



AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

January 2005

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

December's Program

Our thanks go out to all those who participated in December's show and tell: Tim Wittenburg's photos of the most recent lunar eclipse; Tony Galvan's photo journal of Italy and the transit of Venus; Mary Freerick's space poetry; Bill Buzin's box of old optics; Jim Billig's humorous account of UFOs; and Tim Crawford's hilarious description of mirror-making and his more serious outreach thoughts (see page 2, "The Bigger Picture.")

December's meeting also brought us our officers. After a major coup, we have President: Chuck McPartlin; Vice President: Tim Wittenburg; Secretaries: Kathy and Ken Pfeiffer; Treasurer: Bob Brown; Outreach: Chuck McPartlin; Webmaster: Paul Winn; Refreshments: Tim Crawford; Newsletter: Tom Whittemore. Thanks to those who held posts last year and congratulations to those who are willing to serve this year!

Our Speaker for January

The speaker at our January meeting will be Dr. Karl Hutterer, the museum's Executive Director. Come and find out more about the Museum, and show Dr. Hutterer how dedicated we all are to astronomy in Santa Barbara!

Outreach Volunteers

Since the last newsletter, AU Outreach Volunteers Bridget & Andy Allen, Bill Clausen, Tim Crawford, Joe Doyle, Art Harris, June Kelley, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Kathy & Ken Pfeiffer, Jim Williams, and Tim Wittenburg showed astronomical goodies to **201** people at AU events.

Speaking of Outreach If you've helped out at some outreach events during the year, there's still time to cinch your **Frequent Outreachie Award**, consisting of free AU membership for a year for volunteers at 6 or more events by the time of the holiday party!

AU Events for January

Here's the calendar of AU events scheduled so far for January. We're hitting lots of schools, and we can always use telescopes and constellation tour guides. Remember that events are subject to change, and new events pop up, so contact Chuck at 964-8201 or macpuzl@west.net for the latest information.

Monday, Jan 3, Quadrantid Meteors

They peak @ 4 am, but a 52% waning gibbous Moon will interfere a bit.

Thurs, January 6 through Sat, January 8

Comet C/2004 Q2 Machholz cruises by the Pleiades, possibly at naked-eye brightness.

Friday, January 7, 7:30 PM

Monthly meeting featuring Dr. Karl Hutterer, Executive Director of SBMNH, who will update us on what's happening in and around the museum.

Saturday, January 8, 5 - 6 PM

AU Planning Meeting at Krissie's office at SBMNH. All members are welcome.

Saturday, January 8, 7 - 10 PM

Monthly Public Star Party at SBMNH. See Comet Machholz by the Pleiades and soak up photons from Saturn.

Saturday, January 8, all night

Dark Sky. Contact Joe Doyle or Paul Winn to find out when and where.

Thursday, January 13, setup 6 PM

Telescopes for Hollister School.

Friday, January 21, 7 PM

Monthly public telescope night at Westmont's Van Kampen Observatory.

The Bigger Picture

Whether small and insignificant, or rich and famous, or for that matter, anywhere in the scheme of things, there always comes a time when we wonder why we are here. Looking up at the stars recently someone came up to me and curtly asked, “What’s the big deal? What’s so important about looking at stars? What’s with all that? Why are you doing this for a living?” Well, as you know I’m not, and I said as much. I told him, “Look, you live, you die, the end... You’d better find something to have fun at in the meantime.” That was a pretty snotty reply, even if he asked for it. But, I didn’t just say that. I added, “People look up at the stars to answer questions like, where did we come from? How did we get here? What is out there and how did it get there? How far are all those stars from us? How big is the Universe? Are there any more life forms out there? Are any like us? Is there just one Universe? How does any of this help us now and in the future?” I was unsettled by all this and looked away and contemplated a moment then looked back to say more but he was gone. What a wasted moment. I looked back in hindsight with many more answers. We’ve all been there. I still don’t have the perfect words, but here are just a few I have thought of since...

When we do anything that matters to us, in word or deed, it is rarely a waste of time. What we are doing is out of love. It is not so important why others do not understand, only that we do. It may not make great sense to others, but we see great hope and purpose in our choices. Compassion in this pursuit only deepens our understanding of what it means to be alive. I believe that. I want to believe that. When we speak from the heart, rarely is it wrong, for it mirrors our innermost feelings. In our search for what is meaningful, purpose, and faith in that purpose is what takes us beyond. In the end, that may be enough.

Maybe what I could have said that night was, “It may not appear what I’m doing makes any sense, but I get a sense of peace and well being from it as well as humility in imagining how very small we are in the great expanse of things. It’s sometimes during these nights it also occurs to me that the distance to the stars may not be as important as the distance between one heart and another.”

Tim Crawford (from 2004 AU Members' Night)

Mirror-Making: Some Reflections

The AU has its first mirror-making graduate! Using a lot of muscle and patience, Jeremy Schmidt is the first mirror-maker to cross the finish line. Jeremy fashioned a near-perfect 10” mirror and crafted an elegant truss-tube telescope to house his mirror. Several others in Tom Whittemore’s mirror-making class are also nearing completion of their projects. The classes, which began in the summer of 2003, continue in the Broder building at the SBMNH on Wednesdays from 7:30 – 9:00 pm. Tom will take on new students next summer who are interested in crafting 6, 8, or 10-inch mirrors. Details on the classes will follow in a future newsletter.



Jeremy Schmidt figures his “perfect” 10” mirror!

Electronic Newsletters Available

You can now receive your monthly AU Newsletter by email. This will insure timely delivery, prevent mangling by the USPS, and help conserve the club’s resources. To start receiving the newsletter electronically, just send an email to the club secretary at keagle10@cox.net (that’s “keagle-ten”) indicating your choice. For those of you who have already filled out a membership form indicating this as your choice, you need do nothing more. But if you haven’t, or are unsure, then a quick email will ensure that your next newsletter will arrive safely in your electronic inbox. We will send the newsletter as an attachment in PDF format that can be read on both Mac and Windows machines, along with instructions on how to get a free PDF reader in case you don’t already have one.

Need a Ride? Give a Ride?

If you need a ride to club events, or if you are willing to give rides to other club members, please send an email to the club secretary indicating this. We will make this information available to the respondents, so we can help one another and increase participation in club activities.

For Sale

6" Apochromatic f/8 Astrophysics Starfire Triplet, Refurbished Refractor OTA with Telrad, Mounting Rings, Losmandy Dovetail Plate and 2" Televue Diagonal for \$3800 and a 38" pier 800 AP Mount with computer for \$2800. Interested? Contact Deanmars@cox.net. 969-5436.

Astro Questions

Which of the following stellar properties can you estimate simply by looking at a star on a clear night?

- Distance.
- Brightness.
- Surface temperature.
- Both a and b.
- Both b and c.

The reason stars twinkle is because of motion

- On their surface.
- Of the Earth.
- Of the Solar System.
- Of gas in Earth's atmosphere.
- Relative to the observer.

Parting Thoughts

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour

-William Blake

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| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
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| January 2005 | | | | | | 1 |
| 2 | 3  | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 AU Meeting | 8 Planning Meeting Star Party Dark Sky |
| 9 | 10  | 11 | 12 | 13 Hollister School | 14 | 15 |
| 16 | 17  | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 Van Kampen Observatory | 22 |
| 23 | 24 | 25  | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 |
| 30 | 31 | | | | | |

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