

Galilean Nights Event ID: gn621

Number of telescopes: 7

Number of organisers: 3

Number of attendees: 600

Event photos: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/44643469@N07/>

Event Report:

Sharing Space, a New Zealand Sidewalk Astronomers organisation, based in our capital city of Wellington, set up 5 telescopes and 2 binoculars on our main street centre called Courtenay Place for 4 hours. Before we finished set up the queues had formed. The longest queue was to the biggest scope, a 10 inch LX200 owned by David Scales, impressive, and a remarkable view of Jupiter in the 40 lux ambient lighting.. (We measured it).

We ran the 6in reflector on the moon for the first few hours. The Stellarvue refractor was on Jupiter, for a wide and clean low magnification view, giving a comparison to David's LX200 high magnification view. We had at least a view a minute, non-stop for the 4 hours on the LX200, and slightly lower rate on the 75mm refractor, and even less on my two instruments, not really sure of the rate on the 50mm reflector, but we simply had hundreds of people look. At one time I counted 40 people waiting! And it seemed to be like that for most of the event.

There seems to be an exceedingly high interest here, we are networking more these days, we are using social network tools and that's a noticeable part of our audience, as many of them are known to us, or by us. They said "we came because you invited us" and "we heard you on the radio" and "we saw the event on facebook". There was no hint of trouble, and it was a happy and hugely positive environment, with many children! many couples, but many groups of 4,5,6 and more also stopped.

There was huge excitement that ebbed and flowed, a major celebration of life, and the heavens, and we continue to be blown away by it all. It's big. I think it's bigger than what we have dared think it might be. We could have had a dozen telescopes running non-stop for the 4 hours, so many people don't like queues, and ours were quite long. The local shopkeepers were impressed, and no one was put out; even the 5 police stopped and had a look at Jupiter, and enjoyed the treat.

There were many special moments, the 50 yr old who saw Jupiter for the first time, was so disbelieving it was possible, went home and googled it, wrote down some info and returned to thank us, and let us know that he found it was 588 Million km and if he drove his car flat out it would take him 249.2 years to get there!

Mike (one of our sidewalk astronomers) went home and wrote to me; "For the counting estimate: my scope saw about one budding stargazer every 75 seconds, approximately. 90 seconds would be a very conservative estimate. This includes me talking with them, and re-aligning it in-between every person, and the odd idle moment. Based on this, perhaps about 140-170 people in 3.5 hours. It sounds like an awful lot to me, but the calculations look ok. Then there are all the people who did not go to my scope and went to Dave's or your scopes. Hard to estimate, but I suspect at least 450 overall, possibly 600?"

We ran a day event in another central Wellington City location, Manners Mall, promoting our night event. The National Radio network of New Zealand called us on the day before, and put my interview on the 'MidDay Report' our national news, and replayed that hourly. The interview is on-line, and the video of the events that we made using my interview as the soundtrack is also available on line. See www.astronomy.net.nz for links, I spoke about the IYA vision for every citizen, showing people the sky directly, looking at the same sky that our ancients saw, lowering light pollution, and saving energy. Our entire country heard about Galilean Nights!

Youtube documentary video here: check out www.youtube.com/watch?v=uR-B-VZ3-e4 for more info on this event..