



AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

April 2008

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Outreach Summary

March was a busy one for AU Outreach, with lots of school science nights. AU volunteers Andy Allen, John Boyd, Chad Caprio, Bill Clausen, Krissie Cook, Jason & Tim Crawford, Ruben Gutierrez, Art Harris, Jürgen Hilmer, Chris Larson, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Ron Nixon, Edgar Ocampo, Helen Osenga, Javier Rivera, Nancy Rohrer, Tom Whittemore, Jim Williams, and Tim Wittenburg showed cool astronomy stuff to 738 customers.

Outreach for April

Here are the AU events scheduled so far for April. To get the latest information on schedules, or directions, just contact Chuck at 964-8201 or macpuzl@west.net

Friday, April 4, 7 PM

Start with a quick planetarium show by Krissie, then a talk by W. Patrick McCray, UCSB history professor, on "Amateur Astronomers, Sputnik, and the Dawn of the Space Age."

Saturday, April 5, all night

Messier Marathon backup night is on! Several of us met at the Gun Club on March 29 for the yearly Messier Marathon. And, guess what? We did get fogged out! We will try again at the Shotgun Range of the Gun Club tonight.

Thursday, April 10, setup 5:30 PM

Scopes for Science Night at Saint John of Damascus Academy, across Fairview from the Goleta Library.

Friday, April 11, 8 PM

Telescopes for Transition House Children's Programs, at 425 East Cota Street, in their parking lot.

Saturday, April 12, 6 PM

AU planning meeting in the classroom next to Krissie's office. Anyone is welcome to attend and help plan your club's activities.

Saturday, April 12, 8 PM

Monthly Public Star Party, next to Palmer Observatory at SBMNH. With the time change, we'll start later.

Thursday, April 17, setup 5:30 PM

Telescopes for Science Night at Monte Vista Elementary School, on Hope Street.

Friday, April 18, 8 PM

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont College, just outside Carroll Observatory. Chuck and Pat can't make it to this event, so please come if you can!

Thursday, April 24, setup 5:30 PM

Telescopes for Science Night at Washington Elementary School, off of Cliff Drive. This is the first time we'll be bringing scopes to this school.

Other April Highlights

April 6 through April 13 is National Dark Sky Week. Also, on Tuesday, April 8, the Moon skirts the outer edge of the Pleiades between sunset at 1926 and about 2115 PDT.

Visits with Sir Arthur C. Clarke

By Jim Williams

At the time I am writing this, Google has 1,970,000 hits relevant to Arthur C. Clarke. You can read all about his accomplishments there. But to me he was an amazing, real person, with a great sense of humor and incredible depth.

I remember my first visit with Sir Arthur C. Clarke. It was in the evening, 3 days after his 80th birthday in 1997. My friend, Wayne Houser, who met Arthur during 3 years with the Foreign Service in Sri Lanka, called Arthur and asked if we could come over. We went to his mansion, were let in through the gate, walked under the port cochere, up the gentle wooden stairs and into his staff's office. The house had once belonged to the Anglican Bishop of Sri Lanka. Arthur lived in an upstairs quarters. It

was indeed rather like visiting a Bishop. We walked through his staff's office, through the "Ego Chamber" where countless awards and plaques were displayed, and there he was, sitting at the end of the long room behind his desk. We came back the next day, and again for Christmas dinner with him and the family. Yes, Christmas dinner with Arthur C. Clarke!

I made 2 other trips to Sri Lanka, in 2001 and 2003. I snuck away from a banquet at the 2001 Planetarium Conference to share Chinese takeout with Arthur and his adopted family. I met Arthur upstairs, and he was tired and wanted to go to bed. But Melinda, the family's energetic 13 year old said, "But Uncle Arthur, Uncle Jim is here! Come down to dinner!" (I had wisely brought her American candy). So Arthur acquiesced, and came down. Soon he was alert and animated, and forgot all about being tired. We talked about sea mammals, food, and Martin Gardner. Almost before dinner was finished, he pointed a finger at me and said, "Come back upstairs, there's something I MUST show you". We looked at the latest pictures from the Mars orbiter, at some incredible dark spots. Arthur was certain they must be a kind of organic growth.

A few days later I came to the office and there with Arthur was an interesting fellow named Will Rood. Will is a mathematics popularizer, and Arthur had collaborated with him on a BBC special on fractals. We all went over to Otter's, Arthur's private club, to hang out a while. Will showed me an illustrated book on fractals he had written that is just fantastic. I said, "This should be a great seller". He said, "Well, it hasn't sold well at all." "Why not?" He and Arthur said almost in unison "Bad Title!" the book is called "Introducing Fractal Geometry". Arthur said, "It should have been titled 'Fun With Fractals' or some such".

2001 was of course Arthur's Year, and he told me he was going to present, "Live by Satellite from Sri Lanka" the Best Screenplay Award at the Oscars- he whispered to me, with a gleeful twinkle, "But I just finished taping it - It won't be live at all!"

In '03 we sat in his office for 2 hours while Arthur showed me passages from "The Encyclopedia of Science Fiction." Arthur was working on a concept

for a comet story, and he showed me an article on a Jules Verne story I had never seen, about a comet.

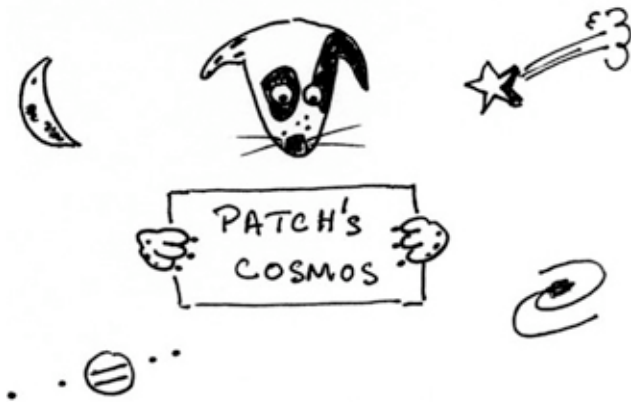
On that visit I had been touring Sri Lankan schools and talking to school kids about astronomy. I told Arthur there had been a lot of questions, some good, some not so good including lots about UFO's. Arthur admonished me, "But those are very GOOD questions!" Inquiry and curiosity are important, he reminded me.

Arthur had a 14" Celestron on the patio outside his office- he invited me to come use it. "Anytime!" I never took him up on it. It would have been a kick. Maybe if I'd had another amateur astronomer with me, I would have done it. At the end of every visit with someone that Arthur knew understood Astronomy, he would say, "Well, see you on your next perihelion."

I emailed Sci-Fi author Jerry Pournelle once before one of the visits to see if there was any trinket I could carry in his behalf to Arthur. He said, 'No, but Arthur is one of the nicest men I have ever met'. Absolutely true. So Sir Arthur, incredible thinker, writer, futurist, inventor, and gracious host to an awed fan; See you on your next perihelion.



Jim Williams visits Sir Arthur C. Clarke in Sri Lanka.



Lunar Eclipse

by Nancy Rohrer

Standing at the ocean's edge
listening to the roaring breeze
herding galloping white horses
rolling crashing on the shore.
I wait for 'It' to begin.

Clouds waltz away for now
as Moon peeks over Earth's edge
Sun hides away in the West
Slowly Earth starts to barge between
nibbling at Moon's glowing rim.

Soon greedily grabbing huge bites.
Earth takes even larger hunks
bringing Eclipse to its totality
as dark cloud dims Moon's freedom
Soon Cloud's gone Moon shines brightly.

The Scientific Doctor

by D. H. Lawrence

When I went to the scientific doctor
I realized what a lust there was in him to wreak his
so-called science on me
and reduce me to the level of a thing.
So I said: Good-morning and left him.

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April 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4 AU Meeting 7PM	5 Messier Marathon backup is on!
6 ●	7	8 Moon visits the Pleiades tonight!	9	10 St John of Damascus 5:30 PM	11 Transition House 8PM	12 Planning Meeting ● 6PM SBMNH Star Party 8PM
13	14	15	16	17 Monte Vista Elementary 5:30PM	18 Westmont College 8PM	19
20 ○	21	22	23	24 Washington Elementary 5:30PM	25	26
27	28 ◐	29	30			

The Astronomical Unit

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