



North American AstroPhysical Observatory (NAAPO)



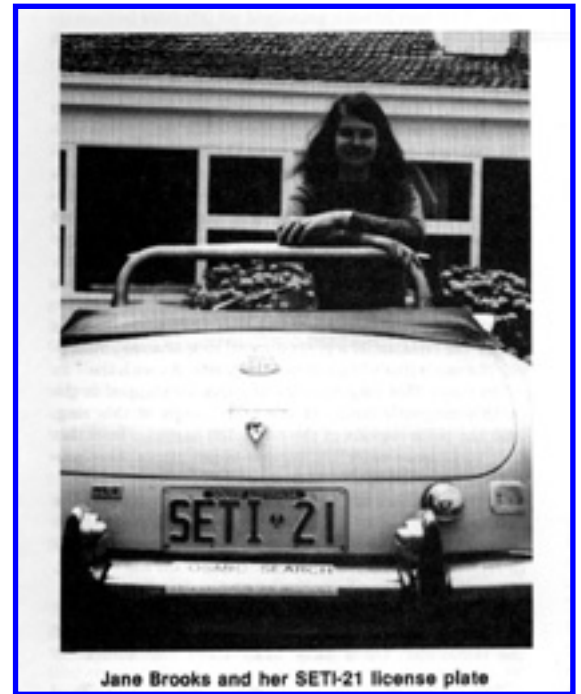
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Australians Promote SETI

By: John Kraus

Two Australians, John Prytz of Canberra and Jane L. Brooks of Adelaide, have been campaigning for a formal Australian SETI project. They have authored a paper about their proposal which was to be circulated at the 50th Jubilee of the Australian-New Zealand Association for the Advancement of Science (ANZAAS) in Adelaide, May 12-16, 1980. At this same meeting, Dr. T.W. Cole, a radiophysicist of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), was to present a paper on SETI. It is reported that this would be the first time a SETI paper has been included in an ANZAAS program.



Jane Brooks and her SETI-21 license plate

The paper by Prytz and Brooks first sets a background for the Search for Extra-Terrestrial Intelligence (SETI) with references to the Cocconi-Morrison article* and the OZMA experiments of Frank Drake.* (* The Cocconi-Morrison article and one by Frank Drake about OZMA were included in the premier issue of **COSMIC SEARCH**, (January 1979). The authors then point out that although Australia has excelled in radio astronomy, there has been no formal SETI program in Australia which "is a shame, for only Australia, of the nations located in the southern hemisphere, has the proper equipment, professional scientists and knowledge to survey the southern skies, to date a virgin SETI territory".

With these thoughts in mind, the authors launched "an intensive and personal multi-faceted lobbying effort" along 3 lines: scientific, political and via mass media to the public.

They were successful in obtaining publicity in Australian newspapers about SETI with "Letters to the Editor" because the idea was a novel one for many editors and hence deemed newsworthy. In part, the "Letter" stated:

"I suggest that Australia join in the American, Canadian and Russian efforts for SETI via the detection of artificial radio signals from extra-solar civilisations.

"A particular advantage of an Australian SETI program would be a survey of southern hemisphere stars not visible in the northern hemisphere, where current research is being carried out.

"Positive results, while not guaranteed, would be one of the most momentous occurrences in the civilisation of mankind. First contact with an alien race can happen only once and could well occur in the lifetime of most of us.

"There is no reason why Australia cannot be the country to do this. There can be no more outstanding philosophical question in modern science today than whether we are alone in the universe. No longer the exclusive realm of science fiction, SETI is an idea whose time has come of age."

They also found a number of Australian Ministers, Senators and Representatives receptive to the SETI idea and also interest by the CSIRO. But the CSIRO has financial constraints as indicated in their response:

"Three or four of our CSIRO scientists have been interested in the possibilities of SETI. If funds, technicians and equipment become available there is no doubt that some SETI work would go ahead. The difficult task is to convince Government circles *that SETI or any science is of any use to Australia.*"

The authors conclude that "if past efforts for Australian SETI are any guide to the future, hard work and persistence will produce positive results" and although "an Australian program has not yet been initiated, much progress towards that goal has been achieved, and the future is viewed as optimistically as the current economic climate realistically allows" because "the human adventure is just beginning."

Readers desiring more information about the Australian SETI program can write Mrs. Jane L. Brooks, 31 Avenue St., Millswood, South Australia 5034.

The near term always takes precedence over the long term with our politicians.

The United States has only one significant advantage over other countries: the ability to develop entrepreneurial companies.

Robert Wilson
Chairman, Memorex
in "Electronic Engineering Times"

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