



AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

February 2006

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Night Sky Network Award

The AU has won one of the quarterly awards given out by the Night Sky Network to member clubs for their outreach programs. From their notification email: "Congratulations! Your club has won the Night Sky Network award for this quarter: a Galileo Replica Telescope."

"Winners were selected at random from among over 550 events logged on the Network website from October 1, 2005 through December 31, 2005. The award is donated by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific."

"Your winning event was "Astronomy Night at SBJHS" logged on 12-10-05. The complete list of winning clubs is: Southwest Florida Astronomical Society, Inc.; Aldrich Astronomical Society; Von Braun Astronomical Society; Cincinnati Observatory Center / Friends of the Observatory; Santa Barbara Astronomical Unit.

Again, we congratulate you on your dedication to astronomy outreach!"

Our reply was: "This telescope is the perfect complement to the 'Telescopes: Eyes on the Universe' toolkit we recently received. It will also give the public a better appreciation of the history and development of the telescope as a scientific instrument, Galileo's observing skills, and the fact that it comes from a time before light pollution."



Pictured above is an image of the award. Congratulations!

Outreach Summary

We started out the year with a quiet month for outreach. Since the last newsletter, AU volunteers Andy Allen, John Boyd, Bill Buzin Bill Clausen, Krissie Cook, Tim & Jason Crawford, Joe Doyle, Art Harris, Jürgen Hilmer, June Kelley, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, and John West showed astronomical goodies to **180** people.

February Events

Here are the outreach events currently scheduled for February. As you can see, school activity is picking up! Remember, outreach events are subject to change as additions and cancellations occur. To get the latest information, or directions to an event, just contact Chuck at 964-8201 or macpuzl@west.net.

Wednesday, February 1, 6:30 - 8 PM

Telescopes for St. Andrew's Preschool Small Science Night. The school is on Auhay Drive, off of Hollister, near San Marcos High School.

Friday, February 3, 7:30 PM

Monthly AU meeting in Farrand Hall at SBMNH.

Saturday, February 4, setup 6 PM

Telescopes for a Star Party at the California Oil Museum, at 10th and Main in Santa Paula. Why there? They have an excellent exhibit about the exploration of Mars.

Wednesday, February 8, setup 6:30 PM

Telescopes for Science Night at Isla Vista School.

Saturday, February 11, 5:30 PM

Planning meeting in the classroom next to Krissie's office at SBMNH. All members welcome!

Saturday, February 11, 7 PM

Monthly Public Star Party at SBMNH. Maybe we won't have to dodge rain this month.

Friday, February 17, 7 PM

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont College.

Thursday, February 23, 5:30 - 8 PM

Telescopes for Ellwood School Science Night.

Monday, February 27, setup 6 PM

Slide show and telescopes for Happy Valley School, in the mountains along SR 150 near Ojai.

“It must have been moon bow...”

Early Saturday evening, January 14, the moon treated Santa Barbara to a fairly rare event: a “moon bow!” As a number of us were waiting for company to arrive from the Bay Area, we received a phone call from my sister-in-law as she crested San Marcos Pass on Highway 154. “Look toward the west, Sheila said. I think that the light of the moon is causing a rainbow in the west.” Hearing this incredible story, we all piled out of the house and looked toward the west, and there it was: a faint, but beautiful arc in the sky! Although the light in the arc was weak, several of us thought that we could detect a faint glow of green in it. Never having witnessed one of these events before, I looked up what conditions had to be in place to produce a moon bow. They are: (1) the moon must be full or nearly full; (2) it must be clear in the part of the sky where the moon is shining; (3) the moon must be no higher than 42° above the horizon, and (4) it must be raining opposite the moon. All these conditions were in play that evening, and they all led to a wonderful round of conversation!

Observers’ Highlights for February

by Fred Schaaf (taken from the *Astronomical Calendar* 2006)

Saturn is climbing the east sky as dusk falls, still at virtually its brightest and, in telescopes, its largest. Saturn begins the month to the southern fringe of M44, the Beehive Star Cluster, a conjunction best seen in binoculars and telescope. By month’s end Saturn has retrograded west relative to M44 but still lies only about 2° from the cluster by then... **Mars** is high in the south-southeast as evening twilight ends. It continues to fall behind Earth, getting dimmer and looking smaller. Around mid-month the ruddy planet has faded to about magnitude 0.5 but is then spending several days passing only about 2.5° from the Pleiades. Mars dwindles to only

about $8''$ wide in telescopes around mid-month, a little too small to allow a few most prominent surface markings to be glimpsed in most amateur telescopes. The planet is at eastern quadrature (90° east of the Sun) on February 19 so telescopes show a slight shadowing of the planet’s eastern edge this month... In the second half of February, **Mercury** has one of its finest apparitions of the year for observers at mid-northern latitudes. Though bright, Mercury is setting in the west less than an hour after sunset on February 10. The view, however, gets better in the next two weeks. The fleet world reaches a greatest elongation (maximum angular separation) of 18° from the Sun on the evening of February 23, when it sets more than 1.5 hours after the Sun. Mercury then shines at magnitude -0.4 and its $7.2''$ wide globe is almost exactly half-lit in telescopes. The planet fades somewhat in the final days of the month... **Jupiter** keeps rising earlier, and starts coming up before midnight by the middle of the month. The best time to view it in telescopes is the start of morning twilight, when it has gotten fairly high in the south or southwest. Jupiter is at west quadrature (90° west of the Sun) on February 6... **Venus** rises about 2.5 hours before the Sun by mid-month, when it reaches a stunning peak brightness of -4.6. Can you keep Venus in sight with your naked eyes until long after sunrise this month? (Note Shelly’s description of this in “To a Skylark”: “Keen as are the arrows/ Of that silver sphere/ Whose intense lamp narrows/ In the white dawn clear/ Until we hardly see – we feel that it is there.”)... **The Moon**, just past First Quarter, is approximately 2° to 3° from Mars on the evening of February 5, when it is only a little farther from the Pleiades (use binoculars for the cluster). The nearly Full Moon moves from about 5° to 8° away from Saturn on the night of February 11-12. The Moon shines 6° or 7° below Jupiter on the morning of February 20. The lunar crescent is a huge 13° from Venus at dawn on February 24 and 25. On February 28, the Americas see an ultra-thin lunar crescent – less than one day old from the East Coast – appear about 5° lower left of Mercury and set about 1 hour after the Sun.

Astronomical Arts Corner

Fleeting Mercury

by Nancy Rohrer

Known to the Romans of old
as messenger of the Gods
for he dashed about so bold
hiding from view except
a few evenings and dawns.

Nearest planet to the Sun
has year of eighty-eight days
as he travels in different ways
He is just a little one
about one third size of Earth.

Galileo found Mercury in 1610
Surveyor flew around in 1968
Mariner 10 landed in 1975
a land of many impact craters
We'll learn more when
Messenger returns in 2011.



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Single = \$15 **Family = \$25**

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February 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1 St. Andrew's Preschool 6:30 – 8:00	2	3 AU Meeting 7:30 PM	4 Star Party Santa Paula Oil Museum
5 ☾	6	7	8 Isla Vista School 6:30	9	10	11 AU Planning Meeting 5:30 PM SBMNH Star Party 7 PM
12	13 ○	14	15	16	17 Westmont College 7:00 PM	18
19	20	21 ☾	22	23 Elwood School 5:30	24	25
26	27 Happy Valley School 6:00	28 ●				

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