

The High Desert Observer

The Bulletin of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

June, 2008

Presidential-level Partying!

That certainly describes TSP 2008 - tolerating the hot dry conditions rewarded us with night after night of clear, shirt-sleeve observing and imaging! Thus our eyes and CCDs were glutted with photons, and sleep was definitely at a premium, but we held up pretty well. Alas, a few other surprises awaited our devoted but unsuspecting TSPers... that's what keeps it exciting! If you read the new, full-featured TSP blog, you have the outline - come to the June meeting to hear (and see) "the rest of the story" as formulated by Storyteller Steve, with lots of great astro-images! Let's not forget to thank Sheriff Rich for his volunteer service at the gate, which means \$\$ for the ASLC. And a personal word of thanks goes to Chuck S for saving me from a fate worse than... well, missing TSP! You're the man (with the van)!

Remember my mention of the *Astronomy* Out-of-this-World Award last month? This recognizes excellence in astronomy outreach, and I think we do that as well as anybody. Now it's time to get crackin' on this... to submit the best possible package, I need to collect the following: any and all pictures, media clippings, promo flyers, etc., etc. from the last one or two years that really shows our Society's efforts to promote astronomy. So get your best stuff together by July 1 then contact me - I'll need to package it and prepare a few essays. As I said before, \$2500 sure wouldn't hurt our observatory outreach program!

Worthy of Mention:

- WSSP IX planning is proceeding, and we have an expanded role this time, especially in doing the Mini-Workshops. Steve B and Jerry G are our reps so contact them with ideas, offers, etc.
- A possible astro-social get-together (Star-BQ?) with the Sun City Astronomers of El Paso is being considered for late summer. But please keep your greasy fingers off my FeatherTouch focuser! ;~)
- Did you know the amazing, but sad story about Robert Burnham Jr? I didn't, even though I started out 30 years ago with his *Celestial Handbooks*... how 'bout you? While we voice our personal sentiments about this unique man, consider a more concrete expression of our appreciation. See the story later in this issue.
- Congratulations are due! Our *HDO* and its editor, George Hatfield, were awarded 4th place in the 2008 Astronomical League's Mabel Sterns club newsletter "competition" (déjà vu all over again). Another strong showing for our modest Society going up against many large, well-heeled clubs - let George know you appreciate his long-term service to put out a consistent, high-quality product.

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Nils and Bonnie Allen with the "Big Boy" at the TSP

Next Meeting

The next monthly meeting will be held June 27 at 7:30pm in the usual place (Main Campus of the Dona Ana Community College, room 77). The speakers will be a group of members that attended the Texas Star Party earlier this month, lead by Steve Barks.

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

Other events planned for June and early July include:

Grand Canyon Star Party, June 21 through June 28

Dark Sky Observing at the Upham dark sky site, Saturday, July 5

Darkest Sky Observing near Datil, NM, July 3 - July 6 (weather permitting)

MoonGaze, July 12

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

Texas Star Party 2008

Well the 2008 Texas Star Party is now behind us, and it was a very good year. After last year's single night of clear skies, we were treated to 6 nights in a row of observing and imaging. If you haven't yet looked at our TSP blog on the ASLC website, you should certainly take the time to check it out at:

<http://www.aslc-nm.org/TSPBlog.html>

The blog gives a nice of taste of the day-to-day activities at TSP. And of course we'll have our customary review of TSP at the regular club meeting on June 27. I don't want to duplicate the meeting presentation here in the *HDO*, so thought I would give some perspective into getting ready for a major star party. At least the way in which I tend to get ready for a major star party!

So if you're looking for details on:

- Nils Allen's bad fuel pump
- The dust devil that tried to destroy Steve Smith's 14" dob
- Si Senor Chicken Night
- The wildfire
- Rich Richins' solar-powered swamp cooler
- Toss-a-chicken in the Prude Ranch pool
- "Not-a-Lemming" astrophotos
- Obligatory Texas highway flat tire
- Audio tape of Chuck Sterling sleeping in everything but a bed
- Many pictures and great astroimages

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➤ You'll need to attend the next meeting of the ASLC!!

This was my sixth Texas Star Party, and every year I try to incorporate lessons learned from the previous year. The operative word being, "try." Apparently I'm a very sloooow learner. Packing for a week-long star party can be difficult. You never know what you might need, and it's hard to fight the temptation to bring everything. Somehow you need to strike a balance between the two. For the last two years in a row I managed to forget to bring a pillow to rest my weary head on. While a 31mm Nagler eyepiece is about the same diameter as a queen-size pillow, it's just not that comfortable. This year the pillow was the very first thing I put in the truck. I placed it right on the driver's seat where I wouldn't be able to ignore it. It's interesting to look at everything you bring, and those things that you don't. A couple of ASLC members were looking for some tape at TSP. When they asked if I had any I immediately gave them a choice: strapping tape, duct tape (grey or black), electrical tape, masking tape, scotch tape. I had them all. But what I didn't have, in the 100 degree heat, was sunscreen. Maybe grey/silver duct tape across my forehead and over my ears would prevent burning?



July Issue of the *HDO*

Articles for the July issue should be sent to me by Saturday, July 12. Material should be sent as email (GMHLCNM@msn.com) or as an attached Microsoft Word document. If you have any questions about submitting something to the *HDO*, please don't hesitate to contact me (532-5648 or via email). Thanks in advance! George Hatfield, Editor, ASLC Newsletter.

Bonnie's Big Adventure at TSP

As I have told my friends about my trip to TSP - car tow... \$215, new fuel pump... \$745...spending a week with friends in 106 degree days for perfect warm clear nights.... priceless.

One of the reasons I was convinced to take this adventure was that our friends, the Furry's, from Cottonwood, Arizona, were going and taking their RV and offered to let us stay with them. The way we met Charlie and Natasha is a story in itself, but it was through Nils and Charlie trading astronomy equipment. Nils' astronomy passion has never been something we have shared. He has excitedly called me over to look through one of his scopes to see a double star, nebula, star cluster, or galaxy far far away - after looking I consistently commented that "It's a dot (or a fuzzy dot) - I don't get it." Of course, Nils has conveniently concluded that the reason I don't "get it" is because I can't see more than the dot. He can fix that by getting larger scopes and better eyepieces for my benefit... sure. ;~) Granted the views in the 22" Dob were better... it was a brighter dot.



*Nils babysitting the broken van and his big DOB
Photo from Bonnie Allen*

Even though I haven't had the same passion for astronomy that Nils has, I do have a passion for Nils and try to be a supportive wife, so I have gone with him to other events. I enjoy meeting people, so getting to know some of the other ASLC members and their spouses has been fun. I enjoy Moongaze because it gives me a chance to sit and have a cup of coffee while he's gazing, and the Christmas party is always fun; however, TSP had never been an enticement for me. Actually spending time visiting with friends while staying in their RV was more of an enticement.

As you know, the trip started with a vehicle problem and Nils began calling his buds already at TSP, but since there is limited cell phone access he couldn't reach anyone. The scope couldn't possibly fit through the door of our friend's RV and he wasn't going to leave it on the side of the road. His van could be left there but not the scope. The plan we came up with was that I would go on to the Prude Ranch, find the other ASLC guys, and ask one of them to rescue the scope, I mean Nils, from the side of the road. Rich was on gate-duty and offered his truck, but I would need help - I didn't want to be responsible for lifting and moving the scope. It's one thing to hold up your end of a marriage, it's another thing to hold up your end of a giant scope. Chuck (bless his heart) volunteered to go but with only two seats in his van I would need to stay at camp...oh darn.

Chuck made it back with Nils and scope in time to set up for the first night of observation. Nils picked a site next to our AZ friend's tarp and began unloading and preparing. I began to look around the sky with the mounted binoculars, stopping for the stars with multi-colored glows that sparkled in the sky like the colors in one my "scopes." (Nils and I share a love for scopes - telescopes for him, kaleidoscopes for me.) All of a sudden as I was surveying the dots in the sky, I fell across a huge fuzzy dot. Only this time it wasn't so fuzzy. Trying to conceal my enthusiasm lest Nils get excited that I too might catch the astro-bug, I casually asked Nils to look and tell me what I had in my bins. I think it was the globular cluster M4. I had to yell over to Rich that I had found an "M" knowing that he had just received an award for the number of Messier's he had found. As I glanced around the sky I saw more "fuzzies." The real frustration was knowing that I had found something that I may have seen in the images on the ASLC website, but not having the slightest idea of what it was and not really wanting to bug the guys who were doing "real astronomy" >>

➤to stop and look at my view. I was content to just window shop for the evening. I was ready for bed around 1am and headed to the RV to crash and leave the rest to continue their pursuits but as I was walking I was impressed by the beauty of the Milky Way across a dark sky that I hadn't seen in too many years to remember.

Monday was a new day to venture out, and try to rescue the van. While Nils was off with the tow truck guy, I came back to finish our registration since in the confusion of the day before we didn't get it done. On the registration tables were all of the lists that could be completed for achievement pins. One of them jumped right out to me. It said and I quote: "If you have never done any observing, do not own a telescope or binoculars, were dragged here with your spouse... and never shown any interest in astronomy, this program is for you." It listed 20 objects in the sky with the challenge of finding 10 or more with the naked eye for an achievement pin! I decided to accept the challenge.



*Dave's Si Senor Chicken Night at TSP
Photo from Bonnie Allen*

Before observing though, I finally got to have the famous TSP Si Senor chicken by Dave. It was every bit as wonderful as I had ever heard it was. We did have to share some with the flies, but they didn't eat much and I still had more than my tummy could hold.

I realized the problem with my challenge list was that it gave descriptions of objects to find in constellations. Even though a couple of years ago I took the Beginning Astronomy class that ASLC offers and felt like I had learned a great deal, the retention didn't seem to be there. Part of the challenge was to find these objects without assistance by using the sky chart on the back of the form, but Charlie and Natasha gave me a brief refresher lesson on finding constellations to get me started. I enjoyed the exploration of looking at my little chart with my red light and then looking for something close to the same in the sky. Once I got the hang of it, it became easier to find and I was able to find most of the objects on my list and get my pin.

I spent Tuesday night looking around the sky some more until I got cold and decided to get in our newly repaired van to rest. I turned on the key to roll up the windows without realizing that the headlights automatically come on when the key is turned... Oh NO - I just committed the ultimate TSP sin. I felt terrible and headed back to the RV with visions of ruined astro-photography in my head and knowing that I would have to apologize to the guys the next day. Fortunately they were very gracious to my faux pas.

Wednesday I met with a group of women who were other "Astro-Widows". They were discussing ideas that could become annual events for women coming to TSP that have no real strong interest in astronomy, but would like to come for the camping and social aspect of the trip.

On Thursday with my new award on my hat and a Messier Marathon handbook, I began to look around to find the Messier objects. I learned (again) how to look through a telrad and pinpoint the stars to look out from. My first attempt left me frustrated at knowing I had the right star in the finder and had looked all around the area the map showed to no avail. Finally, I gave up and asked Nils to show me. He pulled the scope over a couple of inches lined up the globular without even looking through the scope and in his best condescending voice said "it's right there..." Getting even really wasn't why I told him that Steve's 14" view of the whirlpool galaxy looked better than his 22" view. I realized that without the space ➤➤

➤ around the object, I don't seem to be able to recognize what I'm seeing. Natasha and I talked about writing a book for the novice or "astro-widow" of "Dumb questions and even Dumber answers."

Friday late morning was the famous swap meet – talk was about this being the first year Nils may not make more than he spent, although I offered to help by selling his 22" to Dave for \$1K. (Nils was quick to nix the idea.) Since Nils wanted to go to the Regional meeting, I offered to sell his swap meet stuff. It worked pretty well, since one guy gave me full price because I didn't know how much I could discount it. We had group pictures made, and then went to see the 48" scope tour. I figured that Nils could have one if we sell everything we own and live in the observatory. After dozing through the evening lecture and winning no prizes, Nils went out for another night of clear skies while Charlie, Natasha, and I hit the bed a little past 10.



*Getting Nils' 22" DOB ready a night of viewing
Photo from Bonnie Allen*

Saturday was our last day and we took in the McDonald tour. Nils wanted to know if I would like to do one of their public observing programs so that I could tell the astronomers at McDonald that "it's just a bigger dot."

As the clouds and lightning began to come in, most of the viewers packed up their gear and either headed home or spent one last night prepared to leave early the next morning. We fit into the second group and spent a little time sitting outside enjoying the light show the lightning provided.

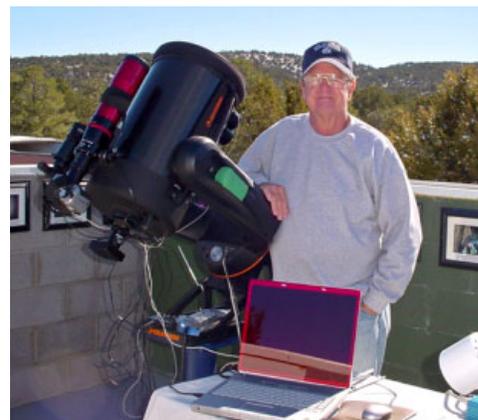
The next morning as we headed home without incident we could see the charred landscape that had been the red glow a few nights before while we discussed the next star party in our plans for the summer.....

An Astronomer's Tribute to a Giant

By Bill Logan

"Stargazers worldwide revere Arizonan Robert Burnham Jr., creator of the most complete, practical, inspirational book ever written about the night sky. But like so many people of genius, he would spend his last years alone and destitute." Those were the words written by Tony Ortega printed on the front page of the September 25, 1997 issue of the *Phoenix New Times*.

Not many people have ever heard of Robert Burnham Jr., but virtually all astronomers know his work through his three-volume *Burnham Celestial Handbook*. The handbook is to astronomers what the Kelly Blue Book is to automobiles. Born June 16, 1931, in Chicago, he was raised in Prescott, Arizona, graduating from Prescott High School in 1949. After graduation and a stint in the U.S. Air Force, he found a job as a shipping clerk at Thunderbird Fashions, a Western clothing manufacturer in Prescott.



*Bill Logan, Robert Burnham Jr.
Observatory, Eagar, AZ*

On the evening of October 18, 1957, eager to use his homemade 10" reflector telescope, the ➤➤

➤ 26-year old propped it up against the porch railings of his parents Prescott home. At 10:30pm, he saw a smudge in the telescope that wasn't supposed to be there. It was his first comet discovery. It is known today as Comet Burnham 1958a.

Soon after this discovery, he was visited by Senator Barry Goldwater. The senator surprised Burnham offering him an 1882 brass refracting telescope owned by his late uncle, Morris Goldwater, who had once been Prescott's mayor. Word of this spread throughout Arizona in various newspapers and attracted the attention of Henry Giclas, Director of Lowell Observatory. If Burnham had the patience to look for comets, thought Giclas, he would be well qualified for a mundane and boring job called a proper motion study. In February 1958, Giclas offered Burnham a \$6,000-a-year job at Lowell that would likely only last two years. He accepted after prodding from his mother.



*Robert Burnham, Jr
Photo from rbjm.org*

An article of his new career was published in the Prescott Courier Newspaper. The astronomers at Lowell were infuriated. Always sensitive to Lowell's reputation, they did not appreciate that Burnham had spoken about his upcoming job without the observatory's approval. It turned out the Burnham's mother was a stringer for the newspaper and had written the article. Burnham, contrite, convinced Giclas and others at Lowell that he hadn't written it.

This was not the first time that Lowell had hired a skilled amateur for cheap repetitive work that professional astronomers scorned. In 1929, Lowell hired a young Kansas farmer by the name of Clyde Tombaugh. On February 18, 1930, Clyde discovered Planet X, Pluto. During the post-Pluto years, Tombaugh was relegated to taking long exposure photographs of the sky.

Fast forward to 1958. Robert Burnham was hired to perform monotonous and repetitive work on a comparator or "blinker" machine. Burnham would spend all night taking photographs of the same areas that Tombaugh had taken 25 years earlier. Then he would insert both the glass photographic plates in the blinker. By rapidly switching plates, he could see that some stars had moved. This was called the "Proper Motion Study." Stars that had perceptible movement were closer to earth and were flagged for later studies to determine their distance. These data are now published in the Millennium Star Atlas and others. It was boring and repetitive work, but perfect for Burnham. He got to spend a lot of time behind the Clark 13-inch refractor and this allowed him a lot of time toward the continued writing of his astronomical journal that he had started in high school.

By 1966, Burnham had amassed enough astronomical data that would fill eight notebooks. His employment at Lowell, and access to the Lowell's library, gave him access to mountains of information and photographs. With this information, this amateur astronomer could now include more scientific depth to his handbook. He couldn't find anyone that would publish his handbook, so with help from his family, they hand-collated the first 2,000-page book.

Burnham was very disappointed with Lowell's official position regarding the handbook. Namely, there was none. Giclas saw the handbook as an irritation. He offered to have observatory personnel look at the book for a possible Lowell publication, but Burnham refused stating that they would have changed everything that he had researched. As it turned out, Burnham's data was about 80 percent accurate.

After several years of self-publishing, by 1976, Burnham secured a deal with Dover Publications and the ➤➤

➤ three-volume *Celestial Handbook* became widely available to amateur and professional astronomers around the world. It was written in several languages and is still published and sold to this day. *Burnham's Celestial Handbook* is a part of most amateur astronomer's reference library. I am on my third set, having worn the first two out.

In April 1979, funding for the Proper Motion Study dried up and without a formal education in astronomy Burnham was notified, after 21 years of work, that his employment would come to an end. Poor royalties for his book and the layoff at Lowell was devastating to Burnham. Even though he was offered an astronomy teaching position at a high school in Texas, he simply vanished. Not even his family knew his whereabouts. It wasn't until 1997 when Tony Ortega, an amateur astronomer and writer for the *Phoenix New Times* discovered his final resting place.



*Robert Burnham Jr's three volumes,
Burnham's Celestial Handbook*

Burnham had become a recluse in San Diego. He painted cats in Balboa Park to earn a living while sleeping in flop houses. He was seen during star parties occasionally by local astronomy clubs in Balboa Park, but no one recognized this stranger who would spout incredible knowledge of the stars.

Robert Burnham Jr., for whom my personal observatory in Eagar is memorialized, was buried at Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in 1993. Like many people of genius, this astronomy giant did indeed spend his last years alone and destitute.

Editor's note: This article was published in the HDO with the permission of the author. As many of you may know, there is a movement (perhaps more than one) to establish a memorial for Robert Burnham Jr. at the Lowell Observatory. Please see RBJM.org for more information on making a donation. There are also several other articles on Burnham's life, several of which are available on the web. Wikipedia even has a good review of his work and life. It cites several good references. The most extensive article is by Tony Ortega and can be found at the following site: <http://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/1997-09-25/news/sky-writer/full>. It is a fascinating and, in the end, tragic story of an astronomer who contributed much to amateur autonomy.

Presidential-level Partying: continued from page 1

Some Reminders:

- It would be great to see more folks submit for the Astro-League Outreach Award; the Excel XLS file posted on our website makes it easy. Come on, let's show the League how well we do outreach!
- There are efforts underway to explore the super-dark Datil-VLA area for cutting-edge imaging and observing; contact George Hatfield to find out the latest.
- Please contact Steve Henderson about any new or follow-up requests you might have for ASLC-logo apparel items. He'll do his best to organize these and meet your needs.
- Due to my planned participation in the Grand Canyon Star Party next week, our VP Jerry G will lead the meeting on the 27th - thanks, Jerry! Everybody help him out. Stellar Stargazin'! - 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 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, May 2008 ASLC Meeting

Call to Order: Nils Allen, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC), called the meeting to order at 7:40 pm., 23 May 2008, Rm. 77, Dona Ana Community College.

President's Comments: Nils Allen recognized and greeted Warren Marquette, vice-president of the Sun City Astronomers, the El Paso amateur astronomy group.

Secretary's Report: The minutes for the April 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 Bert Stevens and seconded by Bill Stein. The motion passed by acclamation of the members present. There was not an additional secretary's report.

Treasurer's Report: The treasurer presented the status of the Club's various accounts. Major recent expenditures included \$400 for Astronomical League (AL) annual membership, \$320 for the AL insurance premium, and \$1400 for Club insignia apparel. The "hold" on the Meade SolarMax telescope was lifted; however, there was not an update on expected delivery of the scope. When one is available, the treasurer will disseminate the information via email and the Club Yahoo group. Two (2) copies of the *RASC Observer's Handbook*, ordered by Tim Billman and Bob Dragon but not picked up, are available for \$10 each. There was no additional treasurer's report.

Committee Reports:

Observatory Committee: Rich Richins, Chairman, Observatory Committee, reported that Dan Lilly continues to work on the permitting process. There was no additional progress to report.

Astronomy Day 2008: Nils Allen gave a brief synopsis of the activities on 10 May. He extended congratulations and appreciation to Wes and Carol Baker for their extensive efforts in chairing the committee and organizing the Club's efforts. He also thanked other members of the Club and spouses who contributed greatly to the success of the day's and evening's activities. Nils encouraged all those with expenditures associated with Astronomy Day to turn in their receipts to the treasurer for reimbursement. With that, Nils declared Astronomy Day 2008 officially over and disbanded the committee.

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. Jerry Gaber had been tasked at the April meeting with consolidating discussions of alternative solarscopes and associated sources and presenting his findings at tonight's meeting. This report was not available. For the time being, the Meade scope will continue to be the Club's primary objective.

2. Club logo/insignia apparel – A number of items, including t-shirts, polo shirts, long-sleeved denim shirts, and caps are available for pickup by members after tonight's meeting. Members who had made requests for items earlier, either in person or via email, were urged to pick up their items and pay for them tonight as the Club and Steve Henderson need to recoup their costs. A follow-on order to cover additional articles of clothing of popular sizes is possible if the need arises. Additional types of apparel, i.e., jackets, sweat shirts, etc., are possible if Club members desire. Steve will post the link to Blue Sky via the Yahoo group so members can see what types of items are available.

There was no additional old business discussed.

New Business:

White Sands Star Party (WSSP) – Nils Allen reported he has been in communication with Mike Mosier of the Alamogordo Astronomy Club (AAC) regarding WSSP in September. The Space Hall of Fame and Museum in Alamogordo, a WSSP co-sponsor in the past, wanted to make changes that the AAC couldn't accommodate and the Museum has withdrawn its support and co-sponsorship as a result. AAC will try to continue the WSSP without the Museum support, which was mainly administrative and financial in nature. Nils would like the Club to participate in WSSP to a greater extent and the Sun Country Astronomers may also increase their participation. AAC needs help primarily in arranging speakers, workshops, and volunteer workers for various activities. WSSP's primary beneficiary is Project Astro. Steve Barkes volunteered to be the Point of Contact (POC) between the Club and AAC. The general consensus of the members present was to support the WSSP this year.

There was no additional new business discussed.

Wes Baker offered a motion to adjourn and Kirby Benson seconded. The business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 pm by acclamation of those present.

Announcements:

1. Texas Star Party (TSP) – Several Club members are registered to attend TSP 01–08 June. Travel updates and coordination will be worked out via email. Blog postings via the Club website are a possibility. Steve Barkes will coordinate postings and images in preparation for the June meeting presentation.

2. Valley of Fires Star Party (VoFSP) – This event will be held the weekend of 30 May-01 June at the Valley of Fire State Park. See web site for additional information.

3. Upham DSO, 31 May – Mike Molitor would like support at Upham; a volunteer is still needed. Joseph Mancilla and Bob Long said they could help.

4. Tom Krajci – Bill Stein gave a brief report on Tom's article in *Sky & Telescope*. Check it out.

5. Mirror fabrication – A workshop is possible as interest within the Club is increasing.

6. MoonGaze - A monthly MoonGaze will be held 14 June at International Delights Café on El Paseo.

There were no additional announcements made.



➤ **Observations:** There were no observational reports offered.

Presentation: Tony Gondola, Big Eye Optics, Las Cruces, NM, and Club member presented the program for the May meeting. His topic was “The Ins & Outs of Real-World Optical Quality: Everything You Wanted to Know But Were Afraid to Ask!.” Tony presented a detailed overview of the various metrics of the optical qualities that affect a mirrored surface. This overview included a very clear exposition of the characteristics that the metrics are measuring, as well as the nature of defects that they don’t measure. The meeting presentation was recorded for rebroadcast and can be accessed on the web at <http://www.aicsresearch.com/lectures/aslcnm/>.

The May 2008 monthly meeting concluded at 9:25pm. - Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary

The Flies of TSP

by Kirbini-san

Seemingly larger than the beasts that attract them.
These creatures plague us as we attempt to understand
the purpose for which they were born.

In the coffee or the cake it matters not to them as they go about their business of destruction, defiling
everything their tiny feet land upon.

It is the strangest feeling to have little wings beating against the inner cheek after inadvertently
slurping one down with the afternoon coke or beer.

Will Rogers once remarked, "I never met a fly I didn't like!"

Of course he was a cowboy, one of the dying breed.

A guy that could lasso one while riding upside down on his Palomino.

And yet, is it not something to ponder?

Perhaps their meaning is much deeper than we can fathom as they kiss us in the morning
bringing us awake?

Kirbini-san
Photo from
Bonnie Allen



Orientation of Planets

By Walter Haas

There has been ongoing argument for a number of years as to whether images of planets should be presented with south or north at the top. I would strongly recommend, probably to no purpose, that images of the bright planets and lunar regions published in journals or archived in computer files always be simply inverted images with south at the top. “Simply inverted” rules out occasional confusing lateral reversal. First, such is the aspect in most telescopes over most of the North Hemisphere, where most of the astronomers live and work. Second, we preserve historical continuity; for a long time in the past the aspect described was in almost universal use. Thinking of existing variations, I would even more strongly recommend that current authors, editors, and archivers always state clearly what the image orientation is. They frequently do not. I disagree even more when the date and the time are missing from that beautiful Solar System image. Any serious science is likely to be excluded.



POSTCARD FROM THE TEXAS STAR PARTY

Photos from Bonnie Allen and Steve Smith

ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY of Las Cruces
PO Box 921
Las Cruces, NM 88004



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

