time.

The Milky Way is so bright it literally casts a shadow on a moonless night while its stars reflect in the water.

Designated as the largest Dark Sky National Park in the country by the International Dark Sky Association, it at the highest level of IDA designation and star-filled skies, the "Gold Tier", so make it your next vacation.

You maybe tired at night but as the old Mamas and the Papas' psychedelic '60s song says, this is "California Dreamin'!"

Sky watch for the next month:

1. Saturn & Moon rise together - Look SE Thursday, February 20th at 06 am see this duo come up as they fade into daylight.

2. Juno Lunar Occultation- Before the witching hour on Thursday February 13th watch the asteroid Juno (436,922,483 kms from Earth) hide behind the Moon from 1:43 a.m. to 3 a.m.

3. Betelgeuse- the Valentine's star is visible Valentine's Day, Friday, February 14th starting in the SEE from dusk until setting in the West



Neel
ROBERTS
YOUR UNIVERSE

after 3:30 a.m.

Impress your date by showing them the easy to find red pulsating star which is Orion's shoulder.

4. 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.

Discovered by the astronomer Giovanni Domenico Cassini in 1683 and later explained by Nicolas Fatio de Duillier in 1684, its best time is from Tuesday, February 11th for 2 weeks in the West after evening.

Public Events for the next month:

Monthly Open House at Calgary's Rothney Observatory near Priddis- Mythology of the night sky 2020. In the sky, Orion will take his place in the southern winter sky along with Canis Major in an eternal chase across the sky.

A first quarter moon will cast a sliver of light over an otherwise dark night. There will be an array of scopes operated by University of Calgary astronomers and members of the RASC Calgary.

You will have the opportunity to look through the telescopes, indoor presentation and astronomers was on hand to answer questions on Saturday February 1st..

The entrance fee \$30 per car. further information, contact Jennifer Howse at jhowse@phas.ucalgary.ca, (403) 931-2366.

Their website <https://www.ucalgary.ca/rao/> updated regularly.

Happy Valentines and stargazing!

Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC)-the nation's leading astronomy club founded in 1849 with over 5,000 members and 29 centers across Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at (403)560-6574, Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com. The members meet once a month on weekends at Calgary's Rothney Observatory near Priddis and you can check out times at <https://www.ucalgary.ca/rao/calendar>. Like them at Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/272037680377/>, Twitter <https://twitter.com/CalgaryRASC> & YouTube <https://www.youtube.com/user/RASCCalgary>.