The observatory undertakes a multi-faceted Public Outreach programme ranging from the provision of a Visitor Centre with ~ 65,000 visitors per year, educational opportunities for primary, junior and senior school children, distance learning courses at undergraduate level for the general public, teacher training activities, external lectures, support for the media and the provision of an comprehensive website.

The original extensive Visitor Centre buildings, some dating from the 1960s, were demolished at the end of the 2003 season. Whilst plans are put in place for its replacement, a temporary centre has been opened with a cafe, shop and small display area. Two new developments are a 3D theatre showing astronomical films and a walkway around the Lovell Telescope. Beside the walkway is a small amphitheatre where, each day during the school holidays, the visitors can “Meet an Astronomer” who describes the work being undertaken by the telescopes and answers questions from the adults and (particularly) children. Not surprisingly, this has proven to be a very popular attraction.

As we can no longer host many groups of primary school children at JBO we are, instead, going out to them. Staff and postgraduate students take a portable planetarium out to schools and supplement its use with astronomy talks and “question and answer” sessions. In the last nine months over 7000 children from 70 schools have attended one of 243 planetarium shows. Senior school physics students still visit the Observatory and are given a guided tour of the JBO site and a talk about the research work being carried out by the Lovell Telescope and MERLIN array.

For a number of years, University staff members, sometimes assisted by postgraduate students, have run astronomy workshops for pupils that have been put forward as especially gifted by their county education departments. There have been half-day events in Cheshire and Lancashire and, in 2004 and 2005, week-long programmes for Cheshire students which included a visit to Jodrell Bank. The aim is, of course, to try to encourage young students to take up science at university and then as a career.
In this internet age our website is now providing a major route by which the public can learn about the work of the Observatory. Areas of the site give details about the history of the Observatory, a guided tour behind the scenes and sections about each of the research topics that are studied by our astronomers. A news area gives access to our press releases describing exciting discoveries such as that of the “Double Pulsar” in 2004 which is providing the best current test of Einstein’s Theory of Gravitation.

There is a “Jodrell Bank Live” page giving details of the operation of all the telescopes on site along with webcams showing images of the Lovell and two other telescopes, together with time lapse movies showing their motion as they track radio sources across the sky.

As part of our efforts in encouraging amateur astronomers an extensive “Monthly Sky Guide” is provided. Receiving over 7000 viewings each month it is our most visited page. In addition, full observing details are given of 50 of the best objects to observe in the heavens using one’s eyes, binoculars or a small telescope. We also provide a web-based question service and one of a team of astronomers will reply soon after they are received.

JBO offers a range of part time undergraduate level courses in astronomy, two of which give students the chance to make their own observations using a dedicated 7-m telescope. Over 700 students have taken part in the last five years. In 2005, over 50 schools used the telescope to map the spiral structure of the Milky Way in an event sponsored by the Rotarians called the “Excitement of Science”, which culminated in a one-day event at the Royal Institution in June.

We are a regional centre for the training of teachers in the use of the Faulkes Telescopes, and provide “INSET” training days to help keep science teachers abreast of the latest advances in astronomy.

Staff members give talks to astronomy societies, community groups and professional bodies all over the UK and provide behind the scenes tours of the Observatory. They also run Day Schools, Evening Classes and Weekend Courses in astronomy across the Northwest of England. Our local astronomical society meets at the Observatory and we provide support for our largest national amateur society.

We are turned to by the local and national media for background and comment when astronomical and space topics are in the news and give guidance for members of the public to safely observe astronomical events such as the Transit of Venus.

THE JODRELL BANK WEBSITE:
WWW.JB.MAN.AC.UK

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