

S.C.R.A.P.S.

Society's Chronological Astronomical Papers



From the President by Bob Arr

A well-deserved "Thank You" to our picnic coordinator Angela Quick, and her faithful helpers Janice Erickson, Lee Erickson and Erik Iverson. The food was wonderful (Thank You donors!) and the weather gave a fine night of viewing. And another "Thank You" to our host, David Fields, for making his great facility available.

The past four months have brought 10 new members into our club, in part due to our publicity and "public invited star parties." (This is despite almost complete cloud coverage!) The next three months, in addition to delivering some of the finest viewing of the year, we hope will deliver many more new members. Our next public event is this coming weekend, August 2, at Look Pebble.

Some of these newcomers are absolute rookies...and, I believe, the future of SMAS. Getting them started on the right foot makes the difference between dedicated amateurs and shunned dropouts. A little coaching, a couple hours under that stars to show them how to find things...that's all it takes.

Bill Dargan, a long-time member of the Alcoa Kiwanis, suggested that we consider making presentations at some of the local civic clubs' lunches, perhaps with a slide talk, maybe with a Dark Sky pitch, or a Mars program (to capitalize on all its current publicity.) That's a pretty good idea--whenever any astronomical event is in the national news, local interest in anything astronomic rises as well. Having addressed many of these clubs over the years, I know from experience that the attendance and receptions are always great. Have you ever done that? Would you consider it? Please let me know.

Henri and Bettie Levy have been members of SMAS for many, many years. Even though they did not attend meetings, they kept up with events through SCRAPS, and did their star gazing vicariously through the observation reports of more active members. Bettie writes that Henri passed away recently. In her letter she included her annual dues! Our hearts are with you Bettie...and please pardon the lump in my throat.

August Meeting

The August SMAS meeting will be held on the 8th at the Division Street Campus of Pellissippi State Community College from 7 PM to 9 PM. Wayne Thompson will talk about his recent visit to Socorro, NM and the Grand Canyon. John Widloski will give a presentation on the process of elemental nucleosynthesis in stellar environments. His talk will cover, step by step, the collapse of a typical massive star, and moreover will incorporate simple astronomical statistics to calculate rates of supernova explosions. Last, but not least Michael McCulloch will take us on a tour of his favorite objects in "The Night Sky".

Something to Think About

A suggestion by Owen Hoffman has raised the possibility of a unique opportunity for SMAS. Owen proposes that we sponsor a lecture by world-famous John Dobson, maverick cosmologist and inventor of the dobsonian telescope mount. Dobson regularly lectures around the country. His honorarium is only \$150, but it is up to the club to also pay for his transportation. Since his home is San Francisco, airfare could be significant.

He has a standing rule that no one pays admission to hear him, part of a remarkable dedication that he has to promoting astronomy among all economic strata. Still, there are financial alternatives, such as organizing a mini-tour, with presentations at (for instance) Kingsport, Nashville and Chattanooga, as well as Knoxville. This would permit sharing the airfare costs with other clubs.

We must first consider what we want to undertake as a club. Below is Owen's letter to Dobson seeking details of a possible visit. We want SMAS members to think about and discuss this extraordinary chance. John Dobson is 89 years old, and in excellent physical and intellectual health. Scheduling, financing and coordination issues are in the future.

If you are unfamiliar with him, please look over his website at

- www.johndobson.com. Read some of his articles (and some of the articles about him!), and you'll quickly see why he has earned such renown. We will reserve time at the September meeting to talk about the proposal.

To: Donna Smith and John Dobson

From: Owen Hoffman, Oak Ridge, TN

Last week, during an informal gathering of the Orion Astronomy Club of Oak Ridge, TN and the Smoky Mountain Astronomical Society, we discussed the historic accomplishments and sidewalk astronomy philosophy of John Dobson, and would be interested in learning whether or not it might be feasible for John to visit us sometime this year or next.

We expect that if he could come to E. TN, he would be well occupied meeting with various East TN astronomy groups over the course of about one week, and he would be housed in residences of local amateur astronomers, possibly ranging from Nashville, to Oak Ridge/Knoxville, to Chattanooga, to Kingsport, TN. At present, however, we are making this request from the Oak Ridge/Knoxville area of our state. The other locations would depend on the actual timing of John's visit and the number of other local astronomy clubs desiring to share in expenses, etc.

Looking at John's posted schedule, we believe that it might be possible for him to stop by Oak Ridge and Knoxville, TN during the time he's traveling to other eastern USA locations (as perhaps the main financial difficulty our clubs would have at present is finding the funding for full fare air travel from the West Coast).

As there presently is no Sidewalk Astronomy group officially designated in East TN, we believe his visit would be an ideal occasion to begin to establish a more formal relationship between our local groups and the Sidewalkastronomers.

If we can arrange something either this year or next, please let us know if there is a convenient time that we should keep in mind, as well as the likely costs and detailed arrangements for such a visit, so that we can begin our process of planning and fund raising, etc.

Mars at Opposition

Don Baker Asst. Editor San Antonio Astronomical Association

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I got to do a little research on my own about this whole Mars at opposition deal. Wow!, the best it's been in some 50,000 years. I reckon that would make it a once in a lifetime sight to see. Here's what I found. The last opposition was June 22, 2001. Mars was 41,850,479 miles from Earth, shining at magnitude -2.3 and its disk measured 20.79". That's not too bad. I could have easily seen some features if it wasn't for that big global dust storm.

The next opposition of Mars is August 27, 2003. If you don't get out to observe Mars sometime this month, just box up the telescope, and call me. Mars will be a mere 34,647,348 miles from Earth, shining brighter than ever at magnitude -2.9, and the disk will be 25.11" in diameter! I got my first ever "good" view of Mars from Seguin, Texas on July 12, 2003. Mars was still 46,363,475 miles away, the disk only 18.77", shining at magnitude -1.8. Doesn't sound that impressive, but it was marvelous. Now I can't wait for the end of August to get here! For the record, the next opposition of Mars will occur near October 30, 2005. Mars will be 43,136,985 miles distant, with a diameter of 20.17", and shine at magnitude -2.3. And, it only gets worse over the next decade (or so), before it starts getting better again.

THE WIZ

Dear Wiz, I read about those wide field of view eyepieces. They said it was like looking out through a port-hole--you had to turn your head to see all there was to see. Eight-four degrees of the sky, all in one view! Actually, I don't understand how you can recognize anything with so much crammed together.

S. Yorated

Dear Satch, You're a victim of a common misunderstanding. You don't see 84° of the sky--that expensive eyepiece only takes in a couple degrees of the sky (some up to 4 degrees). The 84° refers to how your eye sees those few degrees streaming out of the exit lens.

When you go to the movies, where do you sit? About the middle of the auditorium? From there, your eyes are taking in a screen about 50° wide. If you moved to the very front row, your eyes would see a screen about 90° wide. The cone of light coming into your eyes is what is called the apparent field of view--that's what is 84° wide in those expensive eyepieces.

So they take a few degrees of the real sky and distort it so that it appears to be so close that it comes at your eye from the eyepiece in a cone that is 84° wide. Yes, you really do have to move your eye (or head) around to view it all, but all you're seeing is that few degrees of the sky.

Is it worth hundreds (maybe many hundreds) of dollars? Maybe. They give a wonderful view of some sights (Veil, Rosette nebulas, Double Cluster, NGC 7789). While most of these eyepieces have 2" barrels, recently some came out with 1 1/4" barrels. Ya pays yer money and ya takes yer choice.

REINVENT YOURSELF!

Share your astronomical experience with the rest of SMAS and everyone on the Internet by writing an article for SCRAPs. Contact Mike Littleton at (865) 671-1022 or email littlem@ix.netcom.com.



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SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1 UTK	2 TAO SMAS
3	4	5	6	7	8 SMAS Mtg.	9
10	11	12	13	14	15 UTK	16 TAO
17	18	19	20	21	22	23 SMAS
24	25	26	27	28	29	30 SMAS
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SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

SMAS Website:
<http://www.smokymtnastro.org/>

- 8/1/03 and 8/15/03** Public observing from the roof of the Physics Building at UTK
- 8/2/03** SMAS starparty off Foothills Parkway at "Look Pebble"
- 8/2/03 and 8/16/03** Public observing at Tamke Allen Observatory
- 8/8/03** SMAS meeting 7 PM at the Division Street Campus of PSCC
- 8/15/03** Venus sets at 8:27 PM; Mars rises at 9:29 PM; Saturn rises at 3:28 AM; Uranus rises at 8:45 PM
- 8/23/03** SMAS starparty at Unicoi Crest, NC
- 8/30/03** SMAS starparty off Foothills Parkway at "Look Pebble"