



# AU AstroNews

## The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

January 2006

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

### AU Elections

The election of AU club officers for 2006 took place at the December meeting, resulting in an outstanding group for the coming year: President - Tim Wittenburg, Vice President - Laurence Harms, Secretary - Bridget & Andy Allen, Treasurer - Ruben Gutierrez. All of the positions appointed by AU officers remained the same for 2006: Newsletter - Tom Whittemore, Refreshments (and Poet Laureate) - Tim Crawford, Equipment - Art Harris, Outreach - Chuck McPartlin, Web - Paul Winn.



Lots of smiles at the 2005 AU Banquet. Photo: K. Pfeiffer

### Outreach Summary

Since the last newsletter, AU volunteers Andy Allen, Krissie Cook, Tim & Jason Crawford, Ruben Gutierrez, Art Harris, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, and Nancy Rohrer showed cool sky stuff to **636** people. For the year, we had a fantastic turnout of more than **60** AU members and friends who participated in **98** outreach events, reaching a total of **7,431** customers. And, in our first year as members of the Night Sky Network set up by NASA/JPL and the Astronomical Society of the Pacific to bring astronomy to the public, we're ranked number three in the nation in outreach events, behind a club in Florida and a club in Texas. We have better weather than those guys, so let's shoot for number one next year!

### Outreach Awards

As part of our outreach effort, club members who help out at six or more outreach events in a year get their membership extended for a year. This year's recipients are: Bridget & Andy Allen, Warren Bitters, Bill Clausen, Tim Crawford, Joe Doyle, Art Harris, June Kelley, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Helen Osenga, Craig Prater, Tom Whittemore, and Tim Wittenburg.

### January Events

Here are the events currently scheduled for January. 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](mailto:macpuzl@west.net).

#### Friday, January 6, 7:30 PM

Monthly meeting in Farrand Hall at SBMNH. AU member Craig Prater will tell us all about his cruise to the South Pacific to view the total solar eclipse last year.

#### Monday, January 9, setup 6:30 PM

Telescopes for Goleta Valley Junior High School.

#### Saturday, January 14, 5:30 PM

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

#### Saturday, January 14, 7 PM

Monthly Public Star Party at SBMNH. Saturn is back!

#### Thursday, January 19, setup 7 PM

Slide show and telescopes for McKinley Elementary School.

#### Friday, January 20, 7 PM

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont College.

## Observers' Highlights for January

by Fred Schaaf (taken from the Astronomical Calendar 2006)

**Venus** makes one of its spectacular exits from the evening sky this month. It is still prominent in the southwest as evening twilight deepens on January 1, and does not set until about 100 minutes after the Sun (as seen from about 40° North). But that figure dwindles to about 75 minutes by January 5 and a scant 35 minutes by January 10. The planet's crescent is 58" long but very thin (only 6% lit) on New Year's Day, when even binoculars may even show its shape. It narrows even more in the following days as Venus begins to get too low in the solar glare to view. On January 13 the planet passes through inferior conjunction with the Sun. By January 17, Venus appears just before sunrise, its face a stunning 1% lit. By January 21, the planet rises more than an hour before sunup, by month's end nearly 2 hours... **Saturn** rises after evening twilight as the month and year begin. But the ringed planet reaches opposition to the Sun on January 27, when it rises north of east at sunset and is visible all night long. Saturn is then at its peak brightness for the year, magnitude -0.2, and largest in telescopes, 20.4" wide. During January it retrogrades (moves west relative to the stars), gliding about 1/2° north of Asellus Australis around mid-month and closing from about 2.5° to less than 1° from M44 (the Beehive Cluster) during the month... **Mars** is considerably brighter than Saturn as January begins and is already high in the east-southeast as darkness falls. Mars starts the year as a magnitude -0.6 orange-gold live coal in Aries but continues to fade drastically. Its disk still measures 12" wide in telescopes as the year opens but loses a few arc-seconds in apparent width during January, its surface features starting to get difficult to see. Spring begins in the Martian northern hemisphere on January 21<sup>st</sup>... At the start of the year, **Jupiter** rises about 2:45 a.m. local time – about the time Mars is setting. The magnitude -2 world cruises east and less than 1° from Alpha Librae (Zubenelgenubi) from January 9 to 17. Jupiter is in the southeast at dawn, when it is greatly outshined by Venus in the latter part of the month... For North American observers **the Moon** is a thin crescent about 9° left of Venus at dusk on January 1 and a waxing gibbous 2° left of Mars at dusk on January 8. The Moon is just past Full when it rises about 8° above Saturn on the evening of January 14 but is only 3° to 4° from Saturn by the time they set near

night's end. The Moon comes up 6° lower left of Saturn on January 15 and is 6° lower left of Jupiter at dawn on January 23. The waning lunar crescent is roughly 1/2° from Antares and 1° from the globular cluster M4 as morning twilight starts on January 25. A very thin Moon is a whopping 15° lower right of Venus at dawn on January 27<sup>th</sup>. The **Quadrantid meteor shower** peaks on January 3 and is not bothered by moonlight.... Vesta is at opposition on January 5, and gets as bright as 6.2.

## Astronomical Arts Corner

### **The Red Planet**

by Nancy Rohrer

In sky on clear dark night  
Three thousand stars to be seen  
One of them shines a red light  
Named for God of Roman War.

Mars, fourth planet from the Sun  
Half the size of planet Earth  
Has two moons just for fun  
Small rocks orbit, Phobos and Deimos

Red planet has tickled interest  
In many cultures through ages  
Son of Jupiter and Juno, the best  
Orbits Sun different from the rest.

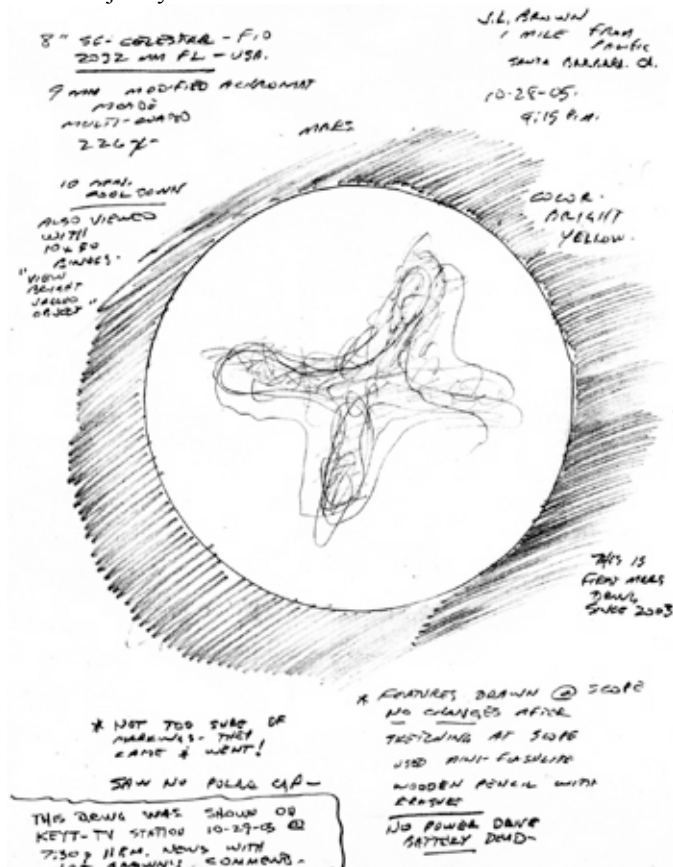
Eons of wishes to see Mars  
Finally, nineteen sixty-four  
Mariner Four flew around  
No Martian opened the door.

Twenty-one photos sent back  
Signs of life they lack  
Could be in distant past  
Some say yes, some say no.

Showed high dry cold desert  
Rocks covered with red dust  
Iron oxide looking like rust  
First close up to see Mars.



Canis Major by Joe Brown



Sketch of Mars this past October by Joe Brown

### AU Information Box

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Updated monthly 682-4711x405

AU AstroNews, the monthly publication of the **Astronomical Unit (AU)**, is mailed to the AU membership. For publishing consideration for the next month, submit astronomical items by the 20<sup>th</sup> of the current month!

### AU annual membership rates:

Single = \$15

Family = \$25

### AU mailing address:

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On the Web: <http://www.sbau.org>

**January 2006**

<b>Sunday</b>	<b>Monday</b>	<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>Thursday</b>	<b>Friday</b>	<b>Saturday</b>
1	2	3	4	5	6 ● AU Monthly Meeting 7:30 PM	7
8	9 Goleta Valley Junior High 6:30 PM	10	11	12	13	14 ○ AU Planning Meeting 5:30 PM SBMNH Star Party 7 PM
15	16	17	18	19 McKinley Elementary 7:00 PM	20 Westmont College 7:00 PM	21
22 ●	23	24	25	26	27	28
29 ●	30	31				

**The Astronomical Unit**

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