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CARIBOO COLLEGE OBSERVATORY

The Cariboo College Observatory can best be described as a telescope which built itself a home.

The initial idea for an Astronomy program came from Physics instructor Dr. Roland Cobb who had been involved with Astronomy as a graduate student although he subsequently did research in Nuclear Physics.

During the summer of 1971, Cobb was able to purchase the telescope and its mount. Unfortunately this expended the funds allocated to Astronomy without providing any way that the telescope, a 12 ½ inch Newtonian reflector could be used.

Subsequent appeals resulted in funds being made available for the purchase of the necessary motor driven dome, a manufactured item which arrived knocked down and was then put in storage in a Kamloops warehouse.

During this period Cariboo College was preparing to move up from its temporary home on the Kamloops Indian Residential School site to the buildings which had been under construction for the B.C. Vocational School, Kamloops, and which were to become the basic facility for Cariboo College.

Cariboo was now the possessor of an astronomer, a telescope, and a large galvanized steel dome which was accruing substantial storage charges in the local warehouse. Cariboo College now had the makings of an observatory and an Astronomy program and no place to put them.

Following an appeal to the Cariboo College Council Dr. Cobb was provided with an additional small amount from the maintenance budget and told to do his best.

After an unsuccessful attempt to interest local contractors in the job of building the Observatory (a quote for electrical services alone would have used up half of the funds available) Dr. Cobb undertook the job himself.

Since he was technically prohibited from erecting a "permanent" building the observatory was placed on four concrete blocks cast in place by Cobb and student volunteers. Nobody, however, has ever managed to explain how the thirteen foot concrete pillar in the centre of the building on which the telescope and its electrical drive was bolted could have been easily moved.

By the last day of lectures in December, 1971 the structure was up, the dome and telescope were in place and Cariboo College had a working observatory built by volunteer faculty and student labour.

The structure remained in a rough state until the following Fall when Dr. Cobb returned from a period of work at the TRIUMF project. By then Cariboo College had begun to offer a pre-apprentice Carpentry course and the students in this program under instructor John Whittle applied the final touches.

The rough plywood sheathing was covered with aluminium siding, paths were surveyed and constructed, the inside walls were panelled and a steep but sturdy stairway was put up in place of the ladder up to the dome.

At this point the college had a relatively complete Astronomy facility for little more than the cost of the telescope, drive, and dome.

The Cariboo College Observatory is primarily a teaching tool, but it has involved hundreds of people from the region other than the students in the regular credit courses in Astronomy.

Each year cub packs and senior citizens, Rotarians and elementary school classes have toured the facility.

Even after five years Dr. Cobb is occasionally interrupted during an observing session by a knock on the door from somebody wanting to look at the stars.