

ASTRONOMY DAY at the Royal British Columbia Museum  
May 10, 2003  
Discoveries of Jurassic Light!



ASTRONOMY DAY  
LECTURE SERIES  
Newcombe Conference Hall



1:00 – 1:45 – “**Blown Away? The Story of Dinosaur Extinction**”  
**Scott Mair – Director of the Astronomy Interpretive Centre,  
the Centre of the Universe, National Research  
Council of Canada.**

***Abstract:***

The demise of the dinosaurs has been blamed on all sorts of things: volcanic eruptions, rising and falling sea levels, disease and even diarrhea. With the work of Luis and Walter Alvarez it appears that the culprit came from outer-space. Evidence of a 10km diameter asteroid collision just off the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula may be the smoking gun of the dino's demise - or is it?

***Bio:***

Mr. Mair has been a heritage interpreter for over two decades, having worked with parks, science centers and museums across Canada. Scott first had an opportunity to work on dinosaurs while working at the Royal Tyrrell of Museum of Paleontology in Drumheller as the curator of education at the Museum. As the Manager of Visitor and on-site programs at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County Scott was lucky enough to work on the T.rex Named Sue exhibit and Tinniest Giants, and exhibit on the amazing long necked dinosaur nesting site in Argentina.

2:00 – 2:45 – “**Ancient Moons of Giant Planets**”  
**Dr. JJ Kavelaars – Astronomer, National Research Council  
of Canada**

***Abstract:***

These distant comets and ancient satellites of the giant planets, hold the secrets to the physical evolution of the outer solar system. During his talk JJ will relate the process of his discoveries and the implications that they hold for understanding our solar system and the planetary system of distant stars.

We live in the most remarkable era of astronomical discovery in the history of humanity. New discoveries, ranging from planets around other stars to baby galaxies in the early Universe, are being made using exciting new observatories, while telescopes which are even now being commissioned hold the promise of more exciting things to come in the near future. This talk will be about the recent discoveries of the last few years, about the facilities that made them possible, and about the promise of this golden era that is upon us.

***Bio:***

Dr. JJ Kavelaars is an astronomer working at the National Research Council's Herzberg Institute of Astrophysics. In 1998 JJ received his PhD from Queen's University for work on the use of star clusters as probes of the formation of galaxies. However, by 1997 he'd already found a passion for astronomical observations of objects much closer to home.

Solar system comets provide a direct connection between life (and its destruction) on Earth and the stars above. Most scientist now accept the view of a giant comet impact as the killer of the dinosaurs, but what else can these fossils of our solar systems formation tell us? In the late 90s JJ began his search through the debris belt of our solar system, looking for the clues to our past. Since first starting this voyage of discovery Dr Kavelaars has worked with a team of young astronomers, discovering new moons circulating the giant planets and hundreds of objects beyond the orbit of Neptune.

3:00 – 3:45 – “**Seeking Ourselves**”

**Dr. Gordon Walker – Professor Emeritus, University of British Columbia.**

***Abstract:***

Seeking ourselves - the search for life beyond the Earth. In the past decade astronomers have found planets circling other stars.

Could there be life on any of them? - almost certainly because we find the complex molecules which are the building blocks of life everywhere we look in the Universe. But, so far, we have encountered no evidence of intelligent life. There are places in the Solar system where there may be simple life forms and they will soon be explored but, as we shall never travel to the stars, we must build large telescopes to detect life elsewhere. I shall talk about all of these things.

***Bio:***

Dr. Gordon Walker looks for planets beyond the Solar system and for complex organic molecules in the space between the stars. He is involved in a Canadian satellite experiment to detect the natural oscillations of nearby stars and has an abiding interest in astronomical instruments.