



A Little Black Dot: the Transits of Venus

Martin George

Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston

Wednesday, 30 May 2012, 8:00 PM

Physics Lecture Theatre 1, Sandy Bay Campus, University of Tasmania

ABSTRACT:

Only the planets Mercury and Venus can pass between the Earth and the Sun. These events are called transits, during which we see these planets appearing as circular black dots appearing to slowly move across the Sun's face.

Although transits of Mercury happen about 13 times each century, transits of Venus are rare. They occur in pairs separated by 8 years, following which the next pair occurs more than a century later.

On June 6 this year, Venus transits the Sun for the last time until the year 2117.

In the past, the transits were very important, as they were used to calculate the distance between the Earth and the Sun.

Today, we have no need of this method. However, the rarity of these events and the colourful history of their observation capture public attention. Both great successes and bad luck were experienced by intrepid astronomers and explorers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In this talk, Martin George will excite everyone with the fascination of the transits of Venus, and discuss what we shall see this year - weather permitting!

SPEAKER PROFILE:

Martin George is a Fellow and former President (President, 2005-2006) of the International Planetarium Society — the world body of planetarium professionals. He is also Manager of the Launceston Planetarium, which forms part of the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery in Launceston, Tasmania.

Martin was born in the UK and educated in Tasmania, gaining an honours degree in Physics (astronomy) at the University of Tasmania. He makes frequent appearances on radio and television to discuss astronomy and space research. In particular, he has monthly astronomy programmes on ABC Northern Tasmania, talkback programmes on ABC radio in Hobart, and fortnightly national programmes on ABC Local Radio. His television appearances have included Channel Nine's Today Programme.

Martin has kept close links with the University of Tasmania, and has on many occasions presented undergraduate courses in astronomy at the University's Launceston Campus. He frequently speaks to community groups and the public on astronomical topics.

Martin is a member of several astronomy-related professional organisations, including the International Astronomical Union. He is also administrator of the Grote Reber Medal for Radio Astronomy — the world's major award for significant and innovative contributions on this topic.

Included in Martin's many other activities are regular newspaper columns (including a weekly article in the Saturday Mercury). Martin has also been a tour guide, on several occasions, for astronomical tours within Australia and overseas.

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