

The High Desert Observer

The Bulletin of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

August 2010

President's Message - August 2010



The Sun has finally started to move rapidly southward, crossing the equator even before our September meeting. This give us more time to observe and with the clouds getting ready to move out as monsoon season comes to an end, we will have more nights that we can actually observe.

School is also back in session and the requests for star parties are starting to dribble in. I hope you have all rested up from the spring school star party season and are excited about showing the universe to a whole new group of children. I have never done a survey, but I would not be at all surprised to find that most of us got our interest in astronomy in our childhood, whether we could act on it or not. This is our opportunity to pass on the gift of the sky to a new generation.

We have also received a request to act as hosts for the 2011 Association of Lunar and Planetary Observer annual convention. They have had their convention here in the past, so this would not be a new location to them. If we were to tender an invitation, we would have to be ready to commit a substantial amount of our personal time to planning and running the event.

A.L.P.O. conventions are usually two days long, but we could add a third day for tours of White Sands, Sunspot, and/or Apache Point. There is no specific plan at this point, but the convention usually runs during the summer after school is out. I would like to see if there is a commitment to running this convention. If there is no commitment from a sufficient number of members, we will not offer to host their convention.

Speaking of next year, it is time to start putting together a slate of officers. The first step is to get a nominating committee together. If you would like to chair the nominating committee for 2011, please let me know. I also hope that you will consider running for office. We can always use some "new blood" to step-up and help out the astronomical society.

We need three more speakers for this year, so let us know if you can contribute. We can also use some more articles for the HDO. See you at the meeting for an interesting talk on Navajo Cosmology.

Your Humble President
Bert Stevens

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The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC) is dedicated to expanding public awareness and understanding of the wonders of the universe. ASLC holds frequent observing sessions and star parties and provides opportunities to work on club and public educational projects. Members receive the High Desert Observer, our monthly newsletter, membership in the Astronomical League, including AL's quarterly A.L. Reflector. Club dues are \$30.00 per year, including electronic delivery. Send dues payable to ASLC with an application form or note to: Treasurer ASLC, PO Box 921, Las Cruces, NM 88004

ASLC members are entitled to a \$10.00 discount to Sky and Telescope magazine.

ASLC OFFICERS, 2010

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Next Meeting

Paul Temple will present " Navajo Cosmology: A Sophisticated View of the Universe". Remember studying about Greek gods and goddesses in school? If you liked soap operas then you liked Greek Mythology! Edith Hamilton's book was required reading for many but definitely hard to keep the players straight!

Navajo cosmology on the other hand, is simple and deeply profound. It presents a look at the universe as it is and does so in an entertaining way. The "winter" stories that are told to the children are highly entertaining and have an added element of chaos science as well. The Navajo universe is based on 4's, 4 worlds, 4 sacred directions, 4 sacred rocks and 4 sacred mountains. This blend of 4's weaves together to build the universe as it stands today. Come join us as we explore Navajo Cosmology! We will look at some of the philosophical and aesthetic questions regarding this branch of photography. I will also address some basic design principles that we may apply to astrophotography and if they are relevant to this type of photography. What are the limits this branch of photography imposes if a photo is to be considered acceptable by the astronomy community?

Events

ASLC hosts both a deep sky viewing and imaging at our dark sky location in Upham and a public in-town observing session for the public at the International Delights Cafe. Both sessions begin at dusk. For information on these and other events, please see the ASLC website.

[Http://www.aslc-nm.org](http://www.aslc-nm.org)

The July 17, 2010, Moongaze

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By Jerry McMahan

The July Moongaze was held at the International Delights Cafe. Members present included Chuck Sterling, Steve Shaffer and Jerry McMahan

Chuck brought his 10-inch Meade LX200, Jerry had the 5-inch Meade Maksutov Cassegrain, and Steve brought a 4.5-inch Celestron Newtonian. Steve made the point that he wanted to show people that they could have a good quality telescope without having to spend a great deal of money.

The targets were the just before first quarter, Moon, Venus and Saturn. Venus was showing nearly the same phase as the Moon.

The seeing conditions were good and the early clouds had disappeared. The images of the Moon and Saturn were steady at moderate magnifications. The number of observers was about average. Overall, it was a successful evening.

There was also a star party at the Bethel Second Baptist Church, on Friday, August 6. The kids were prepared for camping out, on the church grounds, complete with tents.

Society members included Jerry Gaber, Steve Shaffer, Chuck Sterling, Ron Kramer, Jerry McMahan, and Bernie Joplin. It was great to see Bernie back in action!

Jerry Gaber brought his home made 16-inch Dobsonian. Steve Shaffer brought a (6-inch?) Dobsonian.

Bernie had a 4.5-inch Dobsonian. Chuck had his 10-inch Meade. Jerry McMahan brought the 5-inch Maksutov. Ron manned two telescopes. One was a hydrogen alpha solar scope and the other was his 5-inch Meade refractor.

The solar scope showed a very spectacular prominence, plus a number of smaller ones. Ron also projected the image of the Sun, with the refractor, showing 3 or 4 sunspots.

Most of the evening was very cloudy with enough breaks in the clouds to show a number of targets, although some were only visible for short periods of time. Objects viewed included Venus, Mars, Saturn, the Ring Nebula (M57), the double star Alberio, the triple system Mizar and Alcor, and the open star cluster M7. Street lights and clouds made it difficult to see other deep sky objects, but the spectators seemed to enjoy what they were able to see.

The Deterioration of the Horn Antenna at Holmdel, NJ.

By Allan F. Cook

The Bell Laboratories Horn Antenna in Holmdel, New Jersey stands as one of the most revered icons of Radio Astronomy and modern cosmology. By virtue of its skillful employment, Arno Penzias and Robert Wilson won the Nobel Prize for Physics for their discovery of the Cosmic Microwave Background Radiation. The same as with Edwin Hubble and the 100 inch Hooker Telescope at Mt. Wilson Observatory, the names Penzias and Wilson are rarely mentioned without a reference to the Horn Antenna. The purpose of this letter is to share, with as many people as possible, the sad story of what has been allowed to happen to this magnificent piece of engineering technology.

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In May of 2010, I made the journey from Cleveland Ohio to Holmdel New Jersey with the sole purpose of seeing the Horn Antenna. What I found on arrival both saddened and maddened me. I found that the antenna had been sadly neglected and allowed deteriorate by those charged with the care of this National Historic Landmark, Alcatel-Lucent Technologies.

Upon returning home, I immediately contacted the National Park Service (NPS) and reported what I had seen. Although the NPS was sympathetic, I was informed that they have no enforcement power to assure that any landmark is actually maintained. They can make suggestions but it is up to the individual caretakers as to what recommendations they follow and which they ignore. This revelation came as a real surprise to me! My complaint did result in an ad hoc coat of paint and a few repairs but what is really needed is an on-going maintenance schedule. I heard nothing of plans for such a schedule. Without this commitment the Horn Antenna will inevitably return to the same, or worse, condition than it was in when I encountered it.



Faced with the above reality, I contacted the Smithsonian Institute to gauge their interest in acquiring the Horn Antenna as an exhibit. They informed me that both they and the National Radio Astronomy Observatory, in Green Bank, West Virginia, were previously and are currently interested in obtaining, and caring for, the antenna. The main obstruction to either organization making this acquisition was Alcatel-Lucent Technologies' reluctance to donate the item. The very people entrusted with the Horn Antenna's wellbeing are neither willing to providing the necessary care required by the antenna nor are they willing to give it to anyone who would be willing, and in an excellent position, to do so. These facts have moved me beyond frustration.

I have reached the point where I don't think that there is anything else that I, as an individual, can do to achieve my goal of having the Horn Antenna restored to and maintained in the condition that it was in when so adroitly used by Penzias and Wilson. Perhaps if others, who share my passion for astronomy and history, became aware of the situation and became, even peripherally involved, a momentum could be created that would change the dynamics of what is now a static situation. To this end, I am sending this letter to the many places that I am certain that my passion is shared, the astronomy clubs throughout the United States. I ask that you post this letter on your web site, include it in your newsletters and disseminate the information in any manner you have at your disposal. I also ask that as many people as possible contact Alcatel-Lucent Technologies in France and the United States and encourage them to donate the Horn Antenna to either the Smithsonian Institute or the National Radio Astronomy Observatory. Finally, I ask that these same people contact the National Park Service and share our concern with them.

It is my hope that someday, in the near future, I will be able to, again, visit the Horn Antenna but under the conditions such a historic instrument has earned and deserves.

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Minutes, July 2010 ASLC General Meeting

By John McCullough, Secretary, ASLC

Call to Order:

Bert Stevens, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC), called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm., 23 July 2010, Rm. 77, Dona Ana Community College Las Cruces, New Mexico.

President's Comments:

Bert Stevens welcomed the group and recognized new members and/or visitors present. Stanley Fleury is attending his first meeting. He is interested in astrophotography and has a 4" SCT.

Secretary's Report:

The minutes for the June meeting were published in the most recent issue of the Society newsletter, the High Desert Observer (HDO). Fred Pilcher moved to dispense with reading the minutes; Steve Barkes seconded. The motion passed with one objection. There was not an additional Secretary's report.

Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer provided a report on the status of the Society's accounts. She stated that she is somewhat concerned about the lag in members' renewing their memberships on time and submitting their dues. There was not an additional Treasurer's report.

Committee Reports:

Observatory Committee:

Rich Richins, Committee Chairman, did not have an update on the status of the Society observatory proposed for Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP). The current park manager seems reluctant to have the observatory, as proposed, as a part of LDSP. The questions about a new water treatment facility in the adjacent area affecting the quality of viewing at the park appear moot for the present.

Apparel Committee:

Ron Kramer, Committee Chairman, was not present at this month's meeting. An update on apparel sales and availability was not provided.

Outreach Committee:

Ron Kramer, Outreach Coordinator, was not present at this month's meeting (see above): A star party in August has been requested but an update will be required when Ron returns to Las Cruces.

Loaner Telescope Program:

Janet Stevens, Committee Chair, reported she still needs input to establish the status of Society-owned telescope eyepieces. She would like to post a plea for donations, either of actual eyepieces or of funds to purchase eyepieces for the Loaner program, on the Society's website.

There were no additional committee reports.

Old Business:

There was no old business discussed.

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New Business:

There was no new business for discussion.

Janet Stevens offered a motion to adjourn; Fred Pilcher seconded. The motion passed and the business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 7:46 pm.

Announcements:

Items for Sale:

No items were announced for sale.

Recognitions/Achievements:

ALCon (Astronomical League Convention) 2010 – Bert and Janet Stevens attended this year's event in Tucson, AZ. The Astronomical League (AL) is in touch with the National Park Service (NPS) about holding ALCon 2011 at Bryce Canyon National Park. The proposed dates are 30 June, 1-2 July 2011. Rooms, camping and RV sites will be available at Ruby's Inn, UT, altitude 8200 feet. An observing site at 9000 feet will be available to ALCon attendees.

Program Presenters - Kirby Benson needs presentations for the rest of this year. Articles for the HDO are always needed.

Webmaster – Society Webmaster responsibilities are transitioning from Rich Richins to Steve Barkes.

There were no additional announcements made.

Presentation:

The July program was “Art & Astrophotography – Is It Art or Is It Science?” by Society member and Vice President Kirby Benson. Kirby looked at some of the philosophical and aesthetic questions regarding this branch of photography. He also addressed some of the basic design principles of fine art that may be applied to astrophotography and if they are relevant to this type of photography. Finally, he posed the question of what the limits this branch of photography impose if a photo is to be considered acceptable by the astronomical community.

This presentation was not recorded for rebroadcast on the Internet. Other meeting presentations can be accessed on the web at <http://www.aicsresearch.com/lectures/aslcnm/>.

The July 2010 monthly meeting concluded at 8:40 pm.

-Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary

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Calendar of Events July-August (MDT)

Aug. 24	11:05 a.m.	Full Moon
Sept. 01	11:22 a.m.	Last Quarter Moon
01	12 p.m.	Venus 1.2 degrees south of Spica
04	8 a.m.	Mars 2.0 degrees north of Spica
08	4:30 a.m.	New Moon
14	11:50 p.m.	First Quarter Moon
17		Deadline for the September HDO
19	12 p.m.	Mercury greatest distance west of the Sun (18 degrees)
21	6 a.m.	Jupiter at opposition
22	1 p.m.	Uranus 0.9 degrees north of Jupiter
22	9:09 p.m.	September Equinox, Autumn begins
23	3:17 a.m.	Full Moon
24		ASLC General Meeting

Be sure to visit our web site for the latest updates: <http://www.aslc-nm.org>

ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY of Las Cruces
PO Box 921
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ASLC - Sharing the Universe
With Our Community
for Over 50 Years

