



The High Desert Observer

The Bulletin of The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

January, 2006

New President's Opening Note:

Having been elected again to head up our highly successful ASLC, I was wondering what to say in my "incoming remarks". We are a very active and highly successful organization, thus what more is there to say, but "let's keep up the good work". Let's not slack up on all our contributions to our common enjoyment of our hobby and the fine spirit at our dark outings and our lit up monthly meetings!!! We do need to give our hard working and somewhat burned out past officers some rest, namely _we need a newsletter editor_, so let's hear from some of you who may not be very active otherwise. Here is your chance to do some good and also to hone your skills in e-publishing. My phone is 522-5754; give me a call. Rich has done a super job of President and Publisher all at once, thanks Rich, but we now need someone else.

I would like to revisit the prospect of an ASLC observatory during the next year, or consider the possibility of taking over the A-Mountain Observatory, with a public outreach program. I think that we may have a chance to bring this off, but would need to have a good discussion among the membership on how much we can do as a volunteer organization. I will try to start our discussions in February, during our monthly meeting.

Again, thanks for putting your trust in me to steer our ASLC for the next year. Let's keep up the high enthusiasm you all have demonstrated

Your Pres. VinceD.....



January Meeting: The Spaceport in Our Future by Joshua Neubert

Our Jan. 23rd meeting speaker will be Joshua Neubert from the Las Cruces office of the X-Prize Foundation. He will speak not only on their plans to keep the commercial space launch program going, but will also tell us what he knows about the Upham Space Port development, and how this may affect our favorite dark sky site. He has set aside one 8in. MEADE LX-200 telescope, donated by MEADE, for ASLC, and I presume he will present it to us during the January meeting.

Upcoming ASLC Events

Please see the ASLC website <aslc-nm.org> for more information

- January 7 New Telescope Owners Clinic
- January 7 MoonGaze (International Delights)
- January 27 ASLC Monthly Meeting
Speaker: Joshua Neubert (XPrize)
- January 28 DSO at Upham
- February 4 MoonGaze (International Delights)
- February 21 Stargazing Classes Begin

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Beginner's Corner Evolves into ASTRO TIDBITS!!

by Nils Allen

To start out the new year with a bang, I feel that a new title is needed to reflect a new focus for our pre-meeting novice training get-together. For now I'll call it Astro-Tidbits (feel free to suggest a better name), since I really want to use this time to present short topics (thus of limited depth) of possible interest to both novice & journeyman astronomers. Labeling & focusing this time just for 'beginners' might unnecessarily restrict those who can benefit - we have many members who aren't beginners anymore but could definitely learn from the topics we will present. I certainly know that even years after I got involved in this 'hobby', I learned a lot from programs aimed at fairly inexperienced amateurs, especially since almost any of us could be considered novices in certain subject areas.

So now you might want to give a little more attention to what the upcoming topic for Astro Tidbits will be each month - you just may find something you would like to learn more about!

Our January topic will be somewhat unusual but timely - Astro Highlights for 2006. We'll be looking at this year's noteworthy sky events (night & day) to plan for, as well as other amateur astronomer activities to be considering, mostly in our area. So bring a pocket calendar 'cause you might just want to make some entries that will astronomically shape your year! See ya... - Nils

The ASLC Beginner's Corner meets at 7:00 pm in room 77 of the main DABCC branch

New Telescope Owners Clinic

The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces held its annual New Telescope Clinic on January 7, 2006 at Veterans' Park on Roadrunner. This annual event is receiving increasing interest from local new telescope owners. The mission of the event was to help new owners (or owners whose telescopes have gathered a lot of dust since last use) quickly learn how to get the most out of their telescopes and to answer questions by participants. The larger mission is to try to reinforce the use of New Scopes so they will not just gather dust, and to introduce "astro-rookies" to the wonders of the hobby of amateur astronomy.



Nearly a dozen new owners attended the event. Each was helped by one or more members of the ASLC. Questions varied from "now that I have this thing what do I do with it?" to very specific questions about capacities of particular telescope models.

It was a beautiful clear mid-winter day and several folks stayed around to see the moon through Nils' Vince's new 13 inch reflector with Dobsonian mount (affectionately referred to as a "canon" by a passerby). A few photos are attached taken during the New Telescope Clinic.



- Tim Barnett-Queen

ASLC Educational Programs Jump Into High Gear

by Nils Allen

Well, spring is here (at least the DABCC Spring semester!) and that means our classes for beginners will start shortly. Hopefully we'll have enough students sign-up for the classes to 'make' this semester - that didn't happen last fall. Perhaps you could help by spreading the word about our courses to someone you know, or put a note on a public bulletin board, etc. (when successful these classes have generated some nice club income!). So look on the club website <aslcnm.org. for the pertinent info, and/or ask me for some flyers.

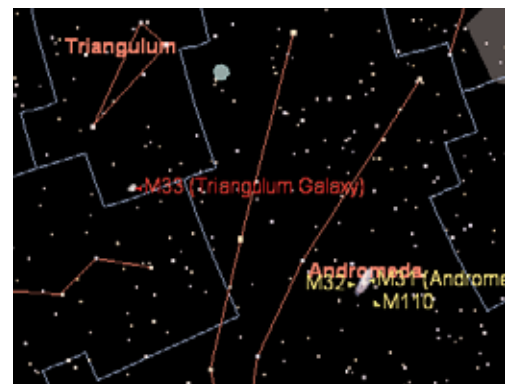
This go-round we are dividing our usual 8-week course into two courses, to see if that might stimulate enrollment. It's all part of fine-tuning our educational offerings to hopefully make them more competitive with all the other interests out there vying for people's time & energy. This is not an insignificant venture, since the future of our Society may well depend on this slow but steady source of new recruits! SO DO WHAT YOU CAN TO HELP OUT. I welcome all questions, comments, contributions, etc, etc.

- Nils, your Education Chairman (for life, I guess)

As Far as I Can See

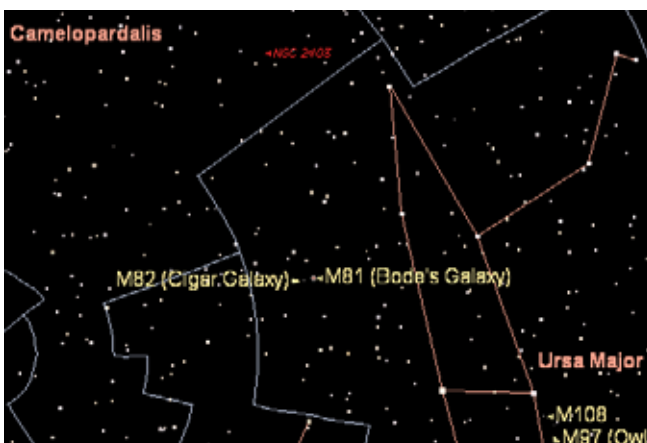
by Joseph Mancilla

Now that winter is here and we are facing away from our galactic center, it is a good time to hunt down galaxies. Our first stop is M33 in Triangulum. At 62' x 39' it is huge. Now the combined mag. of 5.7 can be misleading because the surface brightness is so low being spread out over such a large area. Very low power is advisable. 20x to 45x will do. Binoculars are even better. You can frame the galaxy better with binoculars. At our dark site at Upham on a good night you can see it with your naked eye.



Our next two galaxies are winter showpieces. M81 and M82 in Ursa major. M81 is listed at mag. 6.9 and 25.7'x14.1'. Visually in small scopes it looks smaller because we see mostly the bright condensed core. In 8" or larger apertures we can see more of the spiral arms. M82 is listed at mag. 8.4 and 11.2'x4.6'. This galaxy takes higher power well. At high power (100x-200x) we see a very disturbed looking galaxy especially in the center where we suspect some sort of cosmic train wreck. If you are at high power, switch back over to M81. It will look smaller than M82 because most of the perimeter seems to wash out at higher powers. Now switch to low

power and compare the two. M81 will definitely seem larger.



Our last galaxy is in Camelopardalis. (Carmelo-what?) This constellation is the black hole of constellations. Located in the northern gap of sky above Auriga between R.A. hours 4 to 8. NGC 2403 resides there and if you are pretty good at star-hopping, this will test your wares. Listed at mag. 8.4 and 17.8'x 11.0'. It is a fine looking galaxy well worth the hunt. It is only about 8 million light years away (same as M81 and M82). Happy hunting. *Joseph*

January Sky Map

Chart shows positions of objects at about 9 pm (MST) for mid January, about 8 pm for late January and about 7 pm for mid February. Additional maps are available from the club website.



Jan 6



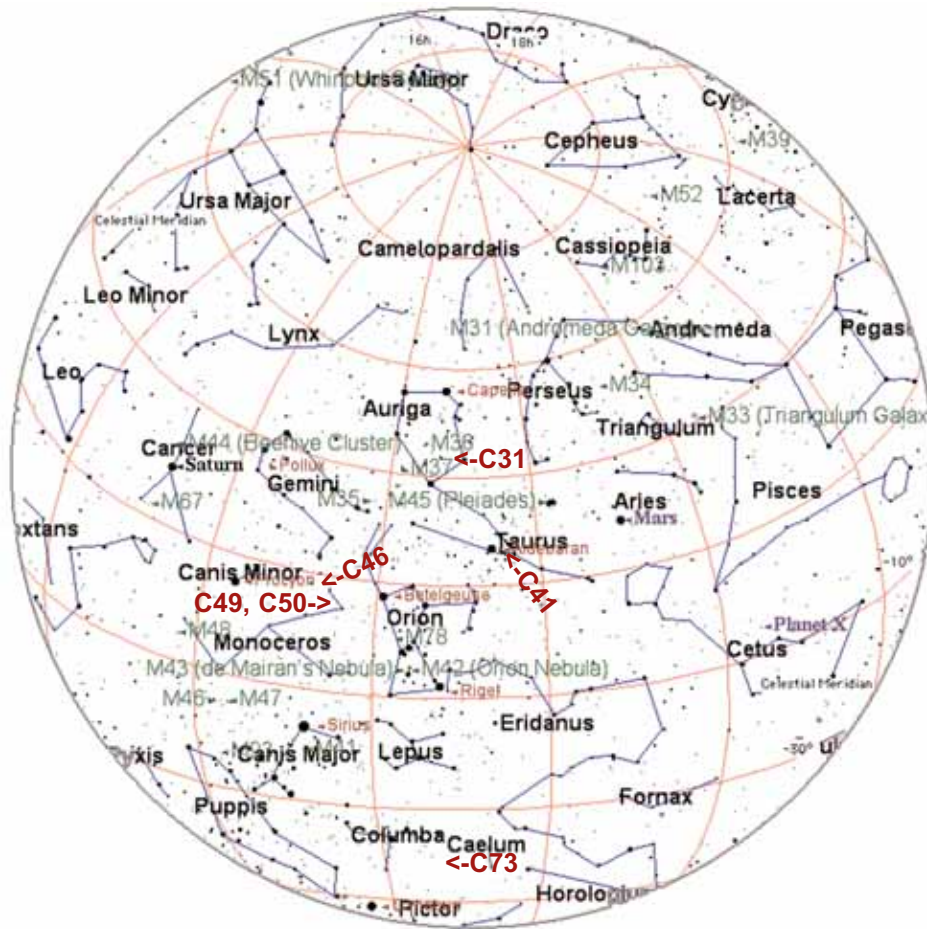
Jan 14



Jan 22



Jan 29



Mars



In Aries
Mag. -0.13
Rises about 12:30 pm

Jupiter



In Libra
Mag. -1.9
Rises about 2 am

Saturn



In Cancer
Mag. -0.17
Rises about 6 pm

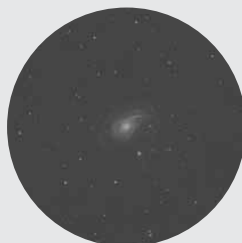
Astronomy Calendar

Dates are MDT. Please see the ASLC website
<aslc-nm.org> for more information

January 3	Quadrantids Meteors Peak
January 13	Venus at Inf. Conjunction
January 26	Mercury at Sup. Conjunction
January 27	Saturn at Opposition

November's Challenge

NGC772 is a beautiful, nearly face-on, irregular galaxy in the often overlooked constellation, Aries. Visually, it looks a bit like M109.



January/February Caldwell Tour

- 1) C41 (Open Cluster in Taurus, 0.5)
04H, 27m, 00s; +16°, 00' (Tau)
- 2) C73 (NGC1851, Glob, 7.3)
05H, 14m, 06s; -40°, 03' (Col)
- 3) C31 (IC405, Neb)
05H, 16m, 12s; +34°, 16' (Aur)
- 4) C49 (NGC2237-9)
06H, 32m, 18s; +05°, 03' (Mon)
- 5) C50 (NGC2244, Open, 4.8)
06H, 32m, 24s; +04°, 52' (Mon)
- 6) C46 (NGC2261, Neb)
06H, 39m, 12s; +08°, 44' (Mon)

Joseph's Challenge - IC2118
Dneb (Eri) 05H, 06m, 54s; -07°, 13"

Spring Telescope-Making Workshop is a GO!

The outlook for this spring's workshop is good, mostly due to publicity efforts of several of our die-hard public-outreach-minded members! We have a long list of potential candidates, and maybe a dozen names



from other sources. There always seems to be more interest in this workshop than our beginning astronomy classes, but that's the world we live in...people just want something they can touch & keep. They must believe that having a decent telescope will open up the heavens for them, though we know that it really works better to acquire basic astronomical knowledge & naked-eye experience first. But the bottom line is - you gotta give folks what they want, so I do that. Then I try like heck to convince them that they won't realize much from their investment of time & \$\$ in the scope unless they participate in some of our education-related activities (which is true, unless they learn very well on their own, which seems rare these days). That's been my plan from the beginning - since the scopes we build are as basic as they get, the smarts to get them pointed at objects that they will enjoy seeing must come from the operator (and not an Autostar controller or the like). So really the workshop and the beginners classes are meant to go hand-in-hand. It's quite a deal -- in 2 months you have a custom-built scope that you know how to use to enjoy the night sky, all for about \$175. Sure wish this sort of program was

available when I started out in this hobby! Anyway, better get off my soapbox now...

So here are the particulars for the upcoming workshop (the 7th or 8th one, can't remember which) We start with a short overview briefing (probably on March 29th) that will explain everything. Then the construction occurs over 3 Saturday building sessions, each 4-5 hours long, on April 1, 8, and 15. It's important for folks who might be interested to mark these dates on their calendars now or they probably won't be available! The cost is still \$85, which provides a complete kit, instructions, most tools, a place to work, and instructor assistance. The builders provide the labor & paint/stain/decorations of their choice.

Remember, this is a great partner project - so we encourage builders to bring a child, grandchild, spouse, or whoever! Updated info will be posted on the ASLC website - spread the word if you know anyone who might be interested!



LAST MINUTE ADDENDUM -- I am working on a plan to provide an abbreviated ONE-day workshop also, either in mid-March or early May. I have acquired some factory-fresh Meade 4.5" OTAs that could be interfaced with the usual Workshop plywood mounts and thus quickly turned into nice small Dobsonians - this will allow the folks who can't or won't dedicate 3 Saturdays to the standard workshop to 'build' a telescope too! Be watching for more info!

- Nils

The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC)...

... is dedicated to expanding members and 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 *ASLC Bulletin*, our monthly newsletter, membership in The Astronomical League, including AL's quarterly *A.L. Reflector*. Club dues are \$35 per year. Those opting to receive the *ASLC Bulletin* electronically, receive a \$5 membership discount. Send dues, payable to A.S.L.C. with an application form or a note to: Treasurer ASLC, PO Box 921, Las Cruces, NM 88004

ASLC members are entitled to a \$10 discount on subscriptions to *Sky and Telescope* magazine. S&T subscribers MUST subscribe and renew through the Society Treasurer for the special club rate. To avoid a lapse in delivery, this must be done when S&T sends their reminder, 4 months in advance.

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Dave's Astrophotography Corner

This Month: Zeta Ophiuchi Region

I thought I'd try something a little different this time around. I'm going to share a recent image and just talk a little bit about both the image region and the capture/processing technique.

The star centered in the large red emission nebula is zeta Ophiuchi, one of the more famous "runaway stars" which is believed to have been violently ejected from binary-star system when its companion star went supernova around a million years ago. Radiation from this extremely hot type O star is exciting the large emission nebula (SH 2-27) surrounding it. This dim nebula was the subject of the image and a challenging target due to its low surface brightness.

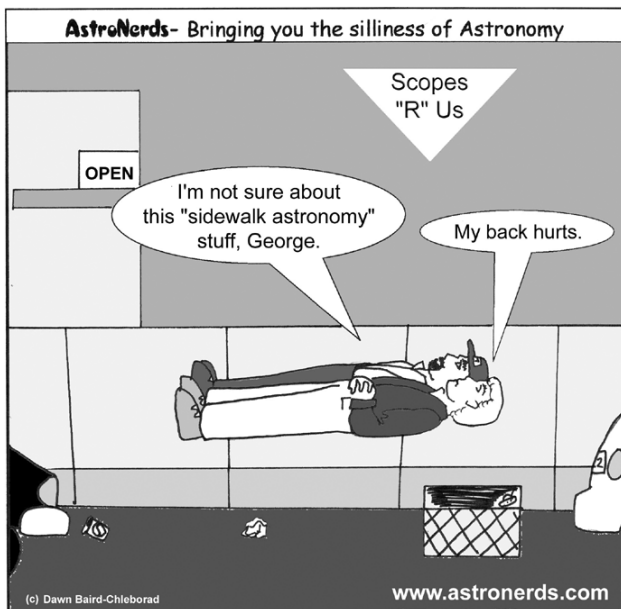
I first saw the SH 2-27 in a wide-field Milkyway photograph last year and set out to capture it last summer after searching and only finding only a few images of it. (A rare prize!) The image below was taken using a Pentax 6x7 medium format film camera and 105mm f/2.4 lens @ f/4 using Kodak E200 slide film pushed one stop in processing. The camera was mounted piggyback on my LX200 and autoguided using a webcam and GuideDog. The nebula was barely detectable in the initial scan and I realized that it was woefully under-exposed at 45 minutes. I sent the slide into Tony Hallas (<http://www.astrophoto.com/>) to have it rescanned and he was able to pull out much more detail. After some aggressive processing I was able to achieve the result below.



This is an incredibly beautiful region that I hope to revisit this summer. I plan to double the exposure time to get better contrast and lower the field to fully capture the colorful rho Oph region at the bottom of the image.

Film isn't dead yet...

- Dave



By-Law Amendment Fails

The vote for the proposed amendment synchronizing membership anniversaries for ASLC members resulted in a tie. A simple majority was needed to pass the measure; therefore, the measure has failed to pass. We will continue to have random membership anniversaries.

Thanks to all who participated.

- rr

ASLC IMAGE GALLERY



M42 - The Orion Nebula imaged by Rich through his ED80 and modified 300D



Orion Sword Region - Image by Dave Dockery. Widefield image using an unmodified 300D and 100mm f/2 lens at f2.5



M13 Bloopers by Steve Smith. Steve writes, "I went inside to brew a pot of coffee and the autoguider lost the guide star".

**ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
of Las Cruces, New Mexico**
PO Box 921, Las Cruces, NM 88004



*ASLC - Sharing the Universe
With Our Community for
Over 50 Years*