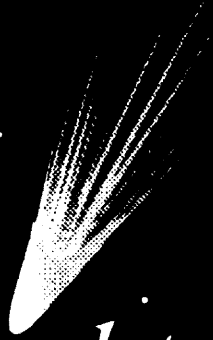


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# nightwatch

Newsletter of the Pomona Valley Amateur Astronomers

INDUSTRY, C  
Amateur  
astronomers  
get better  
looking...



Janis Seaton

Volume 18 Number 4

nightwatch

April 1998

## President's Message

Our thanks to Bob Marvos for his interesting report in the March *nightwatch* about his solitary star party at Yesterday Ranch. Thanks, Bob! It was good to hear that you were able to gain access to the ranch, and that you were well-received. I think we owe you an explanation, though, as to why you were lonely!

John Seaton, Janis Seaton, Ron Hoekwater and I went to Owl Canyon campsite that evening, as part of our on-going site-selection effort. We were pleased. The site is remote enough that it doesn't appear to get a lot of use. There is a group site, somewhat distant from the rest of the campground, that appears to be ideal for our use, since it isolates us somewhat from campfires, flashlights, and headlights. Facilities are adequate. There are concrete picnic tables, an odor-free pit toilet, and a barbecue grill. The only negative: it's not free! Cost is \$6.00 per car per visit, or \$3.00 with a Golden Age Passport. The Board has approved Owl Canyon as an official star party site. Therefore, our March Star Party is scheduled for the Owl Canyon site.

It seems that Spring is here, although the unrelenting rains in recent weeks make the idea seem remote. Nevertheless, the fruit trees in my backyard have bloomed--the best display in memory--and most trees are leafing out. This is a season of unstable weather. Sure enough, March 28, Star Party day, had a soggy dawn, after heavy rains the day before, and dark, scudding clouds on a cold, howling wind promised a miserable time of it for those outdoors. I chose to stay home and nurse my cough.

On a different subject, PVAA has come to the end of an era. After much soul-searching and discussion, the Board

reached the decision that we should consider Mira, our trailer-mounted 24-inch telescope, a surplus asset, primarily for two reasons: (1) Lack of use, and (2) liability. The full story is presented separately, but suffice it to say here, that Mira has been sold to Webb Schools of Claremont, where it will be put to good use by High School students studying physics and astronomy.

Along similar lines, the club owns another seldom-used asset: a simple optical bench with a "knife-edge" tester, usable for checking mirrors. This device has been stored for a number of years by member Steve Simon in a room encumbered with many other objects, making access difficult. The bench has not been used since I became a member, to my knowledge. One of the reasons is that the light source

## PVAA Events Calendar

Month	Star Party	General Meeting	Board Meeting
April	25	10	3
May	23	8	1
June	20	12	5
July	25	10	3

appears to be unreliable, burning out frequently and unexpectedly. The options seem to be: (1) Fix it up to make it reliable, produce a user's manual, and find a suitable storage space--where it can be used, or (2) sell it. The board will be considering these options. Your inputs are welcome.

When spring is here, can RTMC be far behind? Sure enough, the great star party and hardware expo is scheduled for May 22-25 at Camp Oaks, near Big Bear. Members who have never been to RTMC should consider making the effort. Those who wish to camp overnight can participate in probably the biggest star party in Southern California. It will be a dark weekend, and viewing should be spectacular. Then, during the day, the equipment expo is probably your greatest opportunity to trade that unused 80-mm refractor for something more appropriate for your needs: a fine eyepiece, a new star chart (at a discount), or maybe you just want the chance to check out a big Starsplitter or Obsession telescope. They're all there, giving you an opportunity to see for yourself, try it before you buy it, and dicker for the best price. The club has received several registration forms. Ask for one, if you're interested.

*Patrick Nicholson*

## *The End of an Era*

Those of us on the board have been aware for some time that we needed to do something about Mira, our big 24-inch trailer-mounted telescope. I think it all began when we realized Mira had to move from Steve Simon's yard, both to save Mira from further deterioration (being exposed to the weather), and to remove the obstruction from Steve's yard. Some of you may be aware that the tree branches had grown around it to the extent that it had become difficult to remove--and Steve didn't want the branches cut!

Next was the problem of where to store it. We investigated renting storage space but decided that it would be too expensive. Then, when we were just about to give up, Blen Koch came up with a proposal to store it under his shed. At least it was out of the direct rain--most of the time.

But since I've been a member of the board, Mira has only been used 3 or 4 times: twice for Halloween activities, usually handled by Dave Chandler. Then, Dennis Lumbert pulled it out to Yesterday Ranch one time, set it up, decided it was too windy, pulled it back down, then drove back home a very disgruntled man (Lots of work for nothing!)

But the real decision-maker occurred at an lunar eclipse show at Jack Gardner's church. It seems that a little old lady--about 80--got to the top of the ladder, tried to get into position to see through the eyepiece, and then very nearly stepped off the end of the ladder into space! That's when we

realized we have a liability problem.

Thus, we had a storage problem and a liability problem on something that was getting very limited use. The consensus of the board was: sell it. But there was the issue of shared ownership: the optics belong to Webb School. We either had to buy the optics from Webb (and a 24" mirror is expensive!) or sell our share to them.

At that point, an offer of \$500 from Webb was a positive--especially since the science department had the money in their budget. No need to go through bureaucratic levels for approval. As Jack Gardner put it: "It's a bird in the hand. Don't let it go." The board decided he was right, and the sale went through.

For long-term members, it's a piece of nostalgia that is no more. For newer members who have never seen Mira in use, it's likely to be, "what's the big deal?" In any case, the sale is done; the telescope has been delivered. We are committed to doing a star show or two for Webb School, to help publicize their new-found interest in Astronomy. And isn't generating that interest in the younger generation what it's all about?

*Patrick Nicholson*

### *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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## Book Review

### *In Search of Ancient Astronomies*

Edited by Dr. Edwin C. Krupp  
Doubleday & Company, Inc.  
Garden City, New York 1977

This is not a new book. However, if you are interested in how ancient people may have pursued sophisticated astronomical observations, these essays may be for you. It was published in 1978 and was edited by Dr. Edwin C. Krupp, Director of the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles.

The first chapter, written by Dr. Krupp, describes the daily and annual motions of the sun and relates them to observations that, evidence indicates, ancient astronomers made. The moon's monthly phases, its 18.61 year cycle of regression, and its wiggle of perturbation are described and explained, as are eclipses which depend on the lunar variations.

The succeeding chapters explore geometry and astronomy in the Neolithic age described by Alexander and Archibald Thom. It then moves on to detailed descriptions of Stonehenge by Dr. Krupp. This is followed by a review by John A. Eddy of archaeoastronomy in North America as reflected in cliff dwellings, earth mounds and medicine wheels. Astronomy in ancient Mesoamerica, is described by Anthony F. Aveni, focusing principally on the architectural configuration and alignment of the Mayans and Aztecs.

Dr. Krupp returns with a chapter on astronomers, pyramids, and priests in Egypt. The Egyptian constellar pantheon is contrasted with our own. The Egyptians developed a solar-based 365-day calendar which was adopted by Julius Caesar and became the basis for the modern western calendar. Dr. Krupp concludes the book with an essay about astronomical fantasies, as expounded in the pseudo-theories of Velikovsky and von Daniken, among others.

We spend our clear nights scanning the skies with our modern telescopes and detailed charts hoping to get a first-hand glimpse of distant galaxies. This book gives us a chance to visualize how ancient people strove to understand the night sky and the seasons with the tools available to them.

*Bob Marvos*

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### Sunday is Astronomy Day...

from the Los Angeles Times, "...You can spend the day online honing your star knowledge, then take what you've learned outside at night to celebrate the special day. If you have more questions than answers, point your browser to Ask the Astronomer (<http://www2.ari.net/home/odenwald/qadir/qanda.html>). You can check the archives of 3,001 questions already answered or submit your own query. The site is part of the Astronomy Cafe (<http://www2.ari.net/home/odenwald/cafe.html>), designed for the "astronomically disadvantaged." It has an astronomy career guide, big bang cosmology, other Web resources, and the infrared universe..." "The Absolute Beginners Astronomy and Telescopes site (<http://webhome.idirect.com/~rsnow/>) has a question-answer section on buying your first telescope and how to locate objects in the sky: photos and links" [reference L.A. Times April 13, 1998 edition; Business Section; web sites have not been verified for accuracy...if you have trouble try pointing your browser to <http://www2.ari.net> and browsing to the other linked pages referenced above; or confirm the sites by going to the L.A. Times web site.