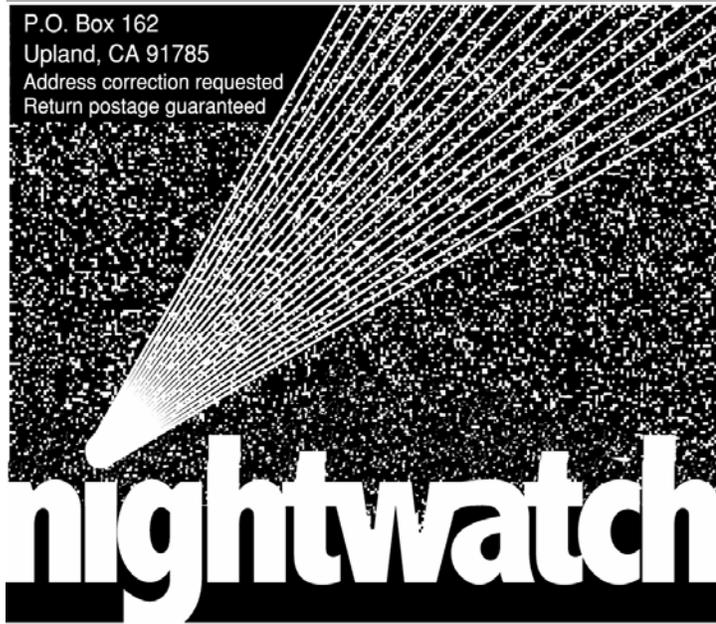


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nightwatch

Newsletter of the Pomona Valley Amateur Astronomers

Amateur
 astronomers
 just get better
 looking . . .

Volume 27 Number 2

nightwatch

February 2007

President's Address

Beginning with a naked eye comet (Comet McNaught) the year is off to a great start. 2007 promises to be a good year. Over the next few months there will be several activities and events of interest to PVAA members.

On February 2, 3, and 4, the man who revolutionized amateur astronomy, John Dobson will be at Pinon Hills! If you have never attended one of John Dobson's lectures I highly recommend it. And even if you have seen him before it might be worth seeing him again.

On Saturday, February 17th (part of a three-day weekend for some of us) the PVAA star party will be at Mesquite Spring. This is a great dark sky site with plenty to do during the day and plenty to look at during the night. I hope many of you can be there.

As for public star parties, we have three scheduled in the next two months. PVAA will be having two public star parties towards the end of February. The first will be on Monday, the 26th at Vina Danks Middle School in Ontario. The second will be on Wednesday, the 28th at the South Ontario Branch of the Ontario Library. The third public star party will be at Sycamore Elementary School in Upland on Monday, March 26th. This will be the third year that PVAA has participated in Sycamore's "Space Science Night." Please plan on supporting as many of these events as you can.

After closing in 2002 for remodeling, Griffith Park Observatory has finally reopened. PVAA will be touring the new observatory. The visit is on February

February Speaker

Dennis Mammana will speak to the Club on the Aurora Borealis – Northern Lights – and the more rarely discussed Aurora Australis or Southern Lights, visible from the Southern Hemisphere. In addition to his role as a popular author and lecturer, Dennis is a celestial photographer. You can see some of his work at www.skyscapes.com.

Star Party Sites

- (MBC) Mecca Beach Campground
- (CS) Cottonwood Springs campground, Joshua Tree Natl. Pk
- (CC) Cow Canyon Saddle, near Mount Baldy Village
- (MS) Mesquite Springs campground, Death Valley National Pk
- (CWP) Claremont Wilderness Park parking lot
- (KD) Kelso Dunes
- (WM) White Mountains (Grandview)
- (CGT) Calico Ghost Town Campground
- (LNDRS) Riverside Astronomical Soc. Landers site

PVAA Events Calendar

Month	Star	Star	General	Board
February	2/26	2/28	2/2	2/22
March	3/17 (KD)	3/26	3/2	3/29
April	4/4 (MBC)	4/23 (CS)	4/6	4/26
May	5/12 (CC)		5/4	5/17

(cont. from p. 1)

24th .. We are definitely going. I should have more information soon.

RTMC (Riverside Telescope Makers Conference) is coming up in May (on Memorial Day weekend). Every year, this is one of the greatest events in amateur astronomy. I have attended every year since 1993. It should not be missed.

Putting on the RTMC is a lot of work. The organizers are looking volunteers to help out. Help is needed with traffic. No special skills required. Helpers would need to be there all or part of Thursday. (Evening arrivals are okay). Also there is a lot of stuff to do Friday morning, and a bit on Saturday. Volunteers receive the satisfaction of being a part of this great event in amateur astronomy and also get to go in early, before anybody else is there. A few people are needed to act as hosts of the workshops and to help out at the Beginner's Corner Observing session. If you are interested in any of these positions contact Alex McConahay or let me know and I will put you in touch with the right people.

Happy stargazing!

Ron Hoekwater

FOR SALE—25 Inch Telescope



Call, e-mail or see Ron for details....

GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY

The observatory closed in 2002 for renovation and a major expansion of exhibit space. It reopened to the public on November 3, 2006. The \$93 million renovation, paid largely by a public bond issue, restored the building, as well as replaced the aging planetarium dome. The building was expanded underground, with completely new exhibits, a café, gift shop, and the new Leonard Nimoy Event Horizon Theater. One wall is covered with the largest astronomically accurate image ever constructed (152 feet long by 20 feet high), called "The Big Picture".



PVAA e-mail and hotline

Those interested in getting information which was not received in time for the newsletter, please send your e-mail address to Ron Hoekwater at

astro.ron@juno.com

To get the latest news on star parties, club meetings, special events and astronomy happenings call

909/596-7274 or

visit our website at www.pvaa.us

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General Meeting

The Club is planning a trip to Griffith Observatory on Saturday, February 24th. We will meet at the LA Zoo Shuttle stop and plan to travel together on 1-2 Observatory busses up the hill. We'll be on our own to check out the newly renovated facilities but it should be fun for our whole group to be up there at once. The Club will purchase shuttle tickets then resell them to members so we can all make it up on one or two shuttles. Friends and family are welcome to attend. We're hoping to get tickets to leave the Zoo around 11am but I'll let you all know the exact time and details at our February meeting. Cost will be \$8 for adults and \$4 for Seniors 60 and over and children 5-12. Children under 5 are free.

We were asked by the Southern Branch of the Ontario Library on Riverside Drive to help with a public event on Wednesday February 28th. The library will put on a show in a small inflated planetarium from 5-6pm then the Club will be there to educate the public for the next couple of hours. If some of you have never been to a public star party before, there are lots ways to help. Some bring telescopes while others have binoculars. I usually just have a laser pointer with me and point out the North Star and the few constellations and planets we can see under city skies. I'll also talk to kids as they wait in line to look through the telescopes. Good topics are the differences between planets, stars, and galaxies; explaining the motions of the Earth around the sun and the moon around the Earth; and asking kids to identify all the planets and to tell you something about each one. You'll find that both the kids and their parents are eager to learn and to share with you what they already know. We already have three people with telescopes attending along with 3-4 of us there to share our knowledge of the skies. Thanks to you all for pitching in. Please join us for a fun evening.

Jim shared with us an interesting article on a geared device found by sponge divers in 1900 inside of a Roman shipwreck near the southern Greek island of Antikythera. The object is the size of a shoebox and contains over 30 bronze wheels and dials covered by a wooden case. It was found in three main pieces and a few other smaller parts and was probably operated by a crank. Its original purpose has been hard to decipher as modern scientists try to reconstruct the puzzle pieces as well as the inscriptions on the mechanism. Researchers have recently re-examined the object using a CT scanner which was taken to the Athens National Archaeological Museum to study the object. It was used to read previously hidden inscriptions which are now almost all deciphered. The text contains many numbers and astronomical references. It is believed that the function of the mechanism was to predict the motions of moon and the five planets which were known at the time. Now the kicker – the estimated age of this surprisingly complex scientific tool is 2100 years, more technically complicated than any yet discovered for the next 1000 years.

http://dsc.discovery.com/news/2006/06/06/astronomycomp_arc.html?

Lee's What's Up discussed the area of the sky around Perseus and Ursa Minor. While rich in nebulae and clusters, many can be seen with only the largest amateur scopes.

We learned about Tycho Brahe, a Danish nobleman who lived from 1546 to 1601. Without the advantage of a telescope of any size as they hadn't been invented yet, he made some of the most accurate astronomical observations of the time. His observations were of great value to his assistant, Johannes Kepler, who went on to use them to develop his three laws of planetary motion. His observations in 1572 of a rapidly brightening star led him to write a book, *De Stella Nova*, about it the following year. Tycho coined the term Nova – the first to use this word to describe an exploding star.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tycho_Brahe

Our featured speaker for the evening was Alex McConahay. Alex is President of the Riverside Amateur Astronomers Society and he gave us a couple of ideas for our calendars. First is RTMC, held yearly every Memorial Day weekend. From 1500 to 2000 astronomers converge on the mountain location, joined by 80 vendors, a couple dozen speakers, and numerous swap meet salespeople. There are many opportunities to observe, learn, and socialize with others who share your hobby. You can rough it, bring an RV, or stay in dormitory fitted with bunk beds. Meals can be prepared on your own or you can purchase a meal plan at a very reasonable price and let someone else do the work. Many of our Club members have had such fun that they attend each year. I encourage you to check out their website for details to see if you'd like to attend.

www.rivastro.org

<http://users.adelphia.net/~alexmcconahay/>

<http://www.rtmcastronomyexpo.org/>

After this brief advertisement, Alex shared with us the wonderful pictures of his trip to Egypt to view the March 29, 2006 solar eclipse. It was one of the longer eclipses, with totality of almost 4 minutes from his viewpoint in Saloum on the Mediterranean Sea. While Alex is most comfortable traveling on his own schedule with only a backpack full of clothes and supplies, this eclipse had generated interest among his fellow Riverside Club astronomers as well as with his wife, so a plan B was needed. They weren't interested in roughing it with Alex for 5-6 weeks but were impressed by his ability to carry out cost-effective trips so his aid was enlisted to plan the trip. Instead of hooking up with a high priced "eclipse tour" for \$4,000 a person, Alex found a travel tour of Egypt for less than half that then made special arrangements to see the eclipse with the tour operators. They got up at the crack of dawn so they could get from their hotel to a large eclipse site in Saloum where they joined other sky watchers including many of those from the high priced tours.

He shared some great photos of the eclipse. I most enjoyed the

solar shots

alongside a video with audio of the star watchers reactions to what they were seeing. You could see how the sky around them darkened to twilight then slowly brightened again after totality and hear their reactions to the sights around them. It sounded like the event was enthusiastically enjoyed by all of the 30,000 or so visitors who observed from that site.

At the end of the guided tour, Alex escorted his wife and fellow club members, along with his observing equipment, to the airport. They traveled back to jobs, obligations, and western "civilization" while Alex continued to explore the sights in this part of the world – including a river cruise along the Nile, the longest river in the world. River tours are a very popular way to see the famous Egyptian temples and monuments, almost all of which are located along this ancient river highway north of the Aswan Dam to its mouth at the Mediterranean Sea.

I'm sure many of us felt the itch of the travel bug after seeing and hearing about Alex' many adventures – and not a few of us may thing twice before dismissing a trip to see a future solar eclipse as too exotic or too expensive for us to try. Thanks so much for an enjoyable evening, Alex!

Claire Stover

February Star Party

The February star party will be held on Saturday, the 17th at Mesquite Spring, Death Valley. Mesquite Springs is at the north end of Death Valley about five miles from Scotty's Castle. Although it is a bit of a drive to get there, Mesquite Springs is one of the two darkest "dark sky sites" that PVAA visits. During the day there are the natural and historic sights of Death Valley. Joe Hillberg always makes a run through Titus Canyon. It is about a two hour drive on a one way dirt road with many interesting sights to see (animal, vegetable, mineral, and of human origin) along the way. Ubehebe volcanic crater is also nearby.

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One way to develop an interest in space...

"As a child I went to a circus. They had a man shot out of a cannon into a net. I became intrigued with what was going on."

Wally Schirra, Astronaut

January Star Party

I had been looking forward to the Mecca Beach Star Party for weeks. But on Friday evening I started coming down with something and on Saturday morning I decided that I had better not go. Saturday afternoon I received a message from Craig Matthews saying that he was going to the Claremont Wilderness Park. I still wanted to get a little observing in and this sounded like something I could manage.

I arrived at the park just after sunset. Craig, Don Clark, Bill Connelly and Ken Crowder were already there, setting up. We were all hoping that it might still be possible to see Comet McNaught. Unfortunately, the hills on the western horizon at the Wilderness Park would not allow us to see it, even if it was still visible.

I decided that I would look through other people's scopes, do some binocular observing, and try taking a few images with my digital camera. For Christmas, I received a remote control. This allows me to use the bulb setting on the camera. I hoped to take some short exposure astro images. Mostly I shot Orion, Auriga, and the Pleiades in Taurus. When I got home and looked at the images they were all slightly out of focus. I will have to figure out my focus problem and try again in February at Death Valley.

Don brought an eyepiece for Bill to try out. Craig looked at the double Cluster in Perseus and perused the open clusters of Auriga. He also looked for Hubble's Variable Nebula in Monocerotis, but couldn't see it. The sky at the Wilderness Park is not the Darkest. He did see the nearby Christmas Tree Nebula.

By 9:00 the temperature had dropped to 30° F. The best thing about observing from the Wilderness Park is that from there it is a 20-minute drive back home. I don't remember what time we left, but I think we were all packed up and gone by 10:30.

Our next star party is February 17th at Mesquite Spring, Death Valley. Unlike the Wilderness Park, it has a very dark sky, with a correspondingly long drive. But it is worth it. I hope to see you there.

Ron Hoekwater