

Carina Software's SkyFi

U.S. price: \$149

Carina Software

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Given the ease with which we can wirelessly connect a modern computer to a keyboard, mouse, or printer, it seems logical that we should be able to do the same with our Go To telescopes, freeing us from annoying cables that can be tripped over in the dark. Well we can, thanks to Carina Software's innovative SkyFi Wireless Telescope Controller. Voted a *MacWorld* Best of Show 2010 product, SkyFi enables you to easily control most computerized

telescopes by running Carina's *Voyager* planetarium software (reviewed in this magazine's July 2008 issue, page 32) on a WiFi-enabled computer or *SkyVoyager* on an iPhone, iPod Touch, or iPad.

SkyFi works by creating a wireless bridge between the device running the software and the RS-232 "serial" port on a Go To telescope's mount or hand controller. When you turn SkyFi on it initially creates an "open" WiFi 802.11 network named SkyFi that any wireless device can connect to. You can, however, rename this network and password-protect it, which is a good idea when observing with a group so that others can't playfully hijack your scope from their computers!

The SkyFi is powered by four internal AA batteries, which are sufficient for

10 hours of operation, and there's a socket for an external 6-12 volt DC power supply. SkyFi's sole data port is an RJ-11 phone-style jack that accepts the supplied 9-pin serial-port adapter. Most Go To telescopes come with (or have available optionally) a serial cable that connects to this adapter. Cables are also available from Carina for \$29.95.

SkyVoyager for the iPhone boasts 300,000 stars (2.5 million to about magnitude 12 with the \$5 Expansion Pack), 30,000 deep-sky objects, hundreds of asteroids, comets, and satellites (Internet updateable from within the program), detailed object descriptions, color images, and much more — all accessed from an easy-to-navigate and beautifully designed graphical interface. It's powerful, accurate, and, at just \$14.99

40 September 2010 SKY & TELESCOPE

from the iTunes App Store, incredible value for money.

Once an iPad, iPod Touch, or iPhone is connected to SkyFi, it remembers the network. Thereafter, controlling a scope with *SkyVoyager* is simplicity itself: just touch the Scope icon and press the Connect button. You can use standard multi-touch finger movements to zoom, pan, and scroll around the screen. To slew your scope to an object of interest, just select it and touch the GoTo button.

At Earth & Sky Ltd. (www.earthandsky.co.nz), an ecotourism company offering public stargazing tours at New Zealand's Mount John Observatory, we use SkyFi and a 2nd-generation iPod Touch running *SkyVoyager* to control three Celestron 9.25-inch CPC telescopes and a 16-inch



CARINA SOFTWARE

Meade LX200. Aside from the 'oohs' and 'ahhs' elicited by anyone witnessing the system's seemingly magical ability to control a telescope, we found the range and reliability of the setup equally

impressive, controlling telescopes from up to 30 meters (100 feet) away.

In addition to reducing the cables that our visitors could accidentally grab or trip over in the dark, SkyFi and *SkyVoyager* provide a detailed graphical user interface that generally enables us to find interesting objects in a particular region of sky — objects that are easily overlooked on the scrolling alphanumeric display of a conventional Go To hand controller. It really is a revolutionary way to navigate the sky. ♦

Lured to the antipodes by the wonders of the Southern Hemisphere sky, former Sky & Telescope associate editor Ade Ashford now lives in the heart of New Zealand's South Island, working at Mount John Observatory beside Lake Tekapo.