



AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

March 2006

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

Outreach Summary

Since the last newsletter, we've showed goodies in the sky to **886** more people. Helping out as volunteers were Andy Allen, Rus Belikov, Warren Bitters, John Boyd, Bill Clausen, Tim & Jason Crawford, George DeFilippo, Joe Doyle, Art Harris, Jürgen Hilmer, June Kelley, Danny Kury, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Edward Tavernetti, Ellen Waddell, Tom Whittemore, and Jim Williams.

March Events

As we sneak up on spring, here are the March outreach events scheduled so far. 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.

Thursday, March 2, 5:30 - 8 PM

Telescopes for Science Night at Monte Vista School.

Friday, March 3, 7:30 PM

Monthly AU meeting in Farrand Hall at SBMNH. Krissie will tell us all about what's going on with astronomy at the Museum.

Wednesday, March 8, 6 - 8 PM

Telescopes for Science Night at the San Ysidro campus of Laguna Blanca School.

Thursday, March 9, 6 - 8:30 PM

Telescopes for third grade classes at Hope School.

Saturday, March 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. Saturn!!

Friday, March 17, 7 PM

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont College. The new dome is up, but no big scope yet, so we'll be setting up our own on the lawn.

Saturday, March 25, dusk to dawn

The annual AU Messier Marathon at the Gun Club. Extreme astronomy and snacking at its best! Rain/cloud out alternate date will be April 1.

The Messier Marathon

Coming up on the evening of Saturday, March 25, until dawn on Sunday, March 26, is the annual AU Messier Marathon. In case you aren't familiar with this enjoyable event, here's what goes on: We gather at the Gun Club a little before sunset to set up our scopes. Then we eat some donuts. As soon as the sky gets dark, we start trying to observe all 110 objects in the Messier Catalog before the sky gets too bright the next morning, after which we have a breakfast of donuts. Whenever there's a break in the observing, we eat donuts. If it's clouded out, we eat donuts and agree to return the next weekend.

At the monthly meeting on March 3, Chuck will have handouts available with a suggested order for trying to spot the Messier entries. One handout will have Right Ascension and Declination coordinates for polar aligned scopes, and the other will have star maps with Telrad circles for you star hoppers. Astronomers, start your telescopes!



Setting up at the 2005 Messier Marathon

Recommended...

When I was young I became interested in gazing up at the night sky. Inspired by my older brother, Paul, this interest rapidly became a passion for me. I could not get enough. I bought a 6" Criterion RV-6 reflector, took and developed black-and-white photos of the moon and planets, joined the local astronomy club in Indianapolis, and stayed up in the cold Indiana winters estimating the magnitudes of variable stars for the American Association of Variable Star Observers. But when I headed off to graduate school in Tucson, this passion for the night sky disappeared. I got busy. My return to astronomy has pretty much happened in the last ten years.

And so it is similar for Charles Laird Calia in his beautifully written book, The Stargazing Year. After a twenty-five year absence from his interest in astronomy, Calia finds himself once again attached to the wonder of the night sky, but it is the events surrounding September 11, 2001 that cause him to pause one evening and look up. He writes: "What stopped me was something that I saw on television. I couldn't explain the events of that September morning but I knew one thing: I felt solace when I looked at the stars." He continues: "I beat a circuitous route back to the love of my youth. It began with a tour of the night sky with my two daughters, both young, with the freshness that only comes with new eyes. My oldest daughter got the ball rolling. "See how clear it is, Daddy." We were pulling into the garage, our car full of heavy shopping bags from evening errands, and as usual I drove in fast without bothering to look up. Why look up? But for some reason I slowed the car, cracked the window. Fresh air overtook me and I felt it. Absolute clarity. I spent that evening lying on the grass with my two daughters, pointing out the constellations, whose outlines and names, oddly enough, I still remembered. Like everyone that autumn, I was feeling confused and angry, afraid for my children and my nation and disoriented by the stories that I was hearing in my own community, from friends and neighbors who worked in Manhattan. But that night, gazing at clumps of broken Milky Way, a thought washed over me, one that I have yet to surrender. We all belong to the sky." In twelve chapters spanning the twelve months of the night sky, Calia elegantly weaves the history of amateur astronomy and astronomers with

a humorous account of his own obsessive quest to build the ideal backyard observatory. The story of how, one starlit evening, the galaxy opened its arms to one man, The Stargazing Year is a paean to the universe and its many mysteries.

Astronomical Arts Corner

Messier Marathon

by A. U. Poe

When the Moon is dark at midnight, at the Gun Club which is our site
Where we go to watch the wonders of the vault of starry sky
From the sunset to the sunrise, with faint fuzzies sought as our prize
Though it does not sound a bit wise, here the AU scans the sky
In the memory of that Charlie, for the marathon to try,
Never pausing to ask why.

Late in March, or early April, with our scopes up to the big hill
Where the dew and wind and clouds and cold can make us want to cry
Til the dawn's light ends our questing, and our frozen butts are resting
Though the mirror needs a dusting, there we seek our targets shy
Standing by our tripods numbly, hardly letting out a sigh,
Never pausing to ask why.

As the heavens wheel above us, and we eat our powdered donuts
We search for distant islands of galaxies while dawn draws nigh.
As our totals near one hundred, with our telescoping kindred
Soon we'll face the trial we all dread - Objects with the Sun near by.
Hunting that last globby cluster, now it's time to do or die,
Never pausing to ask why.

Capricornus hides M30. We are tired, cold, and dirty.
Rosy clouds on the horizon end our searching, by and by.

Packing up our eyepiece cases, lack of sleep on all our faces
Moving at much slower paces, homeward in our beds to lie
We are filled with satisfaction, something money cannot buy
And we know the reason why.

Santa Barbara shows a fine sight, shimmers in the early daylight
As we roll on mountain roadways, coming down from up on high.
Late next morning while we slumber, we will not recall some number
That is not what we'll remember of our time beneath the sky.
It's the friends we spent that time with, sharing life while sharing sky.
That will be our reason why.

WHO WILL WIN

by Nancy Rohrer

Pluto in distant sky
Average 40AU up high
In this elevated position
Shocked to have competition

Another has been found
Who's higher, bigger and round?
Will it become our new planet?
Has Pluto had it?

The new one is called Xena
Her moon Gabrielle
One moon for Xena
Pluto has three in the arena
Time and talk will tell
Which one is for sale?

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

March 2006

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
			1	2 Monte Vista School	3 AU Meeting 7:30 PM	4
5	6 	7	8 Laguna Blanca School	9 Hope School	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	24	25 Messier Marathon!
26	27	28	29 	30	31	

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