



# AU AstroNews

The Newsletter of the Astronomical Unit



September 2009

Sponsored by the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History



*Chuck McPartlin sets up for public stargazing at the Biltmore on an ashy night in August. Photo credit: Ruben Gutierrez.*

## September Talk

Craig Prater, former officer of the AU, was inspired by a previous AU speaker to start travelling to total solar eclipses. Since that inspiration he and his family have travelled to Australia, the South Pacific, Libya, and most recently China to chase and witness solar eclipses. At September's meeting, Craig will share his slides and stories from these eclipse trips, and hopefully inspire you to put an eclipse trip in your vacation plans. The title of Craig's talk is "**Around the World in Search of Total Solar Eclipses.**"

## Outreach Summary

We had a great turnout of both AU volunteers and the stargazing public this August. Since the last newsletter, volunteers Andy Allen, Warren Bitters, Chad Caprio, Sabina & Marciano Chan, Bill Clausen, Tim Crawford, Joe Doyle, Carolyn & Ed Edwards, Mike Farris, Ruben Gutierrez, Art Harris, Jürgen Hilmer, Chris & Eric Larson, Pat & Chuck McPartlin, Edgar Ocampo, Helen Osenga, Colleen & Dennis Pease, Javier Rivera & Samantha Thompson & the Quasars, Nancy Rohrer, David Salvia, John West, Tom Whittemore, Jim Williams,

Paul Winn, Tim Wittenburg showed the night sky to **874** astro customers.

## Outreach for September

AU monthly meetings start up again in September after the summer hiatus. Here are the events scheduled so far for the month. Outreach events are subject to change, so to get the latest information on schedules, or directions, just contact Chuck at 964-8201 or [macpuzl@west.net](mailto:macpuzl@west.net)

### Tuesday, September 1, setup 7:30 PM

Telescope Tuesday at the Camino Real Marketplace in Goleta. We set up in the plaza between Borders and the theater.

### Wednesday, September 2, around 9:50 PM

Jupiter will appear moonless for about an hour and a half, with the four Galilean Moons either in front of or behind the planet from our point of view. Not an outreach event, but it doesn't happen very often (a couple of times per century), so get out and take a peek! Even binoculars will show the moons, or not, in this case.

### Friday, September 4, 7 PM

See a quick planetarium show, then hear about the Shanghai total solar eclipse this year from AU member and moonshadow seeker Craig Prater.

### Saturday, September 5, setup 8 PM

Telescopes for campers at Cachuma Lake Campground. We set up on the grassy field at Dakota Plains.

### Sunday, September 6, setup 7:30 PM

Telescopes for the Bacara, on the Miro Lawn. Contact Chuck for details if you haven't come before.

### Wednesday, September 9, setup 6:30 PM

Telescopes for the Biltmore, on their back lawn. Contact Chuck for details.

**Friday, September 11, setup 8 PM**

Telescopes for campers at Cachuma Lake Campground. We set up on the grassy field at Dakota Plains.

**Saturday, September 12, 5:30 PM**

Planning meeting in the classroom next to Javier's office at SBMNH. Come plan your club's activities. All are welcome.

**Saturday, September 12, 7:30 PM**

Monthly Public Star Party, next to Palmer Observatory at SBMNH.

**Thursday, Sept 17 to Saturday, Sept 19**

Annual CALSTAR star party at Lake San Antonio, in the overflow campsite.

**Friday, September 18, setup 7:30 PM**

Monthly Public Telescope Night at Westmont College. Their new observatory probably won't be operational yet, but we might be setting up scopes next to it instead of the old Carroll Observatory.

**Saturday, September 19, setup 7:30 PM**

Telescopes for Refugio Beach State Campground, in the day use parking lot, at the southwest corner of the park.

**Tuesday, September 22, 2:19 PM**

Autumnal Equinox - It's fall!

**Friday, Sept 25 to Sunday, Sept 27**

Annual AU campout and Starbecue at the Mohawk Shores group campsite at Cachuma Lake. The Starbecue will be a catered event this year on Saturday evening at 5:30 PM. The number of cars we are permitted to have with the site is limited, so carpool or come early if you can. If we run out of permits, and you have to pay at the entrance gate, keep your receipt for reimbursement from the AU.

Remember to reserve early for the Wildlife Cruises!



*Sitting down to dinner after a tiring, but enjoyable outreach.*

**Reflections on a Dark Sky**

*T. Whittemore*

This past summer I had the opportunity to camp at Lassen Volcanic Park during the dark of the Moon. One evening, after dinner, I walked down to Summit Lake, and stopped at its edge. After turning off my headlamp, I looked across the lake at the stars on the southern horizon. Antares and the Precordia popped out of the darkness. The False Comet; Lesath and Shaula pointed the way to Ptolemy's Cluster. To their left appeared the Teapot with its steam of stars hiding the center of our galaxy. Above, the Sagittarius Star Cloud pulsed. Curious, I lowered my eyes to the surface of the lake where the entire southern horizon lay inverted, mirror-like on the still water; absolutely calm, no stars danced. Higher above, the Scutum Star Cloud sparkled subtly on the water's darkness. Reading this inverted star map, I felt a spooky pleasure taking over me; the softness of this light was far more impressive than any direct light. To be honest, it was difficult to leave. Later, as I walked back to my tent, I thought how, if we are lucky, Nature sometimes reveals Her elegance through an occasional simple act.

## **From the President's Pen....**

*Ruben Gutierrez*

Wow, what a summer it was! Despite not having a General Members Meeting in July and August, the AU was still very much involved in Star Party outreach events, distributing "Galileo scopes" to underprivileged children of the community, and keeping in step with International Year of Astronomy 2009. I'm looking forward to our first General Membership Meeting on Friday, September 4th, at 7:00 pm, so we can enjoy a planetarium show, reconnect, and make plans for the future. Speaking of which, September will see the resurgence of Star Parties at the schools, as well as the regularly scheduled ones such as "Telescope Tuesday" at the Camino Real Marketplace. Make sure you keep your AstroNews close by with the listing of the various outreach events for September. One fun event this month is our annual AU Campout at Cachuma Lake, Mohawk Shores, starting on Friday, Sept. 25, through Sunday, Sept. 27. On Saturday, the Country Meat Market will cater our Starbecue dinner that will include barbeque Tri Tip and chicken, garlic bread, and beans; sign up at the September meeting to bring salad, side dish, or dessert to share, and remember to bring your favorite beverage. This event is free to AU members; even the parking is free (we have numerous parking spots, but if you are charged, turn in your receipt and get reimbursed – better yet - car pool). We encourage you to camp both Friday and Saturday nights, but if you can only make it for the barbeque dinner at 5:30 PM, please join us. For those of you who wish to enjoy the 2 hour Wildlife Cruise on the lake, these cruises will be offered on Friday at 3PM, Saturday at 10AM and 3PM, and Sunday at 10AM. Adults are \$15 and kids from 4 to 12 are \$7 (sorry, no children under 4) Reservations can be made weekdays from 10AM to 3PM by calling (805) 686-5050, and after 3PM on Fridays and weekends at (805) 686-5055. See you at the lake!

AU Treasurer Pat McPartlin has not only been busy keeping the Club's books in pristine order and spearheading the 2010 Calendar sales, but has taken on the AU Cap project. Yes, the official AU Cap will be available soon, so keep checking the AstroNews for updates. Pat will also be passing out the sign up sheets for the Holiday Dinner, scheduled for December 10. Remember, the first 40 who sign up will pay just \$30 (the AU will pick up the rest).

After the first 40, you'll have to pay full price off the menu, and won't be able to sit in the banquet room, so don't delay! Pat will also be passing out sign up sheets for one of the final International Year of Astronomy 2009 events - the Avocado festival in Carpinteria with an Astronomy twist (see Did You Know).

Finally, I wish to take a moment to thank Joe Doyle, Tim Crawford, Tom Whittemore, Jim Williams, John Gomm, and Art Harris for their work on the Porter Garden Telescope restoration project. This beautiful and rare telescope was presented to the Santa Barbara Museum of Natural History on August 28th. A more detailed story and photo will be in next month's issue of AstroNews, as well as very exciting other events planned that include a lecture offered at the Museum by the world famous Astronomer Mike Brown! So, stay tuned, get involved with your club, and enjoy astronomy to the fullest!

## **Did You Know?**

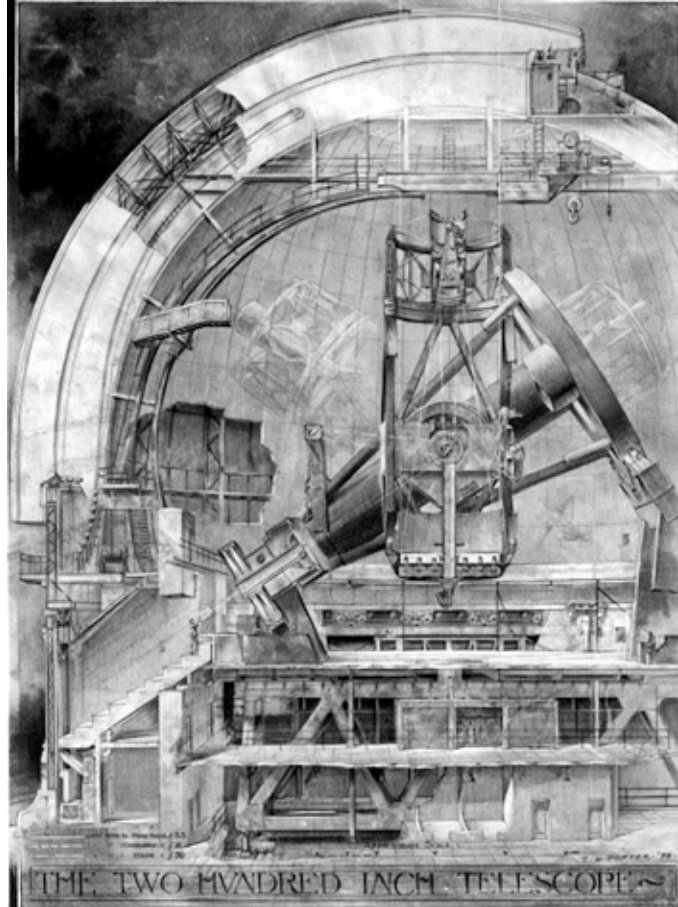
*Ruben Gutierrez*

Santa Barbara County is the third largest avocado producer in North America, with Carpinteria being a major contributor. Because of this, the annual Avocado Festival was launched in 1986. and has been a tremendous success ever since. So, what does this have to do with astronomy and the AU you ask? Well, perhaps there are just as many avocados as there are stars? No, that can't be right! The connection is that the AU will be part of the festival this year on Saturday, October 3rd, from noon to 10PM. We will set up at the end of Linden Avenue, on the lawn, and have a variety of telescopes, displays, hands-on projects by the SB Museum of Natural History, a giveaway of some Galileoscopes, and a great Star Party. Make sure you mark your calendars and enjoy what would be another Astronomical Unit blockbuster!

## **Some History of the Porter Garden Telescope**

The Porter Garden Telescope was designed by Russell W. Porter (1871-1949), a true Renaissance Man from Vermont. He is perhaps best known today for his work on the 200-inch Palomar Telescope, which has a mounting based on his design for the Garden Telescope. He made many cut-away drawings of the Palomar Telescope to

show details of its construction. He was an avid amateur telescope maker, and one of the founders of Stellafane, the first big annual star party.



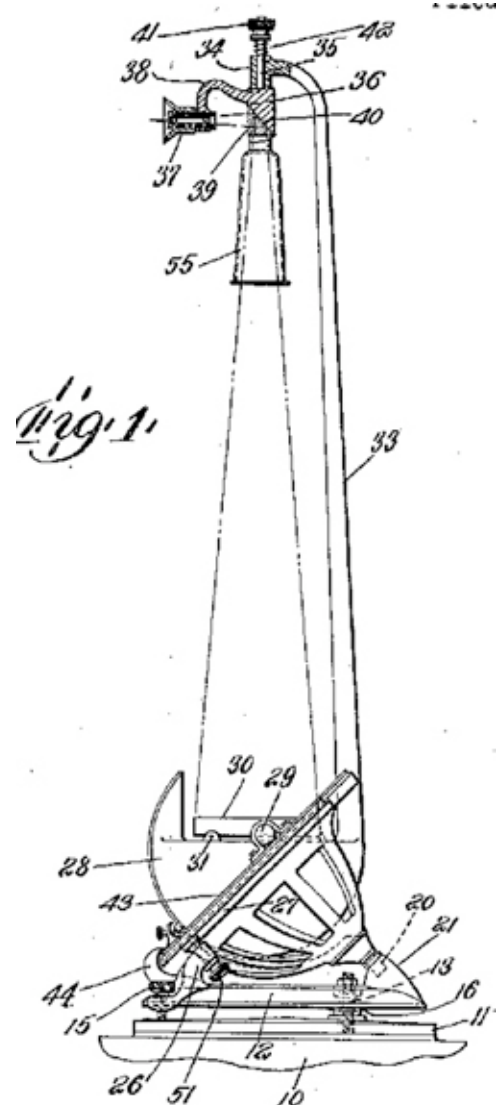
The Garden Telescope was made of statuary bronze, so the major structures could be left out in the garden without fear of corrosion, and was meant to look like a lotus plant when not in use. Fewer than 200 are thought to have been made, and the highest surviving serial number is 53. Ours has serial number 42, but is far from a complete specimen, as you can see from the photo on the right.



Here is an image of the first Stellafane, with Russell Porter standing, second from the right.



Porter made several drawings for his patent application for the design of the Garden Telescope, and here is one showing some of the details.



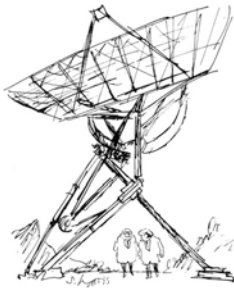
(Historical photos Courtesy of the Springfield Telescope Makers.)

## For Sale

Orion Atlas go-to mount. Excellent condition.  
\$1100. Contact Ken Pfeiffer [keagle10@cox.net](mailto:keagle10@cox.net) or  
call 805-207-5469.

## For Sale

I'm downsizing from my 10" scope to an 8", so up  
for sale are: 10" f/5.5 Newtonian primary mirror  
that has an excellent figure and produces very sharp  
images. Has a few barely-noticeable scratches from  
the previous owner that I believe have no effect on  
the image. \$300. Orion Atlas EQ-G heavy-duty  
German equatorial goto mount with tripod. Includes  
all standard accessories, 4 33-pound  
counterweights, and optional GPS attachment.  
\$800. Andy Allen 805-451-6981  
[andrewstuartallen@gmail.com](mailto:andrewstuartallen@gmail.com)



"There's some light coming from it. We'll just have to assume  
it's a dark gray hole."

## Poet's Corner

*november 12*  
*4:30 a.m.*

On mornings like this, as hours before dawn  
I walk the dark hall of the road  
with my life creaking under my feet, I sometimes  
take hold of the cold porcelain knob  
of the moon, and turn it, and step into a room  
warm and yellow, and take my seat  
at a small wooden table with a border of painted pansies,  
and wait for my mother to bring me my bowl

*november 20*  
*Clear and still, a heavy frost*

The pale gray road lit only by stars.  
A rabbit runs ahead, then stops  
at the edge of the sound of my footsteps,  
then runs ahead and stops again,  
trembling in darkness  
on the cold outer rim of the present.

*Winter Morning Walks*  
*Ted Kooser, Poet Laureate*

## **AU Information Box**

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## **AU Astronomy Information Pager**

**(Leave a short message) 564-9002**

## **SBMNH Astronomy Program Coordinator**

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## **SBMNH Astronomy Program Tape**

Updated monthly 682-4711x405

**AU AstroNews**, the monthly publication of the  
**Astronomical Unit (AU)**, is mailed to the AU  
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next month, submit astronomical items by the 20th  
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## **AU annual membership rates:**


**Single = \$15 Family = \$25**

## **AU mailing address:**

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## September 2009

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1 Camino Real Marketplace 7:30PM	2 Jupiter Moonless!	3	4 AU General Meeting 7PM 	5 Cachuma Lake 8PM
6 Bacara Resort 7:30PM	7	8	9 Biltmore 6:30 PM	10	11 Cachuma Lake 8PM 	12 Planning Meeting 5:30PM SBMNH Star Party 7:30PM
13	14	15	16	17 CalStar!	18 Westmont 7:30PM CalStar! 	19 Refugio State Beach 7:30PM CalStar!
20	21	22 Autumnal Equinox	23	24	25 AU Campout and Starbecue!	26 AU Campout and Starbecue! 
27 AU Campout and Starbecue!	28	29	30			

### The Astronomical Unit

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