

University of Victoria Gets Its Place Among The Stars

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Looking for directions to UVic? No sweat. Hop on a space shuttle and head for the middle of an asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter. A mere 416 million km from Earth you'll find a 3.5-km chunk of rock hurtling away from the sun. Welcome to UVic.

That's the new official name of an asteroid discovered by Dave Balam, a research associate in the University of Victoria's Department of Physics and Astronomy. The name was published today in the Minor Planet Circulars of the International Astronomical Union, which formally approves and registers newly discovered celestial objects.

Balam "accidentally" discovered the asteroid in 1996 while using the telescope at the National Research Council of Canada in Saanich to track near-Earth comets and asteroids. "At the time, the object was more than 200,000 times fainter than the faintest star that can be seen by the human eye on a dark night, and then it faded rapidly," says Balam.

It took 11 years to calculate and confirm the asteroid's orbital path before Balam was able to exercise his naming rights. "Good things take a lot of time," he says, "and so I felt that the most fitting name should be UVic in honour of the institution where I've worked for more than 30 years."

UVic is the ninth Canadian university to be immortalized in the heavens, and the first one in British Columbia.

More properly known as (150145) UVic, the asteroid orbits the sun every 5.43 years and is currently in the constellation of Leo. It will emerge from behind the sun in May 2008 when it will be 332 million km from Earth.

Source: University of Victoria

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