



Solar System tourism takes off in country NSW

March , 2007: Regional NSW is set to become the centre of the Solar System later this year with a spectacular tourism project putting the astronomy headquarters of Australia into focus for tourists.

A half-a-million dollar giant installation project will see the world's largest 3D replica of our Solar System built along the five roads that lead to Coonabarabran in the Heart of Country NSW.

Fibreglass models and huge signage billboards, stationed over a couple of hundred kilometres on each of the five roads, will replicate different scaled sizes and distances of the planets from the Sun to Pluto.

Called a Solar System Drive, the concept exists in Maine in the USA, but the NSW project will be many times larger.

The dome at Siding Spring Observatory, which houses the Anglo-Australian Telescope, represents the sun and central point, and planets will be located along the drives, scaled in distance and size 38 million times smaller than the real Solar System.

The signs are located in RTA Rest Areas or at Visitor Information Centres at 24 sites to allow cars to stop so travellers can learn about the Solar System and the unique features of each planet. There will be brochure information to assist tourists to enjoy and learn from the experience.

The project was an idea hatched by Coonabarabran astronomer John Shobbrook a decade ago. It has gained support of the Warrumbungle Shire Council with a grant of \$418,365 under the Federal Government's AusIndustry Australian Tourism Development Program.

The Solar System Drive is designed to develop sustainable tourism and provide benefits to the region which is already branded as the Astronomy Capital of Australia.

"We hope people will not just pass through, but will stop and stay longer as they explore this wonderful installation and learn a little more about their world and the skies above," said Warrumbungle Shire Council's General Manager Bob Geraghty.

The Solar System Drive is due to officially open mid-year. Visitors can find information about the SolarSystem Drive at www.solarsystemdrive.com.

Planets will be located both within the Warrumbungle Shire and surrounding Local Government Areas including Moree, Narrabri, Tamworth, Gunnedah, Upper Hunter, Gilgandra, Mid-Western and Dubbo. The five road sections are on the Newell, Castlereagh, Golden and Oxley Highways.

Media Note

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