MY FIRST, AND 100,000TH OBSERVATION

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This is an extract of a private letter sent to John Toone from Peter Williams, in response to a question regarding the subject of his 100,000th observation. It is reproduced here with their permissions.

.....Regarding the 100K observation, yes, this was of the suspected LMC recurrent nova RY Dor. It was made on 2004 November 26.465UT through the 30cm reflector at Heathcote, and the star was fainter than magnitude 13.0 under bright moon.

My first observation is a little less clear. I had been observing a few of the brighter variable stars for about 3 years before submitting observations to the VSS RASNZ. This, in turn, suggests I reached 100K some time earlier, but only counting the reported observations is really a better way to go. The difference would only be several hundred at most, so not a great difference.

I had become interested in variables after seeing a light curve of Mira Ceti in a small soft cover book "The Sky Observer's Guide" by R. Newton Mayall and Margaret Mayall. I thought it would be "pretty cool" (it was the 70s, after all) to see with my own eyes a star change in brightness and perhaps even make a light curve.

My very first observation was of Theta Aps at magnitude 6.0 on 1971 Feb 02UT through 10x50mm binoculars. I drafted my own chart from Antonin Becvar's "Atlas of the Heavens - Atlas Coeli 1950.0" and used V mag stars from the Yale Bright Star Catalogue in the library of the Sutherland Astronomical Society. I followed Theta Aps through to the end of September 1971, recording 2 minima and two maxima and determined a 119 day period from the observations. Norton's Star Atlas of that vintage (and still in use) lists Theta Aps as an irregular variable so it came as a nice surprise to later find out it is currently listed as a semi-regular with essentially that same period.

I then obtained copies of several RASNZ charts and my first observation with these was of the Mira star, R Carinae, at magnitude 6.4 on 1972 January 09UT.

Three years later, I submitted my first observations to the VSS RASNZ, the earliest of these being the Mira star S Carinae at magnitude 7.8 on 1975 April 06UT.

I have observed both R and S Car continuously since that time, and therefore have a near continuous record of their behaviour spanning some 33 years and still enjoy them both. Observation of Theta Aps recommenced in 1993 and a paper summarising results for this star appeared in Publications No.24 (April 2000) of the VSS RASNZ, giving a revised mean period of 115.93 days. Further unpublished investigation of the O-C values suggests the mean period may actually vary over a 5 year cycle, rather than have a fixed period.

This seems like a rather long answer for a relatively simple question but I hope you find it interesting. It has brought back lots of memories for me.