On the Beat

COLBY POLICE
Friday

12:20 a.m. – Caller reported vehicle blocking trash cans in Friendly Acres. Officer spoke with vehicle owner and advised it was not blocking access to trash cans; vehicle moved.

5:35 a.m. – Walk-through at Walmart.

8:53 a.m. – Possible criminal damage to property reported. No damage.

9:06 a.m. – Subject reported possible damage to vehicle. No damage.

10:40 a.m. – Funeral block.

12:04 p.m. – Possible e-mail scam. Information provided; all OK.

12:30 p.m. – Criminal damage to property: subject came to station about scratches from neighbor's dog on her car Thursday. Gathered information.

2 p.m. – Caller reported theft of prescriptions from locked vehicle. Report filed.

9:24 p.m. – Caller reported suspicious persons in store. Subjects left when police were called.

11:50 p.m. – Walk-through at Twisters.

THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF
Thursday

8:47 a.m. – Caller reported unlawful use of fuel card from Frontier Ag, Brewster. Report filed.

3:22 p.m. – Released Christopher Alan Hansen.

5:19 p.m. – Breanna Collette Blackhart arrested on warrant.

5:23 p.m. – Booked Blackhart.

Friday

12:07 p.m. – Michelle Renay DeHart arrested on warrant.

12:29 p.m. – Booked DeHart.

1:23 p.m. – Provided traffic control for subject moving cattle at K-25 and County Rd. Z.

3:53 p.m. – Released Breanna Blackhart.

Thomas County Jail

Booked into the Thomas County jail:

• Jason Charles George, 27, Oakley, Sept. 21, obstruction of official duty, fleeing and attempt to elude, reckless driving, distribution of Schedule V drug or analog, possession of a stimulant with intent to sell, possession of drug paraphernalia – distribution, conspiracy – distribution of a stimulant, using communication facility to arrange sales or purchase, no drug tax stamp, Thomas County Sheriff's Office, released Feb. 8 to probation and treatment.

• Christopher Alan Hansen, 22, Colby, Jan. 7, bond violation, Thomas County Sheriff, released Feb. 9 on supervised bond.

• Trevor John Lundgren, 31, Colby, Feb. 1, possession of a narcotic drug with intent to sell, using communication facility to arrange sale or purchases, Thomas County Sheriff, released Feb. 3 on $50,000 appearance bond.

• Breanna Dawn Hooker, 19, Colby, Feb. 3, theft, sale of prescription drug, Colby Police Department, released same day on recognizance.

• Steven Dwayne Briscoe Jr., 25, Baypoint, Calif., Feb. 5, possession/distribution of certain hallucinogenic drugs, Kansas Highway Patrol, released Feb. 6 on recognizance.

• Jesse Lain Crumrine, 27, Brewster, Feb. 4, disorderly conduct, Colby Police, released same day on notice to appear.

• Carl Fitzgerald Kirkland, 46, Antioch, Calif., Feb. 4, possession/distribution of certain hallucinogenic drugs, Highway Patrol, released Feb. 6 on recognizance.

• Breanna Collette Blackhart, 18, Colby, Feb. 9, domestic battery, disorderly conduct, Thomas County Sheriff, released Feb. 10 on supervised probation.

• Janna Layne Cook, 22, Colby, Feb. 12, driving under the influence, Thomas County Sheriff/Colby Police, released same day on notice to appear.

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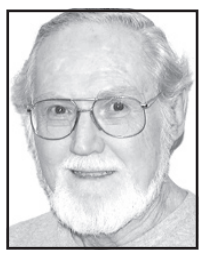
Below equator, stargazing different



Paul Derrick
• Stargazer

This column comes to you from beautiful New Zealand, deep in the southern hemisphere, where my wife and I, with two other couples, have just begun a six-week adventure.

New Zealand is nearly 1,000 miles southeast of Australia and consists mainly of two long, narrow islands end to end – the North Island and South Island – and extending nearly 1,000 miles. The islands are separated by Cook Strait. To the east is the aqua-blue Pacific Ocean and to the west the Tasman Sea. Christchurch, the South Island's largest city, is a major point of departure for flights to Antarctica.

New Zealand's total area is about equal to Colorado. Most of its 4.4 million residents live in five major cities, so there's many sparsely populated areas, especially on the South Island. For stargazers that means dark skies free of light pollution.

Its highly varied land has coasts, mountains, pastures, farms, lakes, waterfalls, forests and even glaciers. But the beauty comes with a price. Situated where two tectonic plates meet, it also has earthquakes, as Christchurch has been painfully aware this past year, and volcanoes, of which most, but not all, are extinct.

The native Maoris settled the islands less than a thousand years ago while Europeans, mostly English, began settling in the 1800s. Today, Maoris are less than 20 percent of the population, yet their culture is highly visible, similar to native American culture in the southwestern U.S. English is the primary language, but Maori is also still in use.

A thumbnail sketch of New Zealand would be incomplete without mentioning the friendliness of the people – Kiwis as they call themselves, nicknamed after the kiwi bird. Their friendliness is more than mere politeness, and it is contagious. I found myself seeking opportunities to be friendly and helpful to others.

An example of Kiwi friendliness: As I was changing a flat tire in a parking lot at the Auckland Sky Dome Planetarium, an older fellow stopped and asked if I needed anything. When I told him I could change the tire, but I had no idea where to get it fixed, he pointed me in the right direction. Later, after the tire shop replaced the tire, I asked the owner-manager the best way to get back to the hostel which was several kilometers away. Rather than simply give me directions, he got on his computer, had MapQuest calculate the route and printed a map for me.

Unfortunately, I still got lost, but it wasn't his fault. I blamed it on having to concentrate so intently on traveling on the left side of the roads while seated on the right side of the auto. And, of course, I also blamed the "backward" driving for my whacking a curb which damaged the tire in the first place.

So what about stargazing, my primary reason for returning to this wonderful place? So far it's been limited owing to cloudy nights and the light-polluted cities we've been in. But I have had one good, if brief, night of viewing, and I was thrilled.

Facing north, I saw many of the constellations we see from home when facing south in the early evening this time of year – what we call the winter sky. I saw the constellations of the Great Winter Arc like Orion, Canis Major, Taurus and Gemini. But even though they are familiar, they don't look like what we're used to seeing, since from here they appear upside-down. There's just nothing like seeing the great hunter standing on his head or the big dog on his back with his feet up.

Facing south and peering into the part of the sky never visible from our mid-northern latitudes, I immediately spotted the four stars forming the Southern Cross, the signature constellation of the Southern Hemisphere. It is so small your fist held at arm's length will cover it, yet it is usually the first thing that comes to mind when we think of the deep southern night sky. Both the New Zealand and Australian flags feature this four-star pattern.

The New Zealand flag features the Southern Cross.

To its lower right were Alpha and Beta Centauri, the brightest stars in the constellation Centaurus, most of which is hidden from our northern view. Alpha Centauri is our nearest stellar neighbor at a mere four light years away. It is actually a multiple-star system consisting of Alpha Centauri and several other fainter stars bound together by gravity and orbiting each other.

High overhead I saw two stars we can just barely see from the southern U.S. – Canopus in the constellation Carina, and Achernar in Eridanus. Canopus was a major guide star for Polynesian sailors who long ago navigated the Pacific using the stars. They undoubtedly used Canopus when they discovered New Zealand. Achernar just barely rises above our horizon.

In seeing part of the Milky Way too far south to see in the U.S., two jewels came into view. The Eta Carina Nebula, a naked-eye area of cosmic cloudiness, is formed by the huge dying star Eta Carina. The star itself isn't visible, but the nebula is spectacular. The other is a naked-eye star cluster, formally designated IC 2602, but better known as the Southern Pleiades. As is often the case with naked-eye objects, both are even more dramatic through binoculars.

While I saw several other things that first night, I'll save them for another column.

Paul Derrick is an amateur astronomer who lives in Waco, Texas. Contact him at pauldermickwaco@aol.com or (254) 723-6346 or write 918 N. 30th St., Waco, Texas, 76707.

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