



PRESS RELEASE: World's Largest Virtual Solar System Drive 29.06.07

A trip to the Warrumbungle Region these school holidays will be an astronomical adventure thanks to the completion of a new tourist attraction that has brought the sights of space down to Earth.

The World's Largest Virtual Solar System Drive – a scaled model of our Solar System – is now complete with the recent installation of the planet Saturn.

See three-dimensional planet models as you travel from Pluto to the Sun along one or more of five drives that lead to Coonabarabran from Gulgong, Dubbo, Tamworth, Merriwa and Moree. The planets and distance between each is 38 million times smaller than it would be in outer space so it's just like shuttling your way through our real Solar System.

John Shobbrook, a Coonabarabran astronomer who came up with the concept, welcomed the completion of the new tourist attraction.

"Behind each of these Solar System Drive signs was a team of community members who each passionately contributed to the goal of presenting a high quality scale representation of the sizes and distances of the planets of the Solar System to the Australian public and indeed the world, and yes, we have included Pluto!" Mr Shobbrook said.

"Not only have all involved achieved a wonderful final result, they have done it months ahead of schedule. It has been a great pleasure to be associated with each of them and I know that the Solar System Drive has benefited from their exceptional creativity and enthusiasm."

All drives finish at Siding Spring Observatory 28 kilometres west of Coonabarabran. The Sun in this scaled model is represented by the huge Anglo-Australian Telescope dome at the Observatory. Visitors can learn interesting facts about our Solar System both along the drive and at the hands-on Siding Spring Exploratory.

Council's General Manager Bob Geraghty said the planets had been completed and installed well ahead of schedule, which was originally December 2007.

“We have already received positive feedback from visitors wanting to travel the Solar System Drive as part of their trip to the Warrumbungle Shire and surrounding Local Government Areas,” Mr Geraghty said.

“This project is not only anticipated to increase visitation to the Shire, but is significant in contributing to the economic development of the region by encouraging our visitors to stay in the area overnight and explore the attractions we have to offer.”

Brochures and maps of the drive are available or visitors interested in the attraction can go to the website www.solarsystemdrive.com.

For more information on the World’s Largest Virtual Solar System Drive or to obtain a brochure and map contact Coonabarabran Visitor Information Centre on freecall 1800 242 881.

Image Caption: World’s Largest Virtual Solar System Drive project management committee members Gary Erikson, Chris Evans and John Shobbrook.

Image 2 Caption: Saturn was the final planet to be installed as part of the World’s Largest Virtual Solar System Drive

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