



nightwatch

Newsletter of the Pomona Valley Amateur Astronomers

Amateur
astronomers
just get better
looking ...



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President's Message: April

*"I would sooner believe that two Yankee professors lied,
than that stones fell out of the sky"*

Thomas Jefferson

The reader can probably recall witnessing some event that on first glance seemed impossible, or at least, beyond easy explanation. Imagine the strange sight that greeted the good folks of this new country in the early morning hours of the 13th of November 1833. Silently the sky was filled with an endless stream of streaking points of light, appearing to emanate from the constellation of Leo. The Reverend Hector Humphreys, president of the St John's College of Annapolis, Maryland noted that people believed that there were nearly, "an infinite number of meteors", falling, "like snowflakes". Some folks were convinced, as related by Reverend Humphreys, that the meteors were striking the ground but he was unconvinced based on the wide spread observation of the shower and the lack of sound. The great meteor shower was also observed by one Denison Olmsted. He decided to collect all the observations made by people and gain an understanding of the extent and nature of the meteor shower. Slowly Olmsted came to the conclusion that the meteors came from beyond the Earth's atmosphere and that they were in a common path about the Sun before they collided with the Earth in 1833(see the note at the end of this address).

The above passage brings to mind two trains of thought. We as amateur astronomers can help educate the public when events such as the great meteor showers or comets become visible to the general public. I have heard the most unusual juxtapositioning of ideas from people during presentations given by experienced astronomical professionals and

amateurs. People aren't to be treated with haughty disdain when these strange ideas come out. We can only win them over with the truth spoken without judgement. The other thrust of my first paragraph was to remind all the members that there are events in the sky that can be observed without benefit of any optical enhancement. Nothing beats the quiet viewing of the night sky with good company and comfortable surroundings. With this in mind, I am investigating the centring the August star party on the observation of the Perseid meteor shower. I will speak more of this in the coming months.

As those among you who were suppose to go to Mt. Wilson know, Mother Nature was not in a co-operative mood. High winds across southern California made it impossible for the dome of the 60" telescope to be opened on the evening of the first of April. These events are known to happen and must be expected. Everyone who goes to star parties can remember the weather turning out completely different from the predicted conditions. Such is life.

We are currently arranging another date for the meeting

PVAA Events Calendar

Month	Star Party	General Meeting	Board Meeting
April	8	14	7
May	6	19	12
June	3	16	3
July	1	11	18

with the 60" and will announce it ASAP. The months ahead will be filled with activities to appeal to everyone. Come to the next couple of meetings to find out what we are doing.

Please join us for the next general meeting on the 14th of April.

We are going to give away a copy of the book, "The Heavens on Fire" by Mark Littman at the May meeting. The material for the first part of this address came from this book..

Roy Schmidt

PVAA General Meeting 17 March 2090

Announcements

An Evening on Mt. Wilson. It looks like we tempted fate by scheduling the viewing on April 1st. High winds cancelled our trip on this night and we are working on scheduling a new date for those who were already on the list to attend. An Adventure Pass will be needed to park at Mt. Wilson. Cost is \$5 for a daily pass and the Club will reimburse this cost upon request, just bring your pass or receipt to a meeting.

JPL Open House. Scheduled for the first weekend in June.

Community Star Party. Planned for Saturday, July 8th at the First Baptist Church of Upland.

What Was Up?

Ron and Alper presented a history of Charles Messier and his famous 109 or 110 objects. (The different counts come from a question over whether items 101 and 102 are separate objects or the same one.) They range in visibility from a 12th magnitude galaxy to the 1.6 magnitude Pleiades and represent a wide range of subjects: super nova remnants, globular clusters, star clusters, nebula, and galaxies. Messier was a comet observer and compiled the list so he would know what objects were not comets and therefore what he should not waste time observing. By age 40, he had located the first 45 objects. By 1781, he had expanded his list to 103 and published a catalog. Although he found a few more to make the list its current length, he was discouraged by Herschel's 1786 list of 1000 objects and stopped compiling his own. Messier was born in 1730, in Lorraine, France and lived until 1817. The objects he documented were found with a 104 power reflector which had the light gathering abilities of a 3 1/2 inch refractor today which is 28 feet long. This should encourage us all that we should be able to see these items ourselves, given the much better telescopes made today. In fact, most of the objects can be seen in 10 X 50 binoculars and a few are naked eye. Our only challenge is our attempt to find skies as dark as those in France 200 years ago !!

March and April are ideal times for a Messier Marathon, which is an attempt by an observer to see all the Messier objects in one night. The most important preparation for this night is to have a good map of where the items are located and to make a plan of the order in which you want to look for the objects, based when they will be visible in the sky. Having both a pair of binoculars and a telescope is recommended to speed up the location of the brighter objects. Understandably, the greatest speed and attention is required at dusk and dawn as the objects closest to the sun will be observable for the shortest times. Dark skies and an unobstructed horizon are also essential. We all have the advantage of living in the Northern Hemisphere, as did Messier, as all the items are not visible in the southern skies.

Several books were recommended to help in your quest:

Messier Marathon Observers Guide by Don Macholz
The Great Messier Marathon Handbook by Harv Pennington
The Messier Objects by Steven James O'Meara

..PVAA 24 HR. Hotline.

Get the latest news on the star party, club meetings, special events and astronomy happenings.call 909/985-1684

Visit or website at:

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

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Presentation of the Evening

In keeping with the St. Patrick's Day holiday, Roy Schmidt gave a fascinating presentation on the history of astronomy and observing in Ireland. A large variety of instruments have survived to present day in this country, teasing us with clues as to how they were built and their meaning to those who built them. Dohlmans are rocks stacked to form what looks like a doorway, perhaps they represented a doorway to another world for ancient peoples? Newgrange is the best surviving restored example of a prehistoric burial mound. It is oriented so that the sun near the summer solstice shines down a 19-meter tunnel and lights up the center of the mound; for a maximum of 17 minutes on the day of the solstice. It was built around 4000 years ago and was discovered in 1699 by people looking for stones to make a road. They must have been successful in their quest, as the reconstruction, done in 1962-1975 involved replacing 200,000 tons of loose rock. Stone circles are another monument from long ago we are left to wonder about. They range in size from small ones like in Drombeg, a 30-foot wide circle of 17 stones, to their famous cousins in England: Stonehenge and the circle at Avebury which actually surrounds and weaves through a small English village. While the Irish weather is not the best for the study of astronomy, the 3rd Earl of Rosse built a 72-inch telescope, which has been lately renovated by the 6th Earl of Rosse. The huge

scope looked quite a task to move as it observed through the heavens but was the largest telescope for 3/4 of a century, so the skill of its builders is to be admired. Roy had some beautiful photos in his presentation, which were enjoyed by all and helped us forget our wait to find a pub to complete our observation of the holiday !!

Claire Stover

Haynes School Star Party

Finally, after two postponements, on March 30, the PVAA was represented by Joe Hillberg with his Dobsonian telescope, Bob Branch with his equatorial Newtonian, Ron Hoekwater with his two pair of binoculars, and Ray Magdziarz with his Dobsonian telescope at a star party at the Haynes school in Ontario.

As soon as it was dark enough, in the evening twilight, Jupiter was the object of interest. As the night progressed, Saturn was viewed. Joe Hillberg had his telescope pointed to M42 among other objects of interest. The weather was mild and the sky clear of clouds. The school provided hot chocolate and cookies.

The children and parents were awed by what they saw through the eyepiece. Some thought that a picture of Saturn was stuck in the telescope. It was very gratifying to see the response of the viewers.

Ray Magdziarz

