

# TERRY HANCOCK

Words + Photo by Melanie Wiseman



**M**any people are morning people; however, Terry Hancock is not one of them. His favorite time of day is nighttime — the darker and clearer the better.

As the director of the Grand Mesa Observatory, this Australia native who now calls the Grand Valley home feels extremely fortunate to share his astrophotography passion with so many other people.

“I consider myself more of an artist than a scientist,” notes Hancock. “I’m using scientific equipment to look deep into the universe, but when I’m processing my images, it’s more of an artistic approach.”

Hancock’s works have been published by NASA, in astronomy magazines and books, in *National Geographic* and well-known online media. Most recently, of 4,500 submissions,

his photograph of the California Nebula won first place in the Stars and Nebulae category at the largest astrophotography competition in the world: the Royal Museums Greenwich in London.

The winning photo was actually 185 individual five-minute exposures totaling 11 hours over five nights. Narrow band filters coated with either oxygen, hydrogen or sulfur created the color for dramatic detail that could not otherwise be seen.

As a child, Hancock used to look at the night sky with a pair of binoculars. At 12, his parents bought him the book *Astronomy* by Sir Patrick Moore. At 13, he was gifted his first telescope.

“Although it was an inexpensive store model, I remember the fun I had with it, seeing the details of the moon, Jupiter and four of its moons, and the rings of Saturn for the first time,” he grins.

Following school, Hancock worked at a professional camera shop where he honed his knowledge of the camera, literally inside and out. He became a freelance photographer, then spent years in the commercial sign business.

“Once I started taking photos through a telescope, that was it. I was hooked,” says Hancock. “I wanted to come to the United States to photograph the northern skies, like the Andromeda Galaxy, which I was fixated on. Objects we see in Australia are really cool too but different, being in the Southern Hemisphere.”

A self-taught photographer and astronomer, Hancock has been teaching others through online tutorials for the past 11 years. His astrophotography tutorial service operating under *downunderobservatory.com* reaches students all over the world.

Five years ago, one of his students, 75 year-old Kannah Creek resident John Mansur, had a dream of being able to create his own astrophotography (also known as data) right from his property. Mansur brought Hancock out to have a look and the rest is history.

Hancock supervised the building of an observatory dome stocked with their

combined six personal telescopes and a 50 x 50 observation pad. The Observatory’s location has an excellent night sky quality (based on the Bortle scale) making for outstanding viewing and photography.

“John’s simple plan mushroomed when he decided to sell his data, then make his legacy community, hands-on astronomy and science educational outreach,” shares Hancock.

The Grand Mesa Observatory now has non-profit status and solid partnerships with District 51, Colorado Mesa University (CMU) and the Western Colorado Astronomy Club. It also now touts a second dome, CMU’s impressive telescope and is being used remotely by the NYC University and a division of NASA.

“The most frequently asked question I get is whether I’ve seen any UFOs and the answer is no,” chuckles Hancock. “I always think of that possibility, but it’s not why I spend so much time looking at night skies.” +

**VISITDELTA.COM**

Delta County, the best of Western Colorado. A true outdoor recreation enthusiasts' playground where nothing is off limits, and weather rarely holds you back. Visit Delta County and discover all that you can do in a day; what are you waiting for?

**VISIT DELTA COUNTY**

**YOUR OUTDOOR ADVENTURE Starts Here**

**ORCHARDS OFF-ROAD**

**SNOWSHOEING**

**SHY DIVING**

**HARD CORE**

**CRUISE-COUNTRY SKIING**

**DELTA COUNTY**