



Amateur
astronomers
get better
looking...

Janis Seaton

President's Message

The August General Meeting is upon us! As always, August is election month, providing your opportunity to select leaders for the club for the next twelve months. Please vote! Send your mail-in ballots early, if you can't make the actual meeting.

As of this moment, we have no candidate for President! It is disappointing that no member is willing to step forward to take on the (not so difficult!) task of leading the club for the next year. If any of you suffer pangs of conscience and decide to run, please make your decision known as soon as possible. Actually, a verbal announcement at the meeting is sufficient to allow write-in votes for anyone who makes the big decision. Otherwise, the club will be run by committee. (Did you know that a camel is a horse designed by committee?)

Our first visit to Kennedy Meadows turned out to be a moderate success, with seeing somewhat limited by excessive moisture in the air. Your intrepid president had to pass on the trip, because of illness. But, let's try again in August, which tends to be the driest month of the year in Southern California. It will probably be a bit warmer, too, which is welcome news to me. 33 de-

grees on Friday night! That puts your warm clothes to the test. Note that it went down to 13 degrees on my first visit to Kennedy, 3 or 4 years ago. Whatever the weather down here in the valley, take plenty of warm clothes!

As mentioned in the last *Nightwatch*, we will have a special event in September: a joint meeting with a motorhome camping group at Observatory Camp Ground, near Palomar. They expect to go down early and hold sites for us near the grassy central meadow where we can set up our scopes. All they ask is that we give them a guided tour of the sky--preferably a "fireside chat" around their campfire in the gathering dusk. Then, once it's fully dark, the fun and fellowship begins! We need to provide them with a count of how many vehicles will go, so they know how many sites to save. Please let us know at the August meeting or by mail.

Patrick Nicholson

PVAA Events Calendar

Month	Star Party	General Meeting	Board Meeting
August	22	14	7
September	19	11	4
October	24	9	2
November	28	13	6

July Star Party

Kennedy Meadows Star Party

Approximately 20 people escaped soaring July temperatures and attended the PVAA star party at Kennedy Meadows in the Southern Sierra Nevada. Alper Ates, a new member from Istanbul, Turkey, and I arrived late Friday afternoon to find Dennis Lumbert, John and Janis Seaton, Joe Hillberg, and Owen Robbins already at the site. Dennis had driven up Thursday night and the others joined him on Friday.

Alper and I set up my Starsplitter and waited for dark. In the twilight, Mercury was visible just above the trees on the mountains west of us. When darkness arrived, the Seatons and Joe Hillberg went to work hunting down objects on the Herschel 400 list with the Seaton's 18-inch Starsplitter (which made a welcome reappearance at our star parties after a several-month hiatus). Meanwhile, Alper found Pluto in my Starsplitter. This was the second time I have seen the most distant planet in our solar system. Alper found it a week earlier at Cottonwood Springs, Joshua Tree National Monument, and showed it to Joe Hillberg and me. The object had moved in the intervening week, confirming that it was indeed Pluto!

Owen Robbins made a nice image of an edge-on NGC galaxy with his 10-inch Meade Schmidt-Cassegrain and CCD camera. He also loaned me his 32mm Meade Super Wide Angle eyepiece that I used to observe the Veil Nebula. I believe it was the best I have ever seen it.

As the night went on, the temperature stayed comfortable, which is unusual for Kennedy Meadows. An amateur astronomer from Orange County, who had been directed to us by David Chandler (and who's name I didn't get), arrived with a 16-inch telescope on an equatorial mount. The warm air agreed with humans but not with seeing. Although there were no clouds, apparently there was a good deal of moisture in the air. John and Joe were having difficulty seeing 8.5-

magnitude globular clusters in the southern sky. They started looking at 11th-magnitude galaxies in Ursa Major. About 2:30am I went to bed.

On Saturday morning, the sun came over the hill about 6:15am and the cool, clean air was pleasant. A thermometer left out over night revealed a low temperature of 32.7 ° F. We looked at huge sunspots, which were causing radio interference here on Earth, through 20 x 80 binoculars with solar filters. Bob Branch reports observing 67 sunspots and 4 groups from his home observatory on this date and says: "If this level of activity continues, it forecasts a strong sunspot maximum in the year 2000. These were the most and biggest sunspots I have seen since I purchased solar filters 2 or 3 years ago.

Lee Collins, Joe Vlietstra and his sons, and Bob Marvos arrived and much of Saturday was spent under the Seatons' canopy solving the world's problems and resting up for the night's observing. Clouds appeared in the late afternoon but disappeared again before sunset. Temperature and seeing Saturday night were much like Friday. The nighttime temperature was the warmest it has been in the 5

PVAA Officers and Board

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years that I have been going up to Kennedy Meadows.

We looked at Mercury through Joe Vlietstra's telescope. Alper and I looked at the dwarf galaxy in Sagittarius (NGC 6822, "Barnard's Galaxy", a member of the Local Group). It's fascinating to me that while we could just see this galaxy in my 22-inch telescope, in the moisture-laden air, E. E. Barnard discovered it in 1884 using a 5-inch refractor. The Helix Nebula was much easier. Lee, Alper, and I spent some time looking at Jupiter's cloud bands with various eyepieces and color filters and finished up by observing Saturn, still low in the sky.

On Sunday morning, most were up early preparing for the trip home. Lee, Alper and I decided to check out Red Rock Canyon State Park, in the Mojave Desert, as a potential star party site. First, however, we fortified ourselves at Denny's in Ridgecrest; I was getting tired of potato salad, bananas, and gum drops.

Red Rock Canyon is about 20 miles north of the town of Mojave on Highway 14. It is about the same distance as Yesterday Ranch and has a darker sky. We hoped to see the ranger and inquire about winter conditions in the park. Unfortunately, the park is closed during late June and July. The campgrounds are still open but the information center is closed so no ranger was on duty. This may not be a choice spot for us anyway. It was too windy and dusty all evening to do any observing and if these conditions prevail year round, then it would not be a suitable star party site.

We set out for home about 12:30am Monday. All in all, it was a very enjoyable 3 days of conversation and observing.

Ron Hoekwater

A Trip to the Hills

My plan was to be on my way early--maybe 9 a.m.--to enjoy a leisurely trip up through Bakersfield and old Highway 99 and Route 65 up to Porterville. But... Saturday's are like that! I finally pulled out just after 10 a.m., heading west on the 210 Freeway. It's been years since I followed it to the end. What a pleasure the way it bypasses

Angeles and Hollywood to dump you onto the 5 Freeway out in the boonies, far beyond L.A.! I got my Mozart and Haydn tapes going, relaxed, and listened to my 4-banger hum.

By the time I started down the Grapevine grade, however, my stomach was asking, "How about dinner?" Never mind that I had a snack just before I left! Well, dinner it was at the "Farmer's Table". These commercial farmers don't set a spread like the ones I remember from childhood, but it was adequate. After all, the only competition was Denny's! On my way, again, I discovered (or confirmed) that it was only a short distance to Bakersfield. As I rolled past all those eatery signs, I wished I'd waited! But, regrets get you nowhere.

Highway 65 branched off shortly beyond Bakersfield, a two-lane highway that could be frustrating, if you're trying to push for speed. I wasn't, so I just settled back to a sedate 55 and enjoyed the scenery--dry, yellow, rolling hills, interspersed with frequent plantations of irrigated fruit trees, all looking wonderfully green and healthy. What Southern California used to be! Porterville turns out to be a typical small agricultural town: several fruit packing houses, lots of car dealerships and fast food places, dusty empty lots, and a wide, virtually empty main street. Quite a few buildings that looked to date from the 20's and 30's, including a JC Penny's that looked like it dated from the scenery--dry, yellow, rolling hills, interspersed with frequent pl

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The wonderful pot-luck dinner started fairly late (see what you missed??). There was so much and such variety that one could fill up just by tasting each dish. By the time dessert came along, I was way beyond eating any more--and way beyond my diet, as well! But, who diets when it's wonderful food and wonderful company?

Our arrival at the site was a la Chandler--that is, verging on full dark! All the PVAA folks lined up behind one of the locals and followed her out to the site. It's private property, marked by a big barn and several outbuildings. We set up on the looping drive, only about 200 yards from the Tule river (every wonder where the Tule fog comes from?). We had a good southern horizon, but north was interrupted by trees and houses. Not perfect, but a good, dark sky! I came prepared to search out a whole slew of NGC globulars in Sagittarius and Scorpius, down to about Mag 10. Sure enough, all of them I found were clearly visible, although early on, one was on the edge, using peripheral vision.

Ron and Chris Hoekwater arrived, just as we got started, so I got Ron to verify some of my findings with his fine 22-inch Starsplitter. Dave was helping Springville beginners get started, using the binoculars to learn how to find their way around the sky. What a fine, natural teacher Dave is! We miss you, Dave!

NGC 6522 and 6528, just off the spout of the Teapot, were fascinating to the Seatons--and also to me. It's not that common to have two globulars within the field of view! But, with that wonderful dark sky--and an occasional word of advice from Dave--I managed to find all my targets in Sagittarius. Scorpius proved more difficult, due to a lack of obvious guide stars. Stand by for a challenge in that area for the next What's Up!

By 1 a.m., I was noticing moisture on my charts, as well as condensation on my Tel-Rad. Frequent wiping kept me going for a while, but by 2 a.m., I packed it in and went to bed. The voices

faded out not long thereafter. There would be pre-dawn planets--but who bothered? We all started stirring about 6:30, and headed out to breakfast and the long ride home, tired, but happy! A good observing night, lots of good food and good friends! Who could ask for anything more!

Patrick Nicholson

Crystal Lake Saga

"That AAA map didn't show how far it was from Azusa to Crystal Lake--worst luck!", I thought as I muscled my little Nissan pickup around another hairpin curve. It was definitely growing dark, and I was still over ten miles from the site of our scheduled star show. Without a question, I would be late. A good thing Dave Garaner had agreed to do the slide show in the amphitheater before the star show began. Maybe I could still get set up in time! I didn't.

By the time I got set up, the lines were diminishing a bit. At 5 days before full moon, the moon was devastating for deepsky objects. Joe had his scope trained on the moon, as the brightest and most interesting object available. Ron appeared to be taking a look at Deneb, in the Swan. Accordingly, I swung to the south to look at the Sagittarius/Scorpius region. Several people enjoyed a look at Antares--fascinated by a name that means, essentially, "Not Mars". When I picked up M4, though, it was so dim in that bright sky that it held little interest.

Switching to a higher elevation, I focused on Vega, then of Epsilon Lyrae--the Double-Double. That gave us the opportunity to talk about double stars--but I didn't attempt to show the close doubles--not the right time! But about this point, Ron picked up Albireo, and lured most of my clients away with the prospect of interesting color, blue and gold. It's hard to compete with Ron's great 22-incher! But I wasn't competing, anyway--just helping to cut down the length of lines.

Patrick Nicholson