

President's Message



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During this northern hemisphere summer the 2009 Council meeting was convened in the French city of Toulouse, home to Airbus Industrie and the famous Cité de L'Espace. The city nestles in the valley of the River Garonne and has been a settlement since pre-Roman times, with a long and rich history.

The whole region is an exciting and quirky place to visit; the Canal du Midi connects Toulouse with the Mediterranean coast and presents a chance to experience the world at the sedate pace of a canal boat. The amazingly well-preserved medieval fortress of Carcassonne is worth the climb. Montségur is less well preserved but occupies a spectacular site. Toulouse has many fine buildings, including the seat of local government in the Capitole, adjacent to the hotel in which we stayed for the council meeting. We were bused up to the Cité de L'Espace each morning and brought back in time for a quick refresh and change before we attended to the important evening networking.

Thanks for the hospitality

The IPS Council is grateful to our French colleagues who hosted the council meeting, and provided us with an excellent meeting space

and the opportunity to continue networking over splendid lunches at Cité de L'Espace. On behalf of our society I would like to formally thank Marc Moutin, Guadalupe Ramirez and Marie Pierre Martin for all of their hard work in helping to organise the smooth running of the IPS Council meeting.

I also would like to thank the Cité de L'Espace technical and security staff and our bus driver for their patience when we ran a little over time on our final day. I also must thank the Mairie of the city of Toulouse, who entertained us and welcomed us to their city in the historic Capitole building.

Toulouse is not only home to the headquarters of Airbus, but also is the heartland of the European aerospace industry. The EU's Galileo global positioning system, the French government space agency (known as CNES or the Centre Nationale d'Etudes Spatiale) runs the Toulouse Space Centre and the SPOT Image satellite system company is based in the area. Other space based industries in the Toulouse area include the Thales and EADS Astrium companies, who build satellites.

The Cité de L'Espace is well supported by these industries and provides a superb site for exploring the history of the space race from a different perspective. In the parkland around the buildings there are full scale models of Soyuz spacecraft, an Ariane 5 launcher and ESA satellites, plus a full size Mir space station. It is a paradise for space buffs.

A busy season

It has been a busy period for me and the other IPS officers. Since I last wrote I have attended the British Association of Planetaria (BAP) meeting in Greenwich and the Association des Planétariums de Langue Française (APLF) in Paris. At both meetings I greeted the planetarians attending with a message from the IPS and encouraged all to join up. I also encouraged the French planetarians to attend the upcoming conference in Alexandria, as there will be a simultaneous translation facility for them. I am also happy to report that we have inspired an interest in a new French bid to host an IPS conference.

I am struck at the sheer volume of activity which has been generated by the IYA09. If this translates into the same type of scientific advances and greater interest in the earth sciences that followed in the wake of the International Geophysical Year which ran from mid-1957 to December 1958, astronomy is in for a major boost. Huge public interest has been generated by the IYA events, the anniversary of the Apollo 11 mission and the mid-year solar eclipse.

I am fond of telling our funding agencies and all of our visitors that planetariums are uniquely placed. In my Irish homeland we are blessed with many inspiring sites, starting with the ancient 350 million-year-old limestone bedrock that underlies most of the island which shows that Ireland used to be a subtropical paradise, rather like the Bahamas today. The downside is that, like the modern Bahamas, much of Carboniferous Ireland was under 30 metres of subtropical water, makes sunbathing a little tricky.

Our Irish heritage sites are a great resource, but when all is said and done, they are frozen in time. Battle sites, a saint's life commemorated in a church and visitor centre, and a Bronze Age ring fort—all tell wonderful stories, but they are not continuously being renewed or updated. Their story is told, there are no new twists, unless the historians dig up some new minor facts. But in astronomy, there is something new every day, and the discoveries keep coming.

Even more importantly, since we humans are such visual animals, the enormous advances in imaging techniques have provided wonderful images from the Cassini space craft orbiting Saturn and from the exploration robots on the surface of Mars. These generate an instant "wow!" factor: I am entranced by the amazing details comparable to the aerial photos I used to work with when I was involved in mapping and researching Earth's surface geology.

Modern school children can look at the spectacular images of Mars on the internet; I compare today's images with the blurry black



Soyuz spacecraft in the grounds of Cité de L'Espace. Photo by Tom Mason

and white photographs of Mars in my boyhood library books. This is an advance as dramatic as any in our history. Of course there is a downside, and I perceive this as a sad loss of imaginative input. As I did not have enough images from my library books, I generated my own in my mind's eye or went on to draw them and make my own reality.

The reminder this year of the huge technological adventure that was the Cold War space race to the moon is a dash of reality. Any exploration will be costly, space especially so, and while I fully understand the reasoning behind the advocates of robot exploration like UK Astronomer Royal Martin Rees, I think that to ignore human space flight is to deny our human nature. I would echo the underlying philosophy of U.S. President John Kennedy's 1962 speech at Rice University emphasizing the challenge of landing on the moon. We do not choose to explore space because it is easy, it is and always will be very hard, dangerous, and technically challenging.

I look forward to the new NASA Administrator declaring the new goals for the future: I am impressed with Charlie Bolden (I heard him speak in London a few years ago), challenging youngsters to do the hard stuff and to learn from their mistakes. It is excellent to have someone in charge of America's space programme who has direct experience of the big challenges, so from all of us non-U.S. planetarians, well done NASA and the USA!

My view is that if we study history, it is best not to repeat the big mistakes; the 20th century's were two disastrous wars. It is surely better to advance our technology in a peaceful way by conquering the challenges of space, than by choosing humanity's other sure fire way of technological advance: war.

Report on Council meeting

The IPS Council meeting dealt with many pressing issues. The most important news from the meeting was the selection of the conference site for IPS 2012. Some of you may find the process which the council uses to select conference sites to be of interest, so let me give you a quick "fly-on-the-wall" summary.

To start the process, we were presented with audio visual presentations and financial projections from Ryan Wyatt of the Morrison Planetarium in San Francisco, California and Jon Elvert of the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Both made their case for the IPS Council to consider their respective facilities as host for the 2012 IPS conference. This process takes place over two days: the presentation is made on the first day, and then on the second day the council members quiz the representatives of the prospective host organisations about the details of their bids.

This is then followed by a secret ballot, and

all have a vote. Affiliates who cannot attend give their proxy votes to others so that everyone in the society has a say. The only person not voting is the president, and I would have had a casting vote in the event of a tie between the two bids. The vote went in favour of Baton Rouge, so I can officially confirm that the venue for the 2012 IPS conference will be the Irene W. Pennington Planetarium at Baton Rouge.

Importance of affiliate reports

The affiliate reports are an important part of the council meeting, as this provides an opportunity for the representatives to raise issues of importance to local IPS members. The newest affiliate group from Brazil was represented by Alex Cherman, and I can also report that there is interest from a number of places to host the 2014 conference. So far Rio de Janeiro has formally written to me indicating their intention to bid for the 2014 conference and Toulouse and Vancouver have expressed their interest in making a bid.

I should also point out that potential hosts should realise that if they do not succeed in their bid to host an IPS conference the first time, it is worth considering a second bid for another year. We are very pleased to entertain bids from all across the world, as it is enormously important that the International part of our title is upheld by having our conferences held at sites outside North America. This recognises the reality that as our society grows, much of the potential growth is in countries like China, India and in South America.

I know that IPS planetarians are keen to travel and see other facilities around the world as well as having a first-hand opportunity to see new skies in other hemispheres, whether east, west, north or south.

I also must inform you that Steve Mitch, who has acted as our Elections Committee chair for many years, wrote to inform me that he would be stepping down from his post as a result of his retirement.

Steve announced this decision and I must respect his wishes, while regretting the loss of a conscientious and effective committee chair. Steve, if you are reading this, please be aware that while it may have been a small affair for you to discharge your duties, it actually is one of the most important jobs in our society. Our process must be open and accountable, and Steve made it so. Many thanks Steve, and good luck for the future. The officers have discussed who could fill this vacancy, and I am happy to report that another recent past president, Martin George, has accepted my invitation to fill this important post.

At the council meeting it was a pleasure to welcome all of the affiliate representatives, many of whom had travelled half way around the world to attend. Following on from my

comments about Steve and his stewardship of the Elections Committee, I would remind all affiliate representatives that they need to be aware that it is their job to represent the opinions of their associations, and to have canvassed that opinion for any important votes that will be dealt with in the business meeting. This is a key element of how we function.

I also report here that *Planetarian* editor Sharon Shanks received praise from the council for the very professional appearance of our flagship magazine. I have already written to her thanking her for all of her hard work on our behalf. Sharon has completed her tasks with great professionalism and efficiency under particularly trying personal circumstances. So Sharon, as I know that you must be reading this, please accept our heartfelt thanks to you for your good work.

It would be remiss of me not to mention another stalwart of the IPS, Dale Smith. Dale has rescued us from a tricky situation when our advertising person for the magazine had to relinquish the position. Dale stepped into the breach and has imposed a very clear cut and rational method of dealing with advertising matters in the *Planetarian*, including a review of how pages are allocated to advertisers. Dale will also be reading this so, on your behalf, I extend to him our gratitude for rescuing our chestnuts from the fire. Any matters relating to the magazine should be copied to Dale and Sharon.

At the council meeting we discussed the possibility of making changes in how the *Planetarian* could be disseminated as an e-version. It was decided that further information was needed to assess members' views, as well as research and collaboration with the Publications Committee. You should expect some query to reach you in due course. Please let us have your views and the outcome will be communicated to you as soon as the data has been collected and collated.

I will be looking at the roles and performance of committee chairs very soon as it is vital that these are driven by cajoling and frequent communication. To aid me I have accepted the assistance of Past President Susan Button, and she and I and the other officers will be meeting on a Skype call as soon as possible to discuss and review committee chairs.

Finally, it was decided that the IPS would provide some support for officers to travel to annual officers meetings on IPS business, as it was becoming increasingly obvious that this could become a problem for the future. The officers will continue to treat the Society's funds with great care, and we hope that this decision may help us to ensure that there is a flow of good candidates offering themselves for election as IPS officers. ☆