



# AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit

May 2001

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History

## May Meeting

Hear about Jim Williams' cool trip! Here's his preview: From March 19th to March 24th I attended the International Planetarium Society's conference in Sri Lanka, entitled "Sri Lanka Skies and Sir Arthur, a 2001 Odyssey." There were 34 conference delegates; from the United States, Australia, South Africa, India, The Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Italy, Spain, China, and Japan.

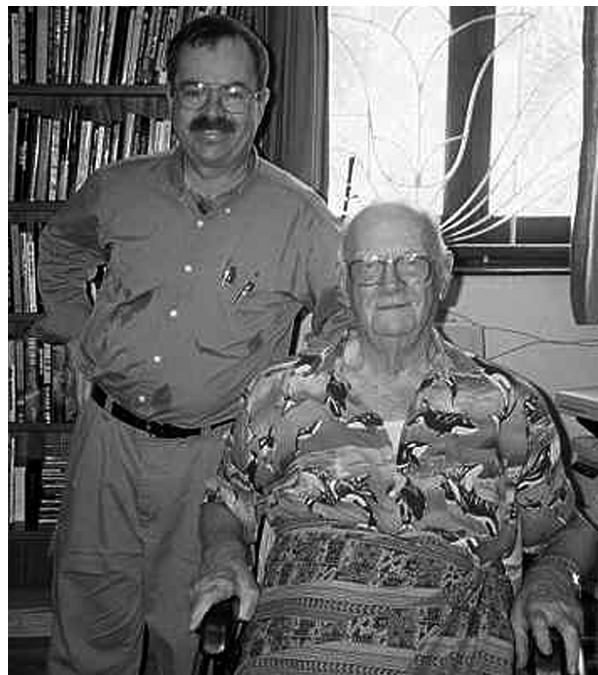
Our Sri Lankan host was T.C. Samaranayake, the director of the 550 seat planetarium in Colombo. Sam (as he allowed us to abbreviate his name) and Dr. Dale Smith of Bowling Green State University had planned a busy schedule from Monday noon to Saturday evening. The conference started on a terrific high: We were welcomed by a keynote address from Sir Arthur Clarke, who makes his home in Sri Lanka. Sir Arthur was witty and pointed, and answered a list of questions from students presented by delegate Joanne Young.

We heard papers on the astronomy programs in many places, including the Slovak Republic and Chennai, India. We heard about a program in South Africa to present indigenous sky legends and stories in the planetarium, and saw some terrific astronomy educational materials from Hong Kong. And oh yeah, some guy gave a slide show about the AU in Santa Barbara.

After the Colombo proceedings were finished, we spent 4 days and 3 nights touring the hill country, visiting the Sigiriya Rock Fortress (500 AD!), the Temple of the Tooth in Kandy (a UNESCO World Heritage Site where the tooth of the Buddha is kept),

tea plantations, and gem mines. The real highlight for most of us was visiting schools in the upcountry; MOST of these visits were not on the schedule; we were pleasantly hijacked into several schools ("We'll just stop here for 15 minutes or so..."), only to be met by 200 or so smiling uniformed children lining the paths to the schools, handing us jaggery (look this up!) wrapped in palm leaves, flowers, king coconuts with straws, and tea. We thus learned that "15 minutes or so" is Sri Lankan for two hours..!

There was a science fair that was amazing, and we spent 3 different nights under the stars (well, haze) with kids, talking and answering questions. I did see the Southern Cross and Omega Centauri! We saw elephants and monkeys, and they have 57 kinds of bananas!



I got to visit Sir Arthur a few times as well; he let me look through his Canon image stabilized binoculars- I

looked at Sirius and said "Look, Look! I can see the companion!" That got a laugh! The flight is about 26 hours air time on the way; I recommend the trip- a cool accessory on Malaysia and Sri Lanka Airlines is the Airshow feature- where you get a GPS readout of your trip progress on the color screen on the seat back in front of you. Saves lots of questions to the stewardesses!

For the Rest of the Story, come see the slide show and video clips from Sir Arthur's talk! Sorry, no jaggery!

### **Volunteers**

Thanks to Chris Baer, Jim Billig, Gretchen & Greg Brinser, Bill Buzin, Joe Doyle, Chey Hahn, Laurence Harms, June Kelley, Pat McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Helen Osenga, Craig Prater, Wayne Rothermich, Joann Tanner Rounds, Jim Williams, and visitor Tom Whittemore (all the way from San Jose) for help at observations since the last newsletter. We had only 3 events, but we still reached **213** customers.

May will be a busy month, so help out if you can. As always, outreach schedules are subject to change, so check the web page or contact Edgar or Chuck to find out the latest. Try to let one of us know ahead of time if you are planning to attend an event!

### **AU Events in May**

Wednesday, May 2 – Vieja Valley School Family Science Night. Setup at 5 PM, event lasts until 8:30 PM.

Friday, May 4, 7:30 PM – AU Monthly Meeting in Farrand Hall at SBMNH. Jim and Sir Arthur!

Wednesday, May 9 – Kellogg School Science Fair. Setup at 5:30 PM, event lasts until 8:00 PM.

Thursday, May 10 – IDP Corporate event at “The Barn” in Ojai. Setup at 6:00 PM, event lasts until 10 PM. Contact Chuck for details and directions.

Friday, May 11 – Outreach Observation for Kellogg School at the Drake’s Bay group campsite at El Capitan State Beach. Storyteller at 8:00 PM, astronomy slide show and observation at 9:00 PM. Contact Chuck for details.

Saturday, May 12, 8:30 PM – Monthly Star Party at SBMNH.

Friday, May 18, 8:00 PM – Monthly Public Observation at Westmont College Observatory.

Saturday, May 19, dusk – Dark Sky at Figueroa Mountain and/or West Camino Cielo.

Friday - Monday, May 25-28 – Join the AU contingent at RTMC in Big Bear.

### **Triple Star System in Santa Barbara**

Sharp-eyed AU observers detected the formation of a new triple star on Monday, April 9 at 2:13 PM PDT. The Kim and Steve Schmidt binary system gave birth to a small but bright star of spectral type M named Michael Jonathan, of mass 6 lbs 1 oz and radius 19 inches. Labor and delivery went smoothly. The new star is already accreting mass and is expected to leave orbit in 18 to 20 years. Congratulations to Kim and Steve on their new arrival!

### **Aurora Visible from SB!!!**

On the night of Friday, March 30, a large coronal mass ejection (CME) from a gigantic sunspot region on the Sun impacted the Earth’s atmosphere and caused a dazzling auroral display, seen in California as far south as Palm Springs.

The coastal areas of SB were clouded over, but the aurora was fantastically visible from the Cachuma Lake campgrounds, and probably from the San Marcos Pass area. The entire northern sky to an altitude of 40 degrees was full of reddish curtains and green blobs that gradually changed shape, with whitish spikes that reached to the zenith. The display went on for at least an hour and a half, starting at 10

PM. Smaller displays were seen from the pass on the night of Sunday, April 1.

### **April Meeting**

The April meeting was a forum for members and planning session for future events. Bob Michael agreed to be the mover and shaker for the holiday party in December. Gretchen Brinser will manage the planning for the picnic in June. Jim Billig is producing an AU Members' Handbook, which will contain contact information, star party etiquette, and travel directions to our observing sites

For the camping trip this year, we decided to have two events. On the weekend of September 15-16, we will attend the California Star Party 2001 at Lake San Antonio (<http://www.sjaa.net/calstar2001.html>). For October, we are going to try to get the group campsite at Refugio Beach State Park.



### **Show Up for Astronomy Day!**

It's really an April event, but we still need AU volunteers to show up for the Astronomy Day festivities on Saturday, April 28. Our tents will be set up in Chase Palm Park, across the street from the new Carousel, near the soccer field. We'll have brochures, displays, eclipse viewers, and telescopes set up to observe the Sun and the Moon. It looks like we'll have some nice remaining sunspots from the group that caused the auroras last month. The event runs from noon to 10 PM, and we still need volunteers for the 7-10 PM shift. You don't need a telescope to contribute – just come and share your enthusiasm for astronomy with your Santa Barbara neighbors. Make David Levy proud of you!

#### **AU Information Box**

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#### **SBMNH Astronomy Program Coordinator**

Steve Schmidt 682-4711x316

#### **SBMNH Astronomy Program Tape**

(updated monthly) 682-4711x405

AU AstroNews is the monthly publication of the **Astronomical Unit (AU)**, mailed to the general membership. Contact Chuck before the 20<sup>th</sup> day of the preceding month to contribute to the newsletter.

Current annual membership rates are:

Single	\$15	Family	\$25
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Our address is:

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On the Web: [www.sbau.org](http://www.sbau.org)

<b>May</b>		1	2	Vieja Valley School	3	4	AU Monthly Meeting	5		
		6	7	8	9	Kellogg School	10	Ojai Corp Obs	11	Kellogg at El Capitan
13	Mother's Day	14	15	16	17	18	Westmont Obs	19	Dark Sky	
20	21	Look for Mercury at sunset	22	23	24	25	<b>R</b> Join	26	<b>T</b> us at	
27	<b>M</b> Big	28	<b>C</b> Bear!	29	30	31	<b>2001</b>			

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