

The High Desert Observer

The Bulletin of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

July, 2008



President's Preamble

How's everyone enjoying the monsoon? Boy, what a change from the clear dry skies we had for so long! Bonnie and I did manage to take part in the Grand Canyon Star Party at the end of June, just before the moisture arrived in northern Arizona. Back home, I heard that Storyteller Steve did a super job presenting our TSP experience at the meeting last month, including some tall Texas tales! And many thanks to Jerry for leading the meeting in my absence!

More congratulations are due! Our webmaster, Sheriff Rich, has just been recognized for creating the 3rd best website amongst all Astronomical League societies - another strong showing for the ASLC. Apparently third scored just a tad lower than first, so we rank up there with some big name clubs! Let Rich know you appreciate his dedication to serving our Society and help him out with good content when you can!



Nils Allen

I hope by now you've heard about *Astronomy*'s "Out-of-this-World Award" we are pursuing. I still need documentation. Requests for pictures, media clippings, promo flyers, etc., have had little response - don't ya'll have any stuff like that? My mailing deadline is July 17, so please act quick. Anything that clearly shows ASLC public outreach efforts in the last year or so will help. \$2500 sure wouldn't hurt our observatory outreach program!

Speaking of our observatory project, have you heard the latest? Jerry finally received three printed copies of his "updated" drawings back, stamped as approved by our NM Certified Engineer. Whoopee! Now that we've passed through that sticky wicket, we can press forward.

- Our first potential joint activity with the Sun City Astronomers didn't pan out - it was to be Moongaze on the July 12. The good ol' monsoon caused poor sky conditions and the El Paso guys wisely decided not to head up here. But where there's a will, there's a way!
- Going to and returning from the GCSP was real interesting... heading over we met with Bill Logan, author of the story about R. Burnham, Jr., in the last *HDO* – he's a skilled astronomer and much more. Likewise on the way back we had an unexpected meeting in Datil, NM, with a determined Texas astronomer. George isn't the only one dreaming of a new super-dark star party up there. More in the August *HDO*.
- Congratulations are due! Jerry G. and Dave D. - each added a "new" 14-inch scope to their equipment stables. Can't wait to see images from and/or views through these babies!
- Second order? Don't forget to give your club-logo apparel requests to Steve Henderson.

Stellar Stargazin'! (just use those cloud filters...) -- Nils

Next Meeting

The next monthly meeting will be held July 25 at 7:30pm in the usual place (Main Campus of the Dona Ana Community College, room 77). The speaker this month will be Tom Krajci who will speak on “Photometry - you too can do real science.”

The Astro Tidbits Group (contact: Rich Richins) will meet prior to the July meeting at 7pm to discuss collimation techniques. The Imagers Group (contact: Rich Richins) prior to the August meeting. Anyone is welcome to attend these special interest group pre-meetings.

Other events planned for July and early August include:

Dark Sky Observing at the Upham dark sky site, Saturday, August 2

MoonGaze, August 9

Please see the ASLC website for further information (<http://www.aslc-nm.org>).

What the Hell is Astrobiology?!

By Wirt Atmar

George has asked me write a few articles on the subject of astrobiology, and this will be the first in that series.

The complaint leveled against astrobiology has remained the same for forty years now: astrobiology is an area of study without a known subject. George Gaylord Simpson, one of the most highly regarded evolutionary biologists of the twentieth century, famously wrote in an issue of the prestigious journal *Science* in 1964: “this ‘science’ has yet to demonstrate that its subject matter exists!”

Yet even though the discovery of a second, independent genesis of life elsewhere in the universe may remain decades away, astrobiology will still nonetheless profoundly change our views of the evolution of life on Earth. Geology was the science that informed and transformed biological thought during Darwin’s time. Comparative planetology, although a new field of inquiry, will do the same during ours.

Speculating on the evolution of life in the universe has always been a risky business, and one not always highly regarded. Two hundred and fifty years ago, when the first thoughts that the formation of the planets must have occurred by natural means in the two competing cosmogenies of Buffon and Laplace, rather than as part of a supernatural command, the ideas were met with at best only tepid enthusiasm. Indeed Thomas Jefferson, our most intellectual and erudite president, wrote fifty years later, in 1804, “Dreams about the modes of creation, ... [are] too idle to be worth a single hour of any man’s life.”

Almost certainly Simpson and Jefferson would now change their minds when confronted with the possibilities of the discoveries that await us. Life, up until recently, has always been a property unique to the planet Earth. It really hasn’t been considered in any other context. But we are now beginning an extraordinary new voyage of discovery: we are beginning to take a galactic survey of planets, at least in our very small region of the Milky Way. Because of this, we are beginning to get a sense of the diversity of planetary systems possible.

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The notion that the universe is populated by inhabited worlds is certainly not new. Giordano Bruno wrote in 1584, “There are countless suns and countless earths all rotating around their suns in exactly the same way as the seven planets of our system. We see only the suns because they are the largest bodies and are luminous, but their planets remain invisible to us because they are smaller and non-luminous. The countless worlds in the universe are no worse and no less inhabited than our Earth...”

➤So far the results have been less than promising. The planetary systems we’re finding would seem incapable of supporting life in general, and certainly not the kind of life we see here on the Earth. But those results have been greatly biased by the detection technologies we’ve devised so far.

We are now embarking on a new series of Voyages of Discovery, reminiscent of Magellan, Cook, and Darwin, but at a speed unparalleled in prior history. We are now discovering new planets at a rate of three to six a month. But we’ve just begun. It’s been estimated that contained within the 10 parsec (32.6 ly) radius sphere surrounding Earth that there should be 30,000 planets. Some of these planets will almost certainly harbor life, and their discovery will transform evolutionary biology - if for no other reason than we are certain to be surprised.

Prior to 1995, we had no evidence of any planets outside of our own solar system. Because we were limited to just this one instance, we attempted to extract every bit of information we could from its existence. The resulting story we told ourselves was both intricate and convincing: the planets that formed near the central star were terrestrial in nature (Mercury, Venus, Earth, and Mars), stony iron planets that had their gaseous volatiles scrubbed clean by a constant solar wind. Only when the planets formed further out would they be allowed to become either the gas giants (Jupiter and Saturn) or the icy planets (Uranus and Neptune).

But the first extrasolar planets discovered were far from Earth-like. They were “hot Jupiters,” orbiting just off the surface of their suns in 4-day years, something we did not even believe was possible. Indeed, we still don’t believe that these planets could have formed where they are. Current thought has these planets migrating inward in billion-year trips.

The method by which these planets were discovered heavily biased the initial discoveries to finding these close-in Jupiters. We watched the light emanating from the central star being shifted from blue to red and back again in a periodic motion as these unseen massive planets jerked their suns around with each orbit, but this “radial velocity” method is far too insensitive to detect Earth-sized planets, especially at orbital distances similar to the Earth’s. The planets we’ve discovered to date by this method are by necessity large.

To correct that deficiency, we are now in the process of building a number of spacecraft designed to be able to detect Earth-like planets. One of these missions is the Terrestrial Planet Finder. Another is the Kepler satellite. But these are just a few of the tools we’ve been able to devise so far, and the “science without ➤”

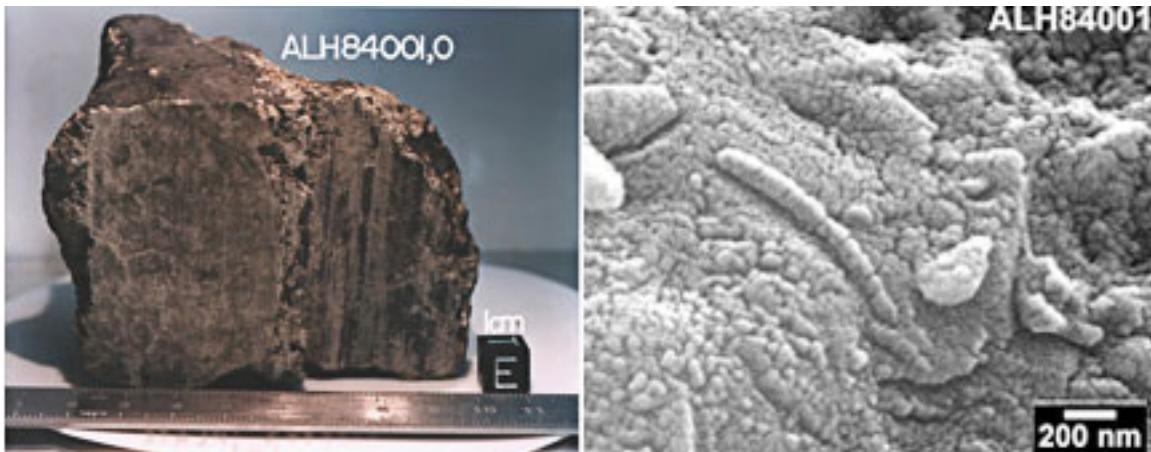
►a subject” has already proven itself to be one of the intellectually exciting and revolutionary adventures we’ve ever undertaken.

David Grinspoon of the Denver Museum of Nature and Science explains a bit of that excitement in this short excerpt from his 2003 book, *Lonely Planets: a natural history of alien life*:

“True story: During the First Astrobiology Science Conference at NASA’s Ames Research Center in April 2000, President Clinton was, by coincidence, landing at the adjacent Moffett Field Air Base, where Air Force One parks when the president comes to the San Francisco area. In a scene right out of *The X-Files*, one of his Secret Service men, who had stopped a suspicious-looking scientist, was heard to shout anxiously into his walkie-talkie, ‘*What the HELL is astrobiology!?*’...”

Increasingly..., astrobiology has become the public face of NASA, in press releases, schools, TV documentaries, and museum exhibits - astrobiology is the new hook. Across a wide spectrum of activities, aliens are in at NASA, like never before...

What happened was that Dan Goldin, NASA’s administrator at the time, took heed of the lavish press coverage [of ALH84001] and the enthusiastic public reaction to these discoveries. Halfway through his nine-year tenure at NASA (1992 to 2001), Goldin seemed convinced that exobiology, rechristened as astrobiology, should largely define NASA’s mission and public image. We were given a green light to write press releases and funding proposals highlighting the question of alien life.



Allan Hills 84001 (ALH84001) is the meteorite from Mars that changed the course of NASA. What initiated this profound change was the discovery of the structures in the right image. Were these created by living processes? They look bacterial, but they are very much smaller than Earth bacteria, and the controversy concerning their origins remains one of the most intense in planetary astronomy.

It helped that, by the nineties, the second generation of planetologists was becoming well established in the field. Astrobiology may at times have been falsely hyped as a scientific revolution or a brand-new discipline, but it is a refreshing and encouraging development. A revolution really is going on - not a scientific revolution, but a revolution in the culture of science, one that is healthy for science in a number of ways.

First, the biocentric tilt of NASA allows us to come clean about our true reasons for wanting to explore and understand the cosmos. Questions about life in the universe have always been behind our exploration of space. We just haven’t always been free or willing to admit it. Of equal significance, astrobiology is bringing our space research more into line with the public’s desires for NASA. You could look at this as ►►

➤merely improved marketing, but NASA administrators are encouraging us to pay more attention to what people respond to. As well we should. It is your tax dollars that pay for our science and exploration. We need to avoid [pandering] or [issuing] near reruns of press releases to boost our ratings, but by focusing on the question of life we are giving people what they want.

Astrobiology's certain radical potential is in the way it bucks two deep trends in modern science. One is the tendency, in recent decades, for science (like everything else) to become much more market-driven. Profit is hot. Pure knowledge is not. An increasing portion of research is corporate-funded, which often blurs the scientific ethics. Particularly in the biosciences, corporate support has led to troubling conflicts of interest between scientists' pursuit of knowledge for the sake of humanity and the pursuit of private gain.

Swimming against this stream is astrobiology. It is not for profit and can't pretend otherwise. We explore space for reasons that are romantic and idealistic. The universe beckons. We want to go because we want to know. With astrobiology there is no fronting the rationale is practical or the benefits material - we do it out of curiosity and longing, to satisfy the human need to know the cosmos that spawned us. Fancy that: a scientific movement that is justified on fundamentally spiritual grounds.

There may be no turning back. NASA has thrown itself into astrobiology, and our administrators have let the planetary science community know that we are to be astrobiologists. We need the biologists now. By making ourselves dependent on astrobiology, we placing a lot of trust in that relationship. This is no longer a flirtation - we're committed to an ongoing dance with biology. A divorce at this time would be messy, embarrassing, and costly.

One cool thing about planetology has always been the chance to learn a lot of different kinds of science. Now this includes biology, too. For this reason I love going to astrobiology conferences. You never know what you're going to hear. The official support for astrobiology is making scientists braver in attempting to bridge disciplines. I say 'attempting' because we're out of practice at being interdisciplinary, and so there is an aggravating side to it, too. The enticingly eclectic mixture of disciplines can also be a recipe for frustration because we don't all speak the same language. All scientific conferences provide a mixture of fun and exasperation. Astrobiology conferences have more of both."

Next Month: Astronomy's Impact on Biology

Brightest Star in the Galaxy Has New Competition

From NASA (<http://www.nasa.gov/home/>)

If our galaxy, the Milky Way, were to host its own version of the Olympics, the title for the brightest known star would go to a massive star called Eta Carina. However, a new runner-up - now the second-brightest star in our galaxy - has been discovered in the galaxy's dusty and frenzied interior. NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope shows the new silver medalist in the central region of our Milky Way.

Dubbed the "Peony nebula" star, this blazing ball of gas shines with the equivalent light of 3.2 million suns. The reigning champ, Eta Carina, produces the equivalent of 4.7 million suns worth of light - though astronomers say these estimates are uncertain, and it's possible that the Peony nebula star could be even brighter than Eta Carina. If the Peony star is so bright, why doesn't it stand out more in this view? The answer is dust. This star is located in a very dusty region jam-packed with stars. In fact, there could be other super bright stars still hidden deep in the stellar crowd. Spitzer's infrared eyes allowed it to pierce the dust and assess the Peony nebula star's true brightness. For more on this topic, see http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/spitzer/news/spitzer-20080715.html

TSP – 2008, the Further Adventures of Kirbini

By Kirbini

The morning was bright with the promise of clear skies as I finished up with a few final chores before leaving Las Cruces for the 2008 Texas Star Party. However, there was one small blemish - I had to take my 109-year-old Aunt (who was also an orphan and a widow) her weekly meal and therefore was prevented from getting up at 3am to travel to the TSP with the ASLC Masters.

On the way down, as I drove along listening to the new album of “Cow Mooing for Astronomers” by the Texas Longhorns, I began plotting my strategy for getting past Sheriff Rich this year. Google maps had played an important role as I discovered a secret back road that would allow me to slip in and Sheriff Rich would never be the wiser.

As I drew closer to Fort Davis I looked over my directions: From Fort Davis take Farm to Market road 15 south toward Ojinga, Mexico. After 45 miles turn east at brown barn and proceed 30 miles until arriving at red and green cattle tank. Cut back north for 15.8 miles on wagon trail and then west for 35 miles. Open Prude Ranch gate, go another 2.3 miles, cross a small ditch and then drive surreptitiously toward the ASLC camping spot. At one point I began to doubt the wisdom of all this extra driving, but quickly remembered the trauma and emotional pain of dealing with Sheriff Rich and therefore pushed on.



Kirbini nears the Prude Ranch

Just as I was getting ready to end my detour and cross the small ditch, a giant twenty foot hologram of Sheriff Rich sprang into existence not ten feet from the front of my car. He was holding a large sign that read, “ABANDON HOPE ALL YE WHO ENTER HERE.” It was then I noticed an old drive-in movie speaker in the bush next to my window. It squawked into life. “Is that you, Kid?”

“No. This is the Vet. I came to fix a depressed cow.” I lied.

“I don’t think so. The Vet wouldn’t run over the tire spikes you just did ten feet back.”

“Oh Jeez,” I thought. Now I’ve really done it. I’m stuck a half a mile from the middle field and Sheriff Rich is on my case again. How was I ever going to get to the TSP and earn points toward becoming a Newbie Advanced and learn how to adjust a worm gear in the dark while holding a flashlight in my mouth?

“OK, OK, you caught me red handed.” I gushed. “But think about this, Sheriff Rich.... wouldn’t the world be a much better place if we all showed a little more generosity, love, and good will toward others?”

“Knock that crap off, Kid or I’ll feed ya to the rattlesnakes. Now turn around and drive back the way you came on four flat tires. Hardy Har Har Har.”

Well, several hours later as I drove up to the main gate on my wheel rims I noticed Sheriff Rich had left guard duty and I was able to limp on in to the ASLC Masters Imaging site.

They were all sitting around marking objects off their viewing lists. I thought something funny was going on since no one had done any viewing yet, but also knew that it is sometimes difficult to understand the ➤➤

►Masters since they operated on such a higher level of awareness. I walked over to Master Dave. “Why are you marking objects off your viewing lists if you haven’t seen them yet?”

This question invoked a glare from Master Dave and a short rebuke. “Slughopper, how can you find an object if you haven’t seen it yet?”

At that very moment I had an incredible epiphany as I realized that Master Dave had taken my very words and turned them into a Zen Koan that potentially could take me to a new level of star imaging and possibly a promotion within the ranks of the ASLC Imaging Masters.

“By the way, Kid, glad you could finally make it.” Crooned Masters Steve and Steve. “We’ve been talking with the TSP organizers and have come up with an assignment for you this week. Yep, might even get you that promotion you’ve been whining about.”

“What?” I eagerly replied as my heart quickened and I visualized the promotion ceremony in my mind’s eye.

“Well, here’s the deal. We need someone to monitor and measure dark matter this year and decided you would be just that person. Didn’t Mystic Bob tell you before you left Las Cruces?”

“Uhhh. Well, actually no. You see Mystic Bob isn’t speaking to me anymore.”

I saw the looks of alarm and concern in the Masters faces as they asked, “Oh, why is that? What happened?”

Feeling shame and despair I replied, “Mystic Bob found me with an eyepiece in my possession.”

At this admission they began backing away from me hissing and making cross signs with their fingers. At least they did until Brother Chuck tripped on a telescope and fell over backwards onto an ant hill.

That seemed to break the tension so I could ask the big question that was now on my mind. “OK. I’ll do it. I’ll measure the dark matter this week. But, how do you measure dark matter?”

“You don’t know? Doesn’t it seem obvious? YOU WANDER AROUND IN THE DARK AND IT DOESN’T MATTER! HA, HA, HA”

I was about to express my deep appreciation for this assignment to the Masters when there was a load roar and dust and gravel began flying all over the place as Miss Bonnie came tearing up on her 1584cc Twin Cam Harley Dyna. On the back of her leathers was writ large, “Up Against the Wall Astronomers Motorcycle Club” and they were also replete with various icons of skulls and road kill.

I could tell that Miss Bonnie was in no mood for frivolities as she swung down off her bike. “OK Bros,” she barked, “one of the Homeys is down. Master Nils took a bad hit. Now get up and get over to Valentine and bring back that scope or I’m gonna be your worst nightmare come true!”



Miss Bonnie arrives

At this news, the Masters went into a great huddle in order to determine who would drive to Valentine in order to rescue Master Nils’ telescope and perhaps as an afterthought bring Master Nils back also. The decision was made and they went over and woke Brother Chuck up since he had fallen asleep after crashing into Sheriff Rich’s dob and landing on the ant hill. He brushed the ants off, walked over to his van, ►►

►and with great fanfare and noise he and Miss Bonnie went roaring off into the distance.

"Gee, Master Dave," I remarked, "it's too bad Master Nils' vehicle broke down. What do you suppose happened?"

"Bad Karma Grungehopper. Now don't ask any more stupid questions. I have to finish a 50,000 word epic poem on chickens to read tomorrow night since we don't eat them anymore."

I was about to ask Master Dave why, but suddenly thought better of it and went about the business of setting up my tent and my telescope for the night. I thought it kinda strange that I was told to set up in the horse pasture across the road, but they explained that would be the best place to look for dark matter or anything else that I might need.

Well time moves along and by Friday I was feeling a bit discouraged as not one little bit of dark matter had turned up in the horse pasture, but I didn't want to complain and earn bad marks on my "Newbie Intermediate" grade sheet. So that afternoon I drove into Fort Davis and bought a case of Mason jars at the General Store believing I may have found the answer to my dilemma. That night I went out into the middle of the horse pasture and held each jar up toward the sky and quickly put the lid on thereby capturing as much dark matter as possible. I was finally able to go to bed feeling as if I had accomplished my mission. I just knew that "Newbie Advanced" initiation would be waiting for me in Las Cruces.

Walter Haas Celebrates a Birthday



On July 3rd, Walter Haas celebrated his 91st birthday. Mary Alba, Walter's daughter, held a party for him on July 4 and several ASLC members attended. Cecil Post will also turn 91 in a few months. It looks like longevity and astronomy go together! Both Walter and Cecil are founding members of ASLC.

August Issue of the *HDO*

Articles for the August issue should be sent to Tony Gondola by Saturday, August 9. Material should be sent as email (acgna@comcast.net) or as an attached Microsoft Word document. If you have any questions about submitting something to the *HDO*, please don't hesitate to contact Tony. Thanks in advance! George Hatfield, Editor, ASLC Newsletter.



Dark Matter Collector

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 High Desert Observer*, 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 newsletter electronically, receive a \$5 membership discount. Send dues, payable to ASLC 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.

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Minutes, June 2008 ASLC Meeting

Call to Order: Jerry Gaber, Vice-President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC), called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm., 27 June 2008, Rm. 77, Dona Ana Community College.

President's Comments: Nils Allen, Club President, is attending the Grand Canyon Star Party. Jerry Gaber, Club Vice-President, recognized and greeted Oscar Pelhoffer, Warren Marquette, and Corey Stone, of the Sun City Astronomers, the El Paso amateur astronomy club.

Secretary's Report: The minutes for the May meeting were submitted as published in the current issue of the Club newsletter, the *High Desert Observer (HDO)*. A motion to accept the minutes as published and dispense with the reading of same was offered by Bob Long and seconded by Wes Baker. The motion passed by acclamation of the members present. There was not an additional secretary's report.

Treasurer's Report: The treasurer was not present at this month's meeting. A treasurer's report was not submitted.

Committee Reports:

1. Observatory Committee: Jerry Gaber, Construction Sub-Committee Chairman, Observatory Committee, reported that Dan Lilly continues to work on a formal drawing package for the permitting process. Jerry supplied his drawings to Dan approximately six (6) weeks ago, but has had no recent contact. Jerry suggested the Club may have to reconsider this approach and move in another direction. There was no additional progress to report.

2. White Sands Star Party (WSSP) IX, 26-27 September 2008: Steve Barkes and Jerry Gaber gave updates on the WSSP planning to date; Jerry has attended some of the Alamogordo Astronomy Club (ACC) planning meetings. There is some progress to report. There will be participation from the Sun City Astronomers and the New Mexico Museum of Space History will continue as a participant. Project Astro will continue to be the primary beneficiary. AAC would like for more club members to participate both as event supporters/workers and as attendees. The White Sands National Monument (WSNM) is proposing to change the event location to another larger area that can accommodate as many as 175 campers. Unfortunately, this area does not have an amphitheater, but the museum may be able to provide the support previously available at the amphitheater. ACC would like the Club to provide speakers for both Friday and Saturday nights and workshop leaders during the day on Saturday. WSNM would prefer an "outreach"-type speaker for Saturday night. Vince Dovydaitis and Corey Stone, director of the Gene Roddenberry Planetarium, both offered presentations they have done for school groups as possibilities. A get-together with the El Paso club members after the presentation will discuss this and other joint efforts.



►There were no additional standing committee reports.

Old Business:

1. Meade SolarMax telescope - no delivery update was available, see treasurer's report above. For the time being, usage will be coordinated through the Board of Directors.
2. Club logo/insignia apparel - Steve Henderson reported that Nils Allen has the remainder of the articles from the initial order. Members should contact Nils to pick up their ordered items or to purchase items from the excess. Steve has not received any additional requests for items; therefore, a follow-on order is not currently in the works. A follow-on order to cover additional articles of clothing of popular sizes or other types of apparel, i.e., jackets, sweatshirts, vests, etc., is possible if there is sufficient Club member interest. Members should contact Steve via the Yahoo Group to express their interest(s).

There was no additional old business discussed.

New Business:

Astronomy's Out-of-this-World Award - This award recognizes excellence in astronomy outreach. To submit the best possible package, Nils Allen needs to collect the following: any and all pictures, media clippings, promo flyers, etc., from the last one or two years that show the Club's efforts to promote astronomy. Members are asked to provide the material to Nils by July 1; he'll need to package it and prepare a few essays. The prize of \$2,500 could benefit the Club's observatory outreach program.

There was no additional new business discussed.

Steve Barkes offered a motion to adjourn and Bob Long seconded. The business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 8:00pm by acclamation of those present.

Announcements:

1. NM Museum of Natural History - Vince Dovydaitis announced the museum has several new staff members. Vince is currently secretary and astronomy coordinator of the museum's board of directors. The museum is currently conducting summer camps and would like to include astronomy as one of the classes. The museum's Star Safari's at La Llorona Park will continue but the NMSU Astronomy Department may not be able to support the expansion of the program. The museum has several telescopes available, but needs help maintaining the equipment. Steve Henderson volunteered to help with maintenance of any Newtonian telescopes.
2. *Reflector* magazine - Walter Haas receives duplicate copies of each issue. His extra is available to anyone who wants it.
3. Astronomical League (AL) Outreach Award - Club members need to fill out the Excel spreadsheet and submit them as soon as possible. This will also help with the Out-of-this-World award submission.
4. Achievement Recognitions - Congratulations to George Hatfield on the *HDO* placing in the AL Mabel Sterns newsletter "competition." Congratulations to Rich Richins for receiving an AL Observer pin. Congratulations to Steve Barkes and Steve Smith for receiving observer pins at TSP 2008.
5. Datil-VLA trip - A trip planned to take advantage of this area's dark skies over the 4th of July weekend will probably be postponed until September or October because of predicted inclement weather . Vince►►

►Dovydaitis asked where the sky meter currently was located and if a database of conditions at the various popular observing sites could be established and maintained on the website.

6. MoonGaze - A monthly MoonGaze was held 14 June at International Delights Café on El Paseo. Steve Henderson, Jerry McMahon, Bernie Joplin, and John McCullough supported a moderate viewing crowd from dusk until after 11pm. Next month's MoonGaze will be 12 July with help from the Sun City Astronomers.

There were no additional announcements made.

Observations: There were no observational reports offered.

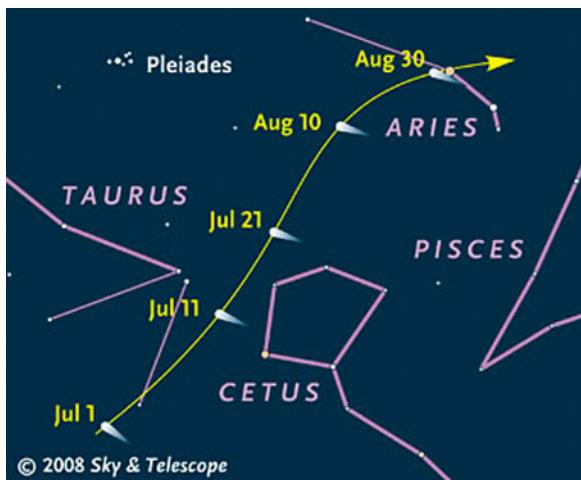
Presentation: Texas Star Party (TSP) 2008 - "A Star Party as Big as Texas, and a Report to Match." Steve Barkes, an old TSP hand, presented images of the event and some astro images that were produced during TSP with the help of other Club participants including Bob Long, Kirby Benson, Chuck Sterling, and Steve Smith. This presentation was not recorded for rebroadcast. Other meeting presentations can be accessed on the web at <http://www.aicsresearch.com/lectures/aslcnm/>.

The June 2008 monthly meeting concluded at 9:10pm. Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary

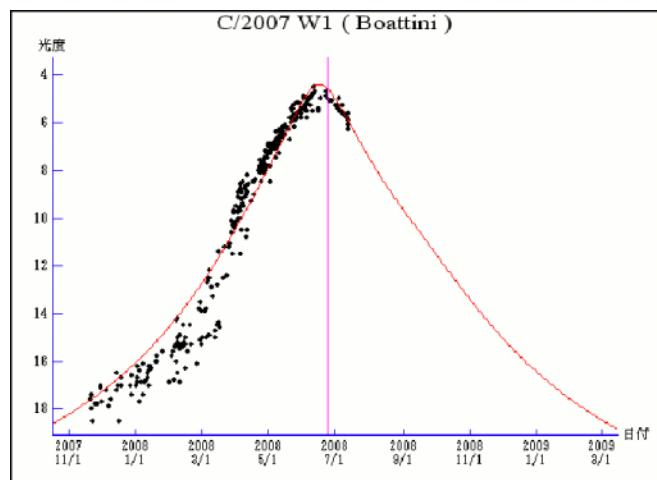
Have You Seen Comet Boattini?

From Tony Flanders, Observing Blog, skyandtelescope.com

A week after perihelion, Comet C/2007 W1 Boattini should now be visible in the dawn sky by observers in the Northern Hemisphere. Preliminary results on Seiichi Yoshida's website (<http://www.aerith.net/comet/catalog/2007W1/2007W1.html>) indicate that it's now roughly magnitude 5.5 — still near its peak brightness. Comet Boattini climbs into the Northern Hemisphere's morning sky during July and August 2008. A detailed printable chart in PDF format can be found at this site http://media.skyandtelescope.com/documents/Comet_boattini_julaug.pdf.



From Sky and Telescope



Intensity Data from Seiichi Yoshida's website

On July 4th, Comet Boattini is just 6° above the eastern horizon 90 minutes before sunrise at latitude 40° north. That's too low for easy viewing, and the sky is already beginning to get bright even then. But the ►►

► comet appears roughly 2° higher on each succeeding morning, and the moon doesn't start to interfere until July 16th. Meanwhile, the comet is likely to fade as shown on Yoshida's website, becoming a faint telescopic target by August. So early July is the best time for northerners to see this comet, assuming that you're fanatical enough to get up at 3 or 4am. Few people are likely to see the comet without optical aid, but it should be pretty easy to spot through binoculars as long as your light pollution isn't too bad. We eagerly await our first post-perihelion reader reports. For more information see: <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/community/skyblog/observingblog/22809364.html>

Observatory Plans Approved by Engineer

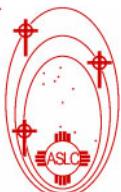
By Jerry Gaber

We are finally moving forward on the observatory project again. We have the engineer-stamped structural drawings and are working on getting the electrical drawing verified and stamped. Bernie Joplin is working with an electrical contractor to verify and make necessary changes to the electrical drawing. Then we can get them engineer stamped and ready to be resubmitted to the state. The electrical contractor Bernie Joplin is working with has agreed to pull our electrical permit and supervise the electrical work. So the good news is we are finally moving forward. Once the electrical drawing is stamped, Rich and I will be meeting with the Park rangers and do what we need to do to resubmit the request.



The proposed design for ASLC's Observatory includes a 16 x 20 foot roll-off roof and a 6 x 14 foot warm room.

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