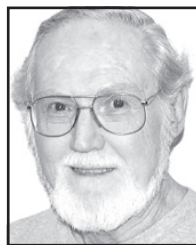


Stargazing 'down South' is disconcerting

This column, like the previous two, comes to you from the small but fascinating country of New Zealand, deep in the Southern Hemisphere southeast of Australia. The natural beauty, rich diversity of scenery, and many other factors, like friendly people and no snakes or poison ivy, make this land a virtual paradise.



Paul Derrick
● Stargazer

For stargazers, getting to see stars, constellations and other night sky objects in the southern celestial hemisphere is a thrill. But as reported last time, I've been frustrated by cloudiness and have to keep reminding myself that the Maori – the Polynesians who first settled the islands nearly a thousand years ago – named it Aotearoa, "land of the long white cloud." And it's the rains from the clouds that give so many places in New Zealand a lush tropical rain-forest feel. Still, I'd sure like more clear nights.

One clear evening I did get to set up my wife's spotting scope, which she uses for birds, in the parking lot of a back packer (hostel) in which we were staying. Before long a group assembled and we had a spontaneous mini-star party with folks from Canada, England, Holland and the U.S. When I pointed out Venus and Jupiter, the young man from Holland expressed surprise that the planets could also be seen from "down" here.

It gave me an opportunity to explain about the Sun's path across the sky, called the ecliptic, and how the Moon and planets also follow the same path as they move through the sky. And just as the Sun can be seen from all places on Earth, so can the Moon and planets.

Owing to the Earth's west-to-east rotation on its axis, the Sun, Moon and planets all rise in the east and set in the west above and below the Equator.

Still, there are differences. From the Northern Hemisphere, the ecliptic tilts toward the south whereas in the Southern Hemisphere it tilts toward the north, and

that can be disorienting. When we in the north see the Sun move across our sky, we're facing in a southerly direction, and the Sun moves left-to-right across our sky. And it's the same with the Moon and planets at night.

However from the Southern Hemisphere and facing in a northerly direction, they move right-to-left – backward from what we're used to.

Even during the day this is confusing: we're accustomed to seeing the morning Sun to our left and the afternoon Sun to our right, and can almost unconsciously estimate the approximate time of day with a quick glance at the Sun's location. But here, we northerners have to consciously remember to reverse things in our mind and realize that the morning Sun will be to our right and the afternoon Sun to our left.

There is another difference. Most constellations can be seen from both hemispheres, yet when seen from south of the equator, they appear upside down to us northerners. The full Moon's "man in the Moon" is hard to make out as he too is upside-down.

And there are yet other notable departures from what we're used to seeing. In the Northern Hemisphere, circumpolar stars and constellations rotate around Polaris in a counterclockwise direction whereas in the Southern Hemisphere they rotate clockwise – and they rotate around an essentially empty space in the night sky.

By chance, we have a reasonably bright star we have named Polaris, the North



PAUL DERRICK

Clouds like these over New Zealand mountains suggest why the Maori called the land Aotearoa, the "land of the long white cloud."

Star, almost straight up from Earth's north pole. But in the Southern Hemisphere, there is no bright star straight above the south pole, and hence no South Star.

On another note, I had an interesting experience while walking in a small town. A passing stranger looked at my T-shirt, smiled big and gave me a thumbs-up. At first I was puzzled, but quickly realized I was wearing my "Bring back Pluto" T-shirt. I guess Pluto-lovers are found around the world.

A final issue not related to stargazing is worth mentioning. After our 2001 trip to New Zealand, I was asked if I noticed

water draining down basins and toilets in a reverse direction.

In fact, that popular notion is a myth. A phenomenon called the Coriolis effect, caused by the rotation of the Earth, does affect large-scale systems like hurricanes which rotate counterclockwise in the Northern Hemisphere and clockwise in the Southern Hemisphere.

But the effect is far too weak to influence the rotational flow of things in our everyday life, like water in drains, except under highly controlled laboratory situations. Other factors – like the direction from which the water enters a toilet or

basin or other subtle currents within the water – determine the direction of rotation. If you make it a point to notice such things, you'll find clockwise and counterclockwise motions occur with about equal frequency.

Paul Derrick is an amateur astronomer who lives in Waco, Texas. His website (www.stargazerpaul.com) contains an archive of past Stargazer columns and other basic stargazing information. Contact him at paulderrickwaco@aol.com or (254) 723-6346 or write 918 N. 30th St., Waco, Texas, 76707.

Oakley woman seeks Ms. Wheelchair title

Jessica Soderlund of Oakley is one of three contestants participating in the 2012 Ms. Wheelchair Kansas competition in Topeka, which will culminate with a crowning ceremony at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Capitol Plaza Hotel.

Other contestants are Emily Evans of Bucklin and Shanell Nieves of Leavenworth. They will be scored during four different events: two personal interviews, a platform speech presentation and on-stage questions. Judges evaluate the participants based on their accomplishments, self-perception, communication and projection skills.

The contestants will also take part in a variety of empowering, informative sessions on such topics as disability pride, self-defense, working with the media, fitness, advocacy, and more.

The ceremony Sunday, open to the public and free of charge, will include platform speech presentations by the contestants, a keynote speaker, farewell from the current titleholder and crowning of the new Ms. Wheelchair Kansas 2012. Kelli Stegeman, Kansas First News anchor in Topeka, will serve as Mistress of Ceremonies.

The mission of the program is to annually select one woman, who is wheelchair mobile, who will successfully advocate,

educate and empower all people on a state level. This is not a beauty contest, but rather a competition to select the most articulate, accomplished delegate who will serve as a role model and spokesperson for people with disabilities in Kansas. The crowned titleholder will have the opportunity to travel throughout the state educating various groups about the issues of importance to people with disabilities. Her reign will ultimately lead up to an opportunity to attend the national competition in August, where she will represent Kansas and compete for the title of Ms. Wheelchair America.

The program was created in 1972, and this is the ninth year that Kansas will be represented at the national competition. The reigning titleholder, Jennifer Kreutzer of Wichita, has traveled all over the state this past year to educate a variety of groups about her platform of "Leading by Example – Mom on a Mission."

For information, contact Carrie Greenwood, state coordinator, at (785) 267-5982 or via e-mail at mswheelchairkansas@yahoo.com. Information can also be found on the Ms. Wheelchair Kansas website at www.mswheelchairkansas.org.

Pianist performing Saturday

Jim Brickman, a chart-topping pianist, will perform as part of the Fort Hays State University Encore Series at 7:30 p.m. Saturday in the Beach/Schmidt Performing Arts Center on the Fort Hays campus.

Brickman is known for his hits "Valentine," "The Gift," "Love of My Life," "Simple Things" and "Peace." He has received six gold and platinum albums, 30 charted adult radio hits and two Grammy nominations. He currently holds four of the top 10 spots on Billboard's New Age chart and has received two Society of European Stage Authors and Composers "Songwriter of the Year" awards, a Cana-

dian Country Music Award, and a Dove Award presented by the Gospel Music Association. Brickman performs in more than 125 cities each year.

"He is involved in many charitable foundations for children..." according to Brickman's website.

Tickets can be purchased at the Student Service Center in the Memorial Union, (785) 628-5306, or on the Encore website. Reserved seating tickets are \$30 for the public, \$28 for senior citizens and children under the age of 18 and \$21 for Fort Hays students. Unreserved seating is \$26, \$24 and \$17, respectively.

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