

60th anniversary of the Parkes Radio Telescope

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This year is the 60th anniversary of the Parkes Radio Telescope, “The Dish”, and I want to congratulate CASS and the Parkes staff, current and past, on this. I think that when it was inaugurated back in 1961 no one thought it could last that long. Instead, it is still here, producing amazing world class science, and is among the top radio astronomical facilities. I have fond memories of Parkes either as observer or System Scientist. As System Scientist: the climbing to the focus cabin at 2 o'clock in the morning to fix a failure and the relieved face of the observer when fixed; the morning cappuccino with Erik - hey mate! - at the Dish Cafe (Craig's pancakes, the best!); working with the staff, a few of them I could not understand a word for the first six months (Jono!); planning observers support with John and Stacy; watching Sydneysiders getting amazed by sighting roos when it was normal for me (just roos); installing the switch matrix while looking horrified at the old system being dismantled (what if it does not work!!!). As an observer, I remember setting up the drive system for my fast, long horizontal scans with JR, Andrew, and Mike. They made the telescope dancing and my dream project real. And I remember the 100 nights in two years spent in control room observing from sunset to sunrise. An episode comes to mind. We just started an observing session when the telescope suddenly stopped with a terrifying metal screech from the azimuth track. We saw the then two telescope leaders, JR and Lewis, jumping off their chairs at the Dish Cafe, where they were for an event, and rushing to the telescope. One of the azimuth motors failed. JR and Lewis called five more staff and they worked to replace the motor until midnight, giving the telescope back to us observers with a big smile. I might be wrong, but I remember at least Ken, Mel, Brett, and Jono (also Tom?), but any other staff member would have answered the call the same way. This was/is Parkes, putting people and science first.