

Dr Ragbir Bhathal Obituary



Ragbir was a founding member of Macarthur Astronomical Society, having joined in March 1996. For a quarter of a century he enthusiastically liaised between us and Western Sydney University. His public legacies will be his observatory, his books and his public outreach – not to mention the thousands of young students whose careers he advanced over a long career as a university lecturer.

Ragbir designed and built the twin-domed *Campbelltown Rotary Observatory*, which opened in 2000. He was the Observatory Director for twenty-two years – and he dedicated it to education, research and public outreach. MAS held many public nights at “*The Domes*” in collaboration with Ragbir, who was always there in Dome 1 controlling the 16” Schmidt-Cassegrain reflector telescope, showing the Universe to all comers.

Ragbir’s personal research speciality was the Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence (SETI). He reasoned that alien civilisations could employ powerful laser beams to announce their existence, so he pioneered *Optical SETI*, the search for alien laser communication signals.

He reportedly kept a bottle of champagne for the occasion when he could confirm a first detection. He did once report a personal “Wow!!” moment when he recorded a signal from the globular cluster 47 Tucanae. The signal was consistent with his search criteria. However, he was unable to replicate and confirm the discovery. The champagne remaining unopened.



Ragbir had a big impact on astronomy. Not just broadly across Australia but also locally in Campbelltown and the Macarthur Region. He regularly held free public lectures to advance astronomy within the community.

Ragbir published an astonishing array of books (fifteen at least) about Australian astronomers, Aboriginal astronomy and SETI. Some of them are still available.

Ragbir's died on 30th November 2022. He was 86 years old and it is understood that he was still teaching at WSU during 2022. He will be missed by many.

[Ragbir's Books](#)
[Ragbir's Domes](#)
[Ragbir's Wikipedia page](#)
[Royal Society](#)