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nightwatch

Newsletter of the Pomona Valley Amateur Astronomers

Amateur
astronomers
just get better
looking . . .

Volume 23 Number 1

nightwatch

January 2003

President's Message

I hope that everyone had a joyful holiday season and that the new year is filled with all sorts of delights (astronomical and otherwise).

During my holiday break and with Mars coming back into opposition next summer it seemed appropriate to stop procrastinating and finally get down to reading *The Case for Mars* by Doctor Robert Zubrin. (I have been meaning to read this book for 5 years.) In the book the author proposes that using technology which is available today, without breaking the national budget, it is possible to put humans on Mars in about a decade. (He feels ten years is about the longest period that the country can stay focused on a goal and that it is politically practical to plan for.) He believes that the goal of settling Mars is not only attainable, but that it is something humans must accomplish in order to preserve the best aspects of western civilization and to promote continued progress towards raising the standard of living worldwide. (He ties the exploration and colonization of Mars in with the idea of the frontier.)

Especially as amateur astronomers, it is exciting to live in a time when such ideas are realistically proposed and seriously discussed.

Everyone old enough, remembers the exhilaration and pride we all felt when Neil Armstrong first set foot on the moon. What a thrill it would be to see our species on another planet. Maybe it will begin and even be well under way during our lifetimes!

The clouds did not fully cooperate, but those in attendance at our joint star party with the Riverside Astronomical Society had a great time. It was clear intermittently Saturday night allowing several hours of observing. Thank you to Alex McConahay and RAS for inviting us to there new Landers star party site.

Lee Collins is taking names and money for our next expedition up to Mt. Wilson and the 60-inch telescope. See him at the next General meeting if you would like to go. It is \$60.00 per member to spend a night at the eyepiece of this marvelous and historic instrument.

Ron Hoekwater

PVAA Events Calendar

Month	Star Party	General Meeting	Board Meeting
January	4	17	9
February	1	14	6
March	1	14	6
April	26	18	10

December Happenings

Star Party

On the night of December 7th, a small group of us enjoyed the starry view from the dark skies of Cottonwood Springs at Joshua Trees National Park. I joined member Les Marcum and his colleague from work, Aditya. We arrived at the Park about 7:30pm and my first call into the darkness led to the discovery of Ron Hoekwater and his 22-inch telescope. Les and his friend spent awhile setting up their telescopes – a challenge in the dark, as one of the scopes hadn't been out in months. Fortunately, one had been set up the day before as a trial to make sure all the pieces were present – making the night-time operation much easier.

I worked with a pair of 8 -17 by 50mm binoculars to see what I could find. I would either see if I could locate objects Ron had seen in his scope or ask him to identify the small fuzzies I would find. The Beehive cluster was impressive in all our instruments, as was M31 and M1. I looked for the Horsehead Nebula in the 22-inch but was unable to discern it. Les and Aditya were aided by Ron's thorough knowledge of the sky to determine good observing objects for their own telescopes.

We three lightweights left around 11pm as we started to feel our toes go numb while Ron was still enjoying the "balmy night." All of us enjoyed sharing our views and knowledge of the sky.

Holiday Party

Good food, good conversation, and good music – so went the PVAA Holiday Party on December 13th. We all met at Jouni's Restaurant on Central Avenue in Upland. We had over 30 members and guests in attendance, some of whom provided entertainment to all with carols on the

mandolin, flute, and tin whistle. We also received a seasonal gift from member Larry Pall - a holiday music CD. It was a very enjoyable evening.

Hope to see you all at Landers in January at our joint Star Party with the Riverside Astronomical Society.

Happy New Year!

WANTED

This newsletter needs articles of astronomical interest. I am sure that there are members with interesting stories to tell. Send them to Ray Magdziarz, 259 Blue Mountain Way, Claremont, 91711. Or preferred by e-mail to "mugjug@excite.com"

..PVAA 24 HR. Hotline.

Get the latest news on the star party, club meetings, special events and astronomy happenings.call **909/596-7274**

Visit or website at

<http://www.cyberg8t.com/patrick/PVAA.htm>

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December Star Party

The December PVAA star party was again at one of our favorite observing sites, Cottonwood Springs. While I always plan on being at the site before dark (as it makes the set up much easier) in this case I didn't arrive until after dark. I walked around the campground to see if anyone else from our club was there, but while I did see a few telescopes, I didn't find any other PVAA members. (If you were there and I didn't find you, I apologize.) So, I went back to setting up the Starsplitter.

About an hour later Claire Stover, Les Marcum and a friend, Aditya Chauhan, arrived. Having observing companions always adds enjoyment to the experience. We decided to share a campsite and they parked next to me. With them, they brought a 100mm refractor and I believe it was an 8-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope. We checked up on some of the Messier objects, set about splitting some doubles, and revisited two giants of the solar system, Jupiter and Saturn. And a scattering of meteors streaked through the upper atmosphere adding a bit of excitement to our evening's observing. Some of these were probably members of the Geminid meteor shower, as it steadily built toward its peak on December 14th.

Around midnight Claire, Les, and Aditya had to leave for home. I stayed and continued to enjoy the desert skies. When I drive this far I usually don't depart before dawn.

In the morning, before twilight began to brighten the heavens, Venus and Mars, the deities of love and war arose together. The former however, vastly outshone the latter. Mars is never a match for Venus, but being the better part of a year from opposition, Mars was a pale companion. Yet, in August the telescopes will be trained on Mars as it approaches Earth more closely than it has in many centuries!

Finally the sun came up and I headed home, tired, but pleased to have spent another night out under the stars.

Ron Hoekwater

SOMETHING SPECIAL

It was December 4th, 2002, in the Australian outback, near the town of Woomera. The site of many Australian and American rocket launches during the past half century. The time is 6:42 P.M. local time. It is very windy, but the sky is clear. So windy, in fact, that a tent shelter that was put up was torn, and the frame destroyed. Looking up, the Sun had a little bite taken out of it. This is the first contact of the Solar Eclipse in Australia.

There are 15 of us looking at the Sun through "Rainbow Symphony" solar filters, and solar filtered camers, binoculars and telescopes. The only people the PVAA might know would be Ray and Irene Magdziarz. We were on a pilgrimage to near the bottom of the world to see the total eclipse of the Sun, and it just started.

I was sitting on a milk crate with my video camera



Group from Sirius Travel Ray & Irene circled

set on a very short tripod (to minimize wind shake), with a "Bader" solar filter attached to the lens. I was just beginning to make five second runs of video every five minutes. If I were to make a continuous video, it would be over an hour and a half, and besides I did not have an equatorial mount, so the image would be all over the place.

I zoomed the camera to almost fill the LCD screen. 20X optical and a little digital. As the eclipse progressed, during my five minute wait, the image slid down the LCD screen. I would try to reposition it to the same location before the five minutes were up for the next five second video run. And so it went, every five minutes until 7:40 and 56 seconds.

The Sun was just a thin sliver of light when I removed the filter from the camera lens.

I saw a wide bright arc that narrowed to a “diamond ring”, which disappeared, revealing pink Baileys’s beads. It was awesome! The beads were most prominent where the Sun had just dimmed, and at the opposite side as well.

Totality was going to be only twenty six seconds, so I had to work fast. I reduced the size of the image, and started to brighten it to show the corona. The camera was in the manual exposure mode.

After a couple of seconds, I looked up from the LCD screen and was overwhelmed by the sight of the bright donut in the sky, with a black center. The sky was dark near the donut, but it got brighter, farther away.

The soil in this part of Australia has a lot of iron, it’s color reminded me of Mars. The scene was befitting a science fiction story. The Sun was fairly low in the sky, which with the view of the horizon, made it look unworldly. This was the Australian desert, so there was no wildlife to observe, except for the cheering spectators.



Totality

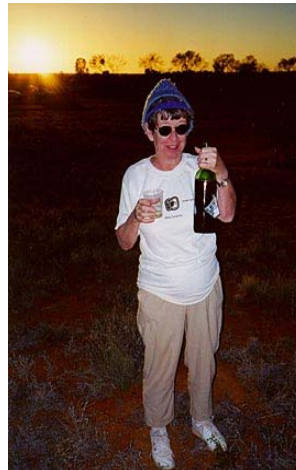
I have the video of the eclipse which will be shown at the general meeting Friday if there is equipment available to show it.

The photos were taken by members of the group, and can be seen at “<http://siriustravel.com>”

A second later, I got back to my job, and in a few moments, the third contact “diamond ring” appeared. I put back the filter and tried to get back to normal. I forgot to turn off the camera, the filter fell off, and it took a while to get back to normal.



Third contact



Everyone was celebrating. The Champagne was flowing, and I sort of forgot about my every five minutes routine. The Sun finally set in partial eclipse. That was **SOMETHING SPECIAL.**

The following day, after a tour of the opal mines, our coach dropped us off a few miles from Woomera on a deserted road, and with three telescopes. We had a star party.

Looking West, soon after sundown we saw a thin crescent moon, resembling the Sun from the day before. The Moon was just twenty six hours old.



Twenty six hour old Moon

Ray Magdziarz