

## **Speech to IPC on the Hills of Gold Wind Farm: Dr David Beirman 01 Feb 2024**

Ladies and Gentlemen, my name is Dr David Beirman. My wife, Liz and I have been property owners in Nundle since 2018 and resident here since 2020. This makes us relative newcomers to the community. We first visited Nundle in 2017 by accident and fell in love with village. We were inspired to settle in Nundle because of the sublime beauty of the region and its unspoiled Hills of Gold. We also love the communality of Nundle and we have quickly been accepted as part of the Nundle community.

The Orwellian (Hills of Gold Wind Farm) proposal to desecrate the magnificent Western ridge of the Great Dividing Range between Hanging Rock and Timor, on the "altar" of renewable energy for a short operational life of 25-30 years is an outrage. If I may paraphrase from His Majesty King Charles III, "our pristine landscape is set to defaced by 47 carbunkles". Their construction will cause untold damage to the landscape, flora and fauna and will turn the "Hills of Gold" into the Hills of hideous spines. 47, 230 metre tall Turbines will be a blot on the landscape even after they cease operation and it's left to landowners to determine the post-operational fate of the turbines. If this project is approved, the proponent will be permitted to damage our environment, erect the carbunkles and leave someone else to clean up the mess. What a very convenient proposal for the state government in Sydney to say they approve a temporary bandaid "solution" to fossil fuel dependence. If the NSW government is so keen on this type of project, let them stick a couple 230 metre high turbines (equivalent to the height of Sydney's MLC Building) on top of the NSW Parliament house.

The proponents of this project claim widespread communal support for it. In their arrogance and hubris they believe that anyone they engage with is bedazzled by the brilliance of their case and swept up with enthusiasm for the magnificence of this project. The truth is that HOGPI's figures demonstrate that close to 70% of the people in Nundle, Hanging Rock, Crawney and Timor oppose the project. These figures are substantially confirmed by two surveys conducted by Tamworth's local State member of Parliament, Kevin Anderson which revealed that 58% opposed the project. Added to this is the firm opposition of Tamworth Regional Council. Yet, on the basis of political expedience for the benefit of its inner-city supporters, the NSW Labor government is determined to impose a short-term windfarm project on a community which clearly opposes it.

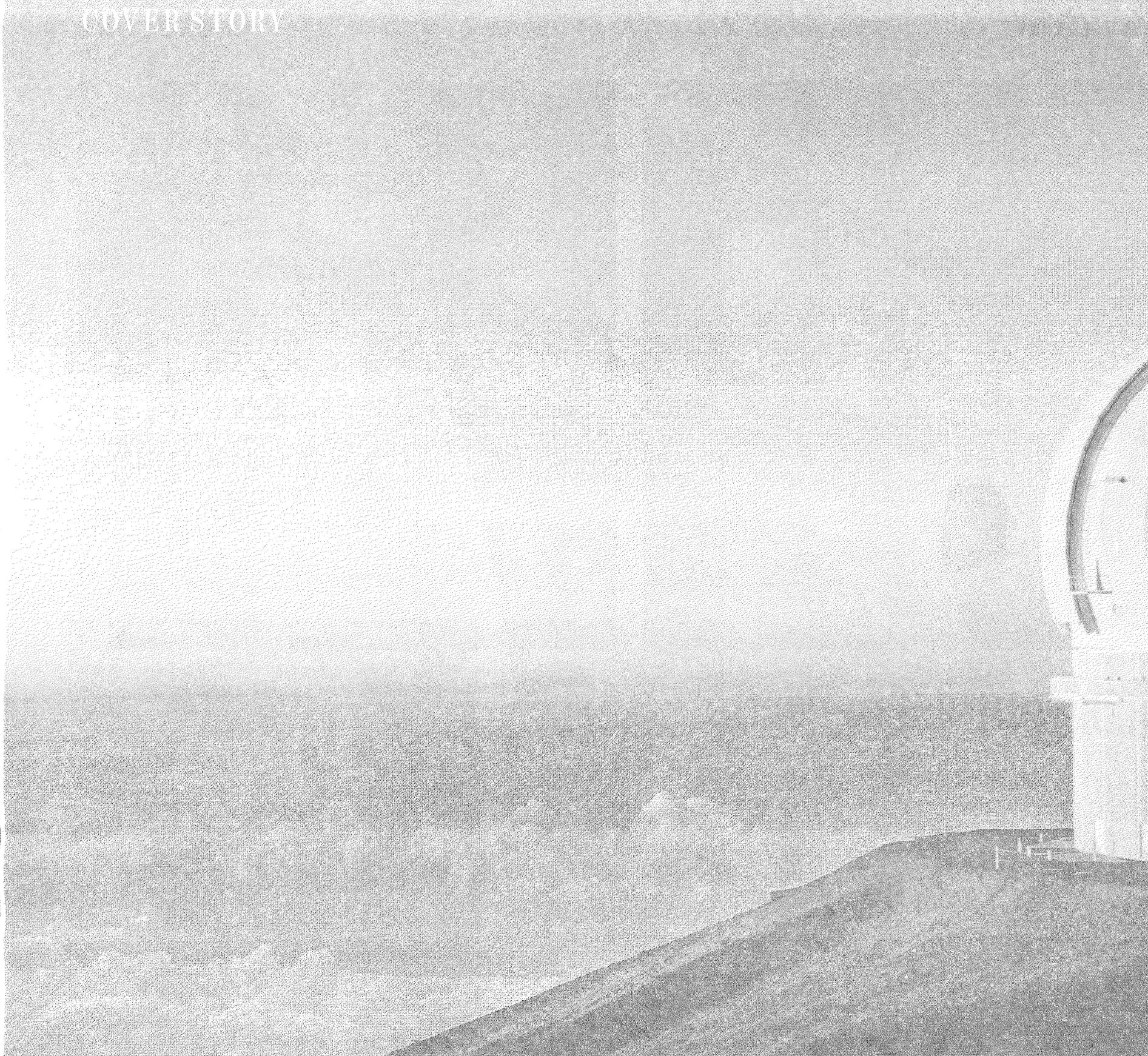
I have spent most of my professional life as either a tourism industry professional or a tourism academic. The proponent's claim that the "wind farm" would be a tourism attraction is laughable. Based on empirical research conducted in Germany, Scotland and even the proponent's own inclusion of a research assessment by a University of Newcastle scholar showed there is no evidence that the presence of a wind farm anywhere is seen as a tourism attraction for more than a miniscule minority of visitors to any of the many destinations worldwide which have them. Visually, the presence of the carbunkles (wind turbines) atop a natural ridge line would constitute a tourism deterrent. Few visitors to Nundle and surrounds who now come to see a natural landscape, are unlikely visit in the future to gasp in awe and wonder at 47 ugly wind turbines.

The IPC is well aware that there are places in NSW which welcome "wind farms" and rather than impose them on us, despoil our environment and divide our community they should focus on

areas which welcome them and incur far less damage during the construction phase than the environmental insanity of Nundle-Hanging Rock-Timor project as proposed.

So, if Wind farms are a deterrent to tourism in Nundle, and surrounds what will attract visitors, please most locals and enhance the economic benefits of increased visitation? A number of us, in Nundle and Tamworth are currently exploring the benefits of the area's potential Dark Sky status which has been enjoyed in Coonabarabran and the Warrumbungles National Park since 2016. The Weekend Australian Nov 18-19, 2023, published a major feature on astro tourism. Astro tourism is a proven success in attracting tourists to many parts of regional Australia. The Tamworth Regional Astronomy Club, Tamworth Regional Council and Marnie Ogg who an Astro-tourism Operator in partnership with her husband Fred Watson (Australia's most prominent astronomer) have discussed their shared enthusiasm for Nundle and surrounds as an Astro tourism centre with business people in Nundle on both sides of the wind farm debate. According to Marnie, who wrote Coonabarabran's successful application for Dark Skies status,(the first such region accredited in Australia) the Nundle-Timor region is currently perfect as a dark sky region which would attract thousands of domestic and international tourists. The "wind farm" and its requirements for navigational lighting and flash lighting during the construction phase would, at best, compromise the area's eligibility for "dark skies status". The evidence shows that the majority of our community prefer tourists to Nundle, Hanging Rock and the ridges to Timor to be attracted by our region's magnificent natural assets. We oppose it being ruined by a project which would despoil our environment and damage its visual beauty. Nundle's natural beauty should not be sacrificed to satisfy the unthinking mania for renewable energy at any cost on the part of the, state Labor government, the enviro fascist Gangrenes and other WOKE folk in Sydney's Inner City electorates who are unlikely to countenance such developments in their own backyards.

Thanks for listening and I sincerely hope the IPC shows it's truly independent and rejects this abominable proposal.



# CHASING STARS

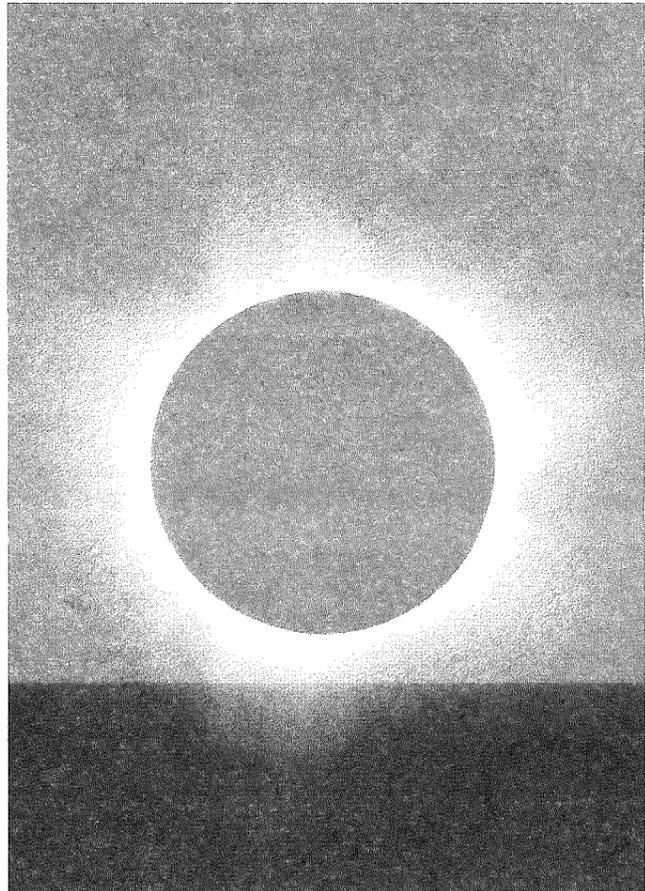
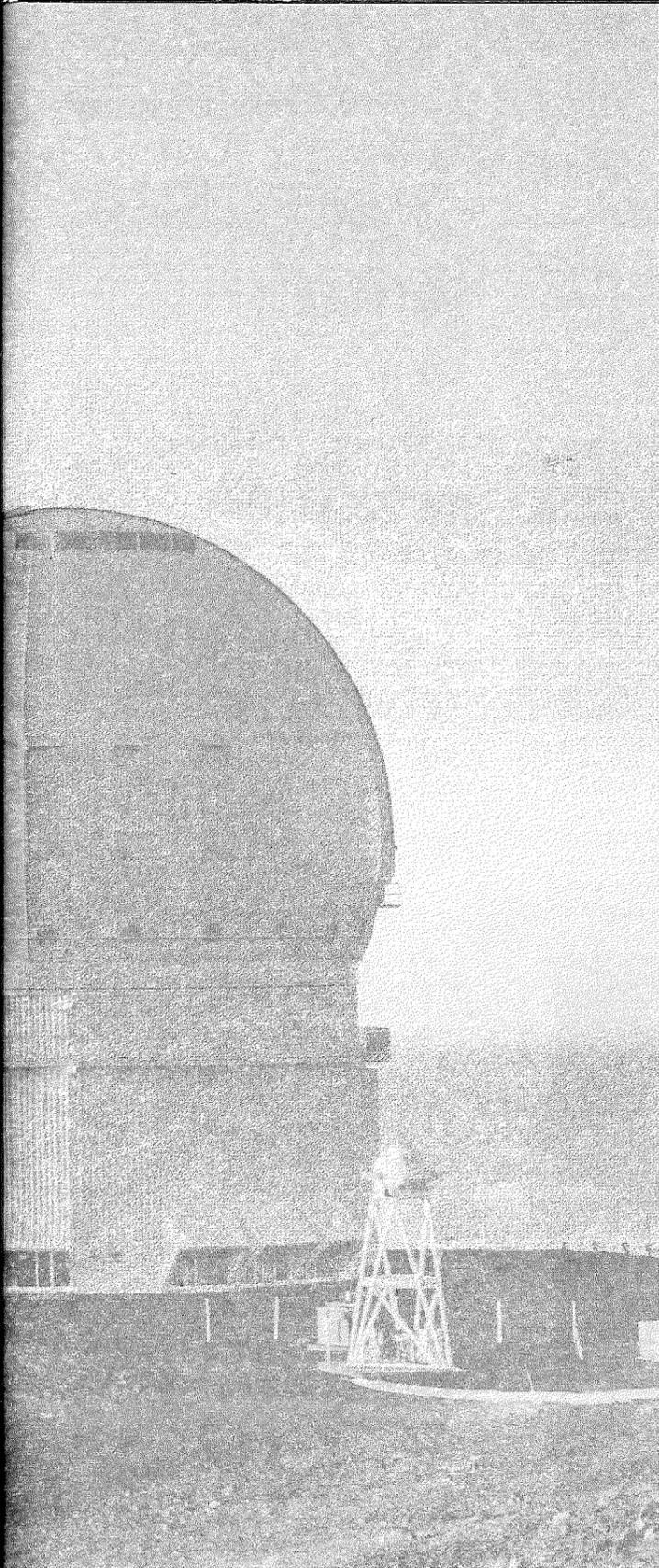
The world of astrotourism is drawing thousands of travellers into its orbit, as WA's Ningaloo Coast recently discovered

RICKY FRENCH

**R**oughly once every 18 months, the moon passes between Earth and sun with such precise alignment that it casts a shadow – a sort of celestial snail trail – across a small portion of the Earth's surface. It's called the "path of totality", and anyone positioned on it will witness the holy grail of astronomical events, a total solar eclipse. And each time this happens, a dedicated tribe of astro-tourists known as eclipse-chasers will travel from all corners of the world to be there. On April 20, 2000, 20,000 of them converged on Exmouth, Western Australia – a town with a population of less than 3000 – to spend one minute and two seconds standing in the shadow of the moon.

The eclipse threw the Ningaloo Coast suddenly into the spotlight (more accurately into shadow) and the region embraced the opportunity to showcase itself on the world stage. Guests aboard a special tour by Ningaloo Whaleshark Swim could tick off two bucket-list items on the same day. Tour manager Jasmin O'Brien says watching the eclipse from Turquoise Bay after swimming with whale sharks was something no one on the boat will ever forget. "Seeing the landscape and seascape fall into darkness, then being dazzled by stars above the boat in the middle of the ocean, surrounded by the big blue of Ningaloo Reef... it's something you can't comprehend until you see it."

Preparing for the huge influx of visitors was a mammoth undertaking for the region. The state government invested \$22m to boost capacity and ensure tourists were kept entertained beyond the fleeting event.



Clockwise from left, Mauna Kea astronomy station in Hawaii; a hiker under the Milky Way; this year's solar eclipse as seen from Ningaloo Reef; the Lagoon Nebula

Eclipse Discovery Tour of 27 events ran throughout April and was attended by about 3000 people. "It was an effort to invite visitors to stay longer, disperse into other regions and experience the wonders of Western Australia's dark night sky," says Carol Redford, chief executive of Astrotourism WA. She says about half the visitors were interstate or international. "We had Tasmanians in Mingenew, Costa Ricans in Northam, Germans in Gascoyne Junction. That never happens."

Redford says the number of inbound international tour operators specialising in astrotourism is rapidly growing, but more product and planning is needed to fully capitalise on the burgeoning market. "Dark-sky enthusiasts become your advocates for the region. They can have amazing experiences that can leave a legacy. We need to make sure we harness it."

Tour operator Dark Sky Traveller is well practised in harnessing the surging demand for astrotourism. Led by the founder of the charity Dark Sky Alliance, Marnie Ogg, and her husband, government astronomer and science communicator Fred Watson, tours traverse all facets of the genre. Guests have sat in Einstein's chair at the tower named after the great scientist in Germany, walked through the tunnel of the Large Hadron Collider, seen the northern lights from a chairlift in Lapland, had lunch in the canteen with staff at the Swedish Institute for Space, and witnessed an exclusive concert by composer Urmas Sisask in his "observatorium" in Estonia.

Watson says the surging popularity of astrotourism flows logically from the desire to experience unspoilt places. "If you think of the wilderness as an unspoilt area on Earth, then the universe is the greater wilderness."

*'If you think of the wilderness as an unspoilt area on Earth, then the universe is the greater wilderness'*

Travel isn't stopping. People have gone through a very insular experience with Covid, and are seeking out natural experiences."

For this year's eclipse, Watson and Ogg were on a Coral Expeditions ship on a Kimberley cruise from Darwin to Broome, leading a tour in partnership with the Australian Geographic Society. The eclipse was viewed from remote Scott Reef, 300km off the Kimberley coast, the 120 guests getting a private screening of the greatest show on Earth.

Coral Expeditions commercial director Jeff Gillies says there's already a waiting list for the next Australian total solar eclipse in 2028. "The evangelists of the astro-travel world seek out eclipse viewing from cruises," he says. "It's a way to get away from the crowds, and being on a vessel means if there's cloud cover you can move around it."

But the regular dark-night sky is proving a powerful drawcard on its own. Recent years have seen a boom in places seeking "dark sky" accreditation from the International Dark Sky Association. IDSA spokesperson Michael Rymer says it's part of a general move towards sustainable, low-

Continued on Page 14

Continued from Page 13

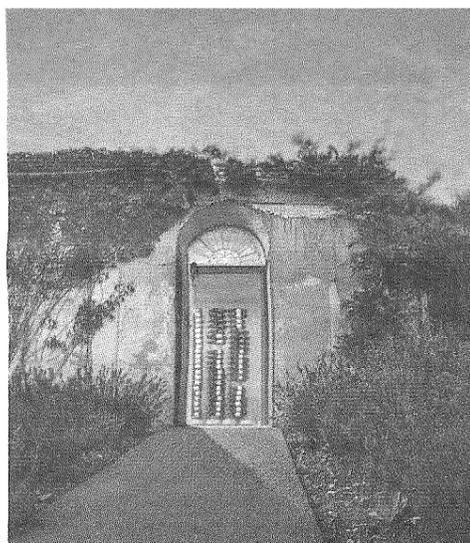
impact eco-tourism. "People are becoming advocates for the protection of dark skies, which is important not just for stargazing but for a healthy ecosystem on Earth."

There are more than 200 certified dark sky places, across 22 countries. In July, Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary in the Flinders Ranges became Australia's fourth, joining NSW's Warrumbungle National Park (home to the largest telescope in Australia, at Siding Spring Observatory), Queensland's The Jump-Up (near Winton) and South Australia's River Murray Dark Sky Reserve. Aoraki Mackenzie Dark Sky Reserve in New Zealand's South Island is the world's second largest, and has seen tourist numbers to the region more than double since its inception in 2012. At its flagship attraction, the Dark Sky Project at Lake Tekapo, astronomy is interwoven with Maori mythology, while at Mt Cook Lakeside Retreat guests can raise a toast to the heavens from the Pukaki Wine Cellar and Observatory.

The dark sky movement began in the US, which is one of the best places in the world for comfort-seeking stargazers. At Summit at Big Bend, in Texas's Big Bend National Park, you can observe the night sky through a transparent ceiling from a king bed inside a stargazing dome, or hole up in a luxury cave carved into the side of Tres Cuevas Mountain. Colorado has 15 dark-sky places spread across myriad mountain ranges and desert dunes. Fans of the great American road trip, meanwhile, can drive the 800km Park to Park in the Dark route from Nevada's Death Valley National Park to Great Basin National Park, timing their trip for the Great Basin Astronomy Festival in September.

Tours to view the aurora borealis (northern lights) have long been a stalwart of winter tourism around the Arctic Circle, while islands in the Pacific Ocean could

*'People are becoming advocates for the protection of dark skies'*



Pukaki Wine Cellar and Observatory in New Zealand, left; the sky over Aspen, Colorado, above right; stargazing in Westcliff, Colorado, right; eclipse crowds in Exmouth, WA, below

be the spiritual home of stargazing, given the role the stars played in wayfinding for early Polynesian explorers. Marama Tours' Legends and Stargazing trip on Bora Bora in the islands of Tahiti takes guests on a traditional outrigger canoe to a private beach for Champagne, canapes and ancient stories recounted by local guides. The Hawaiian volcano Mauna Kea is a hub of astronomical observation, with more than a dozen of the world's largest telescopes dotted around the summit. Mauna Kea Summit Adventures has been running tours since 1983 and takes guests to the top in four-wheel drive vans for stargazing by telescope.

Eclipse-chasers now have April 8, 2024 circled in the calendar for what's been billed the Great North American Solar Eclipse. With the last North American total solar eclipse in 2017 credited with kickstarting mass interest in astrotourism, next year's eclipse, which crosses 13 states of the US, will likely be the biggest event of this kind the world has seen. If you can't make it there, there's every chance Australia's next total solar eclipse in 2028 will come to you, when for the first time since 1857 the path of totality crosses directly over Sydney.

But, as Ogg points out, every night is an astro-tourism opportunity; a chance to get together with friends and let the darkness embrace you – if you just know where to look. "There's something special about bonding under the stars. We're all equal under the night sky."



## FIVE STARS

### FIVE TOP ASTROTURISM TOURS FOR 2024

Guided by Fred Watson and Margie Ogg, Dark Sky Traveller's 11-day Totally Texan Total Solar Eclipse tour is a veritable hit parade for astro-enthusiasts, taking in the Houston Space Centre, Cape Canaveral, the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Centre and George Observatory. A private ranch in Fredericksburg will host the main event on April 8, where the moon will cast its shadow over cowboy country for 3½ minutes. The tour also visits historic stockyards, the remains of Spanish frontier missions, music venues of Austin, Texas and includes two nights at Florida's Hilton Hotel Cocoa Beach; \$US9545 (\$14,830) a person, twin-share; single supplement \$US3595. [darkskytraveller.com.au](http://darkskytraveller.com.au)

Holland America Line's 22-day Solar Eclipse cruise departs San Diego in early April and heads down the coast of Mexico into the path of totality. A professor of astronomy and astrophysics from University of California San Diego will present lectures and help passengers create their own eclipse viewers. Post-eclipse, the ship sets sail for Hawaii, ending in Vancouver; from \$6089 a person, twin-share, in a veranda stateroom. [hollandamerica.com/en](http://hollandamerica.com/en)

The Perseid meteor shower occurs each July and August, when the Earth passes through a debris trail from the Swift-Tuttle comet. On the Go Tours sets up a desert camp among the canyons, cliffs and sandstone arches of Jordan's Wadi Rum (known as Valley of the Moon), the most dramatic natural setting to watch up to 60 meteors a second streak across the sky. Escorted by an expert Jordanian guide, the eight-day trip includes sightseeing at the ancient city of Petra, a day at the Dead Sea, camel riding and canyoning; \$2735 a person, twin-share. [onthegotours.com](http://onthegotours.com)

Chase the Northern Lights through Iceland's most iconic landscapes on Intrepid Travel's eight-day Premium Iceland in Winter tour. Highlights include the lava fields of Skaftafell National Park, the basalt sea stacks of Reynisdrangar, and the breathtaking glacial lagoon of Jokulsarlon. There's an odds-on chance of viewing the aurora borealis, and guaranteed comfort in premium lodgings; from \$5103 a person, twin-share. [intrepidtravel.com](http://intrepidtravel.com)

Fred Olsen Cruise Lines has partnered with Go Stargazing for 26 astronomy-focused cruises around Norway, Iceland and the Azores and Canary islands. Departures are timed to coincide with celestial events such as April's solar eclipse, while on June's Spitsbergen cruise guests can soak in the midnight sun in far-north Norway. A 10-night In Search of the Northern Lights cruise costs from £2799 (\$5342) a person, twin-share, in a balcony room. [fredolsencruises.com](http://fredolsencruises.com)