



AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

March 2005

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Under Construction

Please...



...be seated!



The Gladwin Planetarium takes shape as the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History readies for the grand opening the weekend of March 12 and 13.

Our Speaker for March

Krissie Cook, Director of Astronomy Programs at the SBMNH, will demonstrate the new digital projector at the Gladwin Planetarium Friday, March 4th, at 7:30 pm. As always, the public is invited.

New Westmont Scope

Westmont College just announced that they have received their Keck grant, and will soon be replacing the venerable iron giant 16 inch Carroll scope with a computer-controlled 24-inch Ritchey-Chrétien. Their observatory will close for rebuilding this summer, and will reopen with the new scope in the spring of 2006, if all goes well.

February Outreach

Lately the rain has really put a damper on outreach, but we still managed to show sky stuff to 154 customers since the last newsletter. AU volunteers who braved the clouds were Andy Allen, Bill Clausen, Tim Crawford, Art Harris, June Kelley, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Craig & Kenyon Prater, John West, Tom Whittemore, and Tim Wittenburg.

AU Events for March

Here are the AU events scheduled so far for March. Lots of school Science Nights are held this month!

Wednesday, March 2, 5:30 to 7:30 PM

Telescopes for Vieja Valley School Science Night.

Thursday, March 3, 2 to 3 AM

The Moon occults Antares! See the article in this newsletter for details.

Friday, March 4, 7:30 PM

Monthly AU meeting at SBMNH. Krissie will tell us all about (and demonstrate!) the improvements to the planetarium.

Thursday, March 10, 6:30 PM

Telescopes for Hollister School.

Saturday, March 12, 5 - 6 PM

AU planning meeting in the classroom next to Krissie's office at SBMNH. Everyone's invited!

Saturday, March 12, 7 - 10 PM

Monthly Public Star Party at SBMNH. Saturn!
Double Stars! Galaxies!

Saturday, March 12, all night

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

Wednesday, March 16, setup 6 PM

Telescopes for Santa Ynez Valley Christian Academy.

Friday, March 18, 7 PM

Monthly Westmont Public Telescope Night.

Wednesday, March 30, setup 5:30 PM

Telescopes for Monroe School Science Night.

Thursday, March 31, setup 5:30 PM

Telescopes for Hope School Science Night.

Spitzer Talk

Michael Werner, Spitzer Space Telescope Project Scientist, will be giving a lecture entitled "Lifting The Cosmic Veil -- The Infrared Universe Revealed By The Spitzer Space Telescope" at Caltech's Beckman Auditorium on Wednesday, March 9, 2005 at 8:00 pm. Parking is free, and the lecture is free. Mike is a superior speaker, and would love to meet some Santa Barbara astronomers.

Mercury Hunt

The elusive planet Mercury is making its best evening appearance of the year in the days around March 12. If anyone is interested in searching out a good western horizon (like at Cachuma Lake) for getting a telescopic peek at Mercury, please email Chuck at macpuzl@west.net.

Moon Occults Antares

In the early morning hours of Thursday, March 3, Santa Barbara night owls will be treated to a beautiful sight, and get a chance to spot a star that is difficult to observe. At about 2:18 AM, the bright limb of the Last Quarter Moon will occult the star Antares, the red heart of Scorpius the Scorpion. About 35 minutes later, Antares will pop out again from the dark limb of the Moon.

All that is pretty enough, but the circumstances of this occultation will give you a great chance to spot Antares B, the white dwarf companion star that is normally hidden in the bright glare of Antares. Antares B is six magnitudes (or 251.2 times) fainter than Antares. Because the position angle of Antares B is 270°, it is due west of Antares. This means that it will be uncovered first, and should be visible briefly while Antares is still occulted.

Of course, to catch this much fainter star as it appears, you'll have to be looking at exactly the right spot. Calculations for my back yard show that Antares will reappear between 02:53:42 and 02:53:43, so most of the Santa Barbara area should be within a few seconds of that time (but allow some slop!). It will appear along the dark limb of the Moon at about the 4:30 clock position, using the terminator as the 12-6 line, right next to the lunar crater Oken in Mare Australe, near a selenographic latitude of -50°. This is actually how Antares B was first discovered, so you can relive a bit of history. If you miss Antares B, and Antares has already reappeared, you can still try to catch the white dwarf if the seeing is good. Just pop an OIII nebular filter into an eyepiece that gives you 200-250x magnification, and look for a small green dot right next to Antares. The filter will cut down the red glare from Antares and give you a sporting chance. Still missed it? We'll get another chance on the night of May 23/24.

Astronomy Day

It's not too early to start thinking about Astronomy Day! There'll be lots of activities to join in at the SBMNH on April 16th. For further information please contact Krissie Cook at 682-4711 x173.



This 8" f/4.2 Cave reflector waits for Astronomy Day!

Ask Captain Cosmos!

Did you ever wonder why the latest sunrise comes on January 4th and the earliest sunset is on the 7th of December instead of both occurring on the Winter Solstice? Are you curious why the full moon in September seems to last for days? Now you can ask Captain Cosmos questions about astronomical topics and he will try his best to set your ship straight! Please send all inquiries to kometes@aol.com.

Parting Thoughts

Two men came to a hole in the sky.
One asked the other to lift him up...
But so beautiful was it in heaven that
The man who looked in over the edge
Forgot everything, forgot his companion
Whom he had promised to help up
And simply ran off into all the
Splendor of heaven.

from an Igluik Inuit prose poem, early
Twentieth century, told by INUGPASUGJUK
to KNUD RASMUSSEN, the Greenlandic
artic explorer

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Single = \$15 Family = \$25

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| March 2005 | | | | | | |
|------------|--------|---------|----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| | | 1 | 2 Vieja Valley School | 3 | 4 AU Monthly Meeting | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 Hollister School | 11 | 12 AU Planning Meeting/SBMNH Star Party Dark Sky |
| 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 Santa Ynez Valley Christian Academy | 17 | 18 Westmont Public Observing | 19 |
| 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 Monroe School Science Night | 31 Hope School Science Night | | |

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