

The High Desert Observer

The Bulletin of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

Sharing the Universe with our Community for over 60 years



Photo by John McCullough

May, 2013

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 Society and public educational projects. Members receive the *High Desert Observer*, our monthly newsletter, plus membership to the Astronomical League, which includes their quarterly publication, *Reflector*.

Individual Dues are \$30.00 per year

Family Dues are \$36.00 per year

Student (full-time) Dues are \$24.00

Dues include electronic delivery of the *HDO*. Prorated dues are available for new members. Dues are 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 \$5.00 (per year) Sky and Telescope magazine discount.

ASLC Board of Directors, 2013

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May Meeting

Our May meeting will be held on Friday, May 24, in Room 77 at Doña Ana Community College, with the following schedule:

7:00 pm - 7:30 pm Show & Tell

7:30 pm - 8:00 pm Business Meeting

8:00 pm - 9:00 pm Guest Speaker & Presentation

This month's speaker will be several ASLC members, who will discuss the Texas Star Party.

Events

ASLC hosts deep-sky viewing and imaging at our dark sky location in Upham. We also have public in-town observing sessions at both the International Delights Cafe (1245 El Paseo) and at Tombaugh Observatory (on the NMSU Campus). All sessions begin at dusk.

Starting soon will be regular observing sessions at the new Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park, which houses an ASLC-run Meade 16" LX-200 telescope.

Outreach

Outreach is a very important part of ASLC. We are always looking for more volunteers to help us educate the public. Even if you do not have a portable telescope to bring to the events, please consider attending our public outreach programs to help answer questions, share knowledge and point out constellations in the sky.

The President's column-inch...

I'm writing this under unusual circumstance, having intended to be at the Texas Star Party all week with several others of our members. However, a health issue forced me to return to Las Cruces the morning after arriving late the day before. So I am at the hospital, all wired in, but am doing much better.

The new observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park is ready to use, finally, after a last minute servicing earlier this month (or was it last month?). The Park staff is ready to be trained in its operation and have scheduled several events for this year to take advantage of this new resource. And, Ron Kramer, ASLC Observatory Committee Co-Chair has likewise scheduled events there for later this year. In addition, the club expects to open the observatory for public viewing on the Saturday closest to each last quarter moon for dark-sky viewing (though this has not been formally discussed as yet).



This month's Moon Gaze at International Delights Café falls on Saturday the 18th. Saturn is UP! This month, however, may be our last glimpse of Jupiter, which sets just after 9pm and may be lost earlier behind the buildings.

The May 2013 meeting will be held Friday May 24th at the Dona Ana Branch Main Campus room 77. Our presenter will be ASLC member s, yet to be determined, on this year's trip to the Texas Star Party. There should be some spectacular images this year, and I encourage you to be sure to see this presentation.

Have a Good Year; keep looking UP.

Chuck Sterling

Outreach Events for April, by Jerry McMahan

Thursday, April 11, 2013, Dolores Huerta Academy

Chuck Sterling, Rich Richins, Steve Shaffer, Tracy Stuart, Bert Verstraete and Sid Webb were in attendance. Unfortunately the clouds were also there. The skies were clear not long before time for the star party to begin.

Rich left early, saying he didn't think that the skies would clear. He was right. Tracy said the clouds would clear out when all of the guests were gone and as we finished loading our equipment in our cars. He had it right almost to the minute.

Chuck did have Jupiter fade in and out in his ten inch. It was always behind clouds, but would peek though on occasions. The out object, bright enough to see, at times, was the star Sirius. Steve did point his Dobsonian at an illuminated church cross so that there would be something for the kids to see.

Saturday, April 13, Veteran's Park

A number of home schooled kids combined to organize a star party at Veteran's Park. Chuck Sterling, Steve Shaffer, Daniel Giron, Sid Webb, Tracy Stuart, Bert V, Jerry Gaber and Jerry McMahan were in attendance.

This time we had clear skies and the wind died down so most of us had a successful night. I was the exception since the power cord was pulled out of the mount again and again. I spent half of the time trying to get it to

work. Kid, "What are you pointed at?" Me, "Nothing, it isn't working." Later, kid, "What are you pointing at?" Me, "Nothing, it isn't working." This conversation is repeated at least 2 more times. I finally got it to work and Chuck says that it is time to put every thing up. Me, "Kid, where are you? It is working." There are no longer any kids, or parents in sight.

Jerry Gaber connected his scope to the new camera and a laptop to test the system. It was the camera which will be used to project what is being seen in the 16-inch telescope at the Leasburg observatory. It works fine. A 28-second exposure gave a good view of the Whirl Pool galaxy on the computer screen. A 28-second exposure also showed both galaxies M81 and M82 on the same field of view, with a field of about 2 degrees, using an 8-inch Schmidt Cassegrain. This is the same size scope as the one that will be used at the observatory.

The kids and parents saw a crescent Moon, Jupiter, the Orion Nebula, the globular cluster M3, the Pleiades, the Beehive Cluster and various other deep-sky objects.

Friday, April 19, open house at the Tombaugh Observatory

Steve Shaffer and Jerry McMahan were in attendance. As usual our target was the Moon and for the third straight month we had some tracking problems. The difficulty did not cause serious observing problems. The terminator was near the crater Copernicus, providing a good view of the rugged area, including volcanic domes, around the crater.

The other scopes were on the globular M3, the Orion Nebula, Jupiter, and Saturn later in the evening. It did get cold near the end of the session, but I did get to spend my birthday on the Moon.

Moongaze, Saturday, April 20, 2013

Steve Shaffer and Jerry McMahan were at the International Delight for our monthly Moongaze and Astronomy Day. John McCullough joined us after leaving the activities at Leasburg Dam opening of the new observatory. The owner of the cafe even came out to look through the scopes and offered us free coffee.

Steve brought the 4.5-inch Dobsonian. I had the 8-inch Schmidt Cassegrain. It worked fine this time. I also brought the ETX-125 out of temporary retirement. We had the scopes on the Moon, Jupiter, and for the first time this year, on Saturn. As usual, many spectators were thrilled at the sight of Saturn. The view of the planet improved as it got higher in the sky, providing a good view. The weather was warm enough so that we stayed until after midnight.

Several of the guests said they were going to Leasburg Dam and some had just returned from there. One lady thanked us for advertising the opening of the new observatory. Good job Daniel!

The Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park, Saturday, April 20, 2013, by Ron Kramer

After more than seven years of planning, the ASLC finally opened its Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park (I-25 North to Exit 19, left past the RR tracks, right into the Park). With an official attendance of 193, including Las Cruces City Council member Nathan Small, Doña Ana County Commissioner Leticia Duarte-Benavidez, NMSU Astronomy Department Head Jon Holtzman, State Parks Architect Rob Vadurro, State Parks Region III Manager Rolf Hechler, Leasburg Dam State Park Manager Evaristo Giron, ASLC members and officers as well as the general public and other guests, a grand time was had by all. Park Interpretive Ranger, Alex Mares offered a presentation on *Native American Star Lore*, ASLC members prepared a running slide show of astronomical objects, and several other members brought telescopes to add to the festivities.

Free food was available, presentations were made by several dignitaries and while the weather was rather windy early on, it settled down for a nice observing session. Tours of the Observatory were given and several astronomical objects were viewed. Thanks to the Friends of Leasburg Dam State Park group for handling the refreshments and volunteering at this event.

The new Masthead image (taken by ASLC Secretary John McCullough), on the cover of this month's HDO shows ASLC member Tracy Stuart setting up the 16-inch Meade Cassigrain telescope, with an 8-inch scope piggy-backed with a CCD camera attached. The camera allows live views of what the main telescope is pointed at, so people standing in line, waiting for a peek through the instrument, can see what's in store for them.

There was a "faux" ground-breaking ceremony, with shovels of dirt being gently tossed about. This was followed by a formal ribbon-cutting, with the dignitaries and ASLC officers gathered around the ribbon cutters.

We finally wrapped things up around 10:00 pm, and are now waiting for formal Outreach schedules to begin the primary goal of the new Observatory; education.

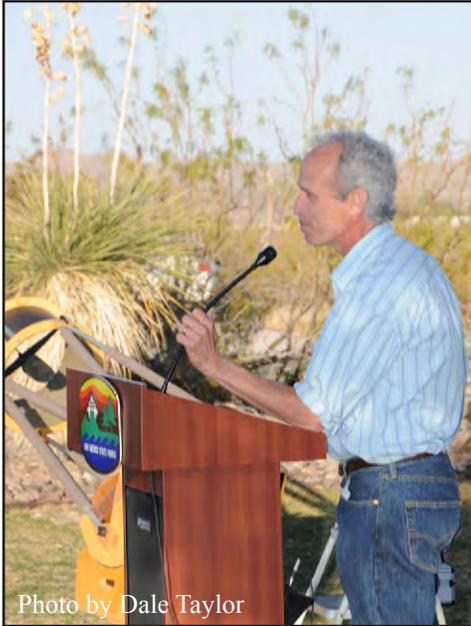


Photo by Dale Taylor

NMSU Astronomy Department Head,
Jon Holtzman



Photo by Dale Taylor

ASLC President, Chuck Sterling and Ron Kramer,
Observatory Co-Chair cutting the ribbon



Photo by Dale Taylor

Observatory Co-Chairs,
Jerry Gaber and Ron Kramer



Photo by Dale Taylor

Dona Ana County Commissioner,
Leticia Duarte-Benavidez and
Las Cruces City Councilman Nathan Small

Calendar of Events: May 2013 - July 2013 (Mountain Time - 24 hr. clock)

MAY	12	07:03	Moon - Jupiter Conjunction
	17	21:00	OUTREACH EVENT; TOMBAUGH OBSERVATORY Open House
	17	22:35	First Quarter Moon
	18	19:00	OUTREACH EVENT; MOONGAZE; International Delights Cafe
	22	09:00	McDonald Observatory private tour field trip (return Sunday at 4:00 am)
	22	04:34	Moon - Spica Conjunction
	23	03:55	Moon - Saturn Conjunction
	24	19:00	ASLC MONTHLY MEETING
	24	22:25	Full Moon
	28	11:30	Venus - Jupiter Conjunction
	31	12:58	Last Quarter Moon
JUN	07	09:56	New Moon
	08	18:00	MUSIC UNDER THE STARS; Leasburg Dam State Park Observatory
	10	05:19	Moon - Venus Conjunction
	12	10:59	Mercury Eastern Elongation
	15	20:00	OUTREACH EVENT; MOONGAZE; International Delights Cafe
	16	11:20	First Quarter Moon
	18	13:56	Moon - Spica Conjunction
	19	11:45	Moon - Saturn Conjunction
	20	23:04	Summer Solstice
	22	09:00	McDonald Observatory Tour by ASLC (return Sunday morning)
	23	05:32	Full Moon
	28	19:00	ASLC MONTHLY MEETING
	28	22:54	Last Quarter Moon
JUL	08	01:14	New Moon
	13	18:00	MUSIC UNDER THE STARS; Leasburg Dam State Park Observatory
	13	20:00	OUTREACH EVENT; MOONGAZE, International Delights Cafe
	15	21:13	Moon - Spica Conjunction
	15	21:18	First Quarter Moon
	16	19:19	Moon - Saturn Conjunction
	22	12:15	New Moon
	26	19:00	ASLC MONTHLY MEETING
	27	20:05	Delta Aquarids meteor shower
	29	11:43	Last Quarter Moon

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

Minutes, April 2013 ASLC Meeting

Show & Tell:

David Anderson started the session by continuing his discussion of techniques for beginning observers. He recapped the use of star guides and planetarium software. A third method he discussed is using an Internet search engine to access Google.com and using it to find "tonight's sky". This provides many links that offer interesting information. Some will require the user to input the latitude and longitude (an iPhone or other smart phone application can provide GPS coordinates) for Las Cruces and will provide targets for an entire range of observing methods from naked eye accessible to large telescope challenges.

Sid Webb asked the group about the usefulness of online astronomy courses, such as available through Coursera.org. There was discussion regarding “formal” education versus looking at topics of interest. The consensus was that different methods appeal to and work better for different individuals. Barnes & Noble has astronomy books/texts on CD that Jerry Gaber favors and finds very useful. Steve Shaffer pointed out online searches provide updates of astronomy “current events”. Chuck Sterling and Robert Williams discussed using “Heavens Above” that includes a number of upcoming events and provides email alerts of real-time phenomena.

Call to Order:

Chuck Sterling, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC), called the business meeting to order at 7:32 pm, 26 April 2013, Room 77, Dona Ana Community College, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

President’s Comments:

Chuck Sterling, President, welcomed the group to tonight’s meeting. He thanked David for the “Show and Tell” session and the various members for addressing the several topics of interest. Guests Don and Linda Simmons were attending after seeing one of the Society’s flyers. Karl Ray was attending as a guest of Sid Webb. Chuck asked that all members be sure to check in on the roster and visitors and guests please sign the guest list.

Secretary’s Report:

The Secretary, John McCullough, reported that the minutes for the March meeting were submitted for publication in the April issue of the Society newsletter, the *High Desert Observer (HDO)*. Tracy Stuart moved the minutes be accepted as submitted; Vince Dovydaitis seconded. The motion passed by acclamation. There was not an additional Secretary’s report.

Treasurer’s Report:

The Treasurer, Trish Conley, had to leave before tonight’s Call to Order. Chuck Sterling presented the Treasurer’s report and gave a status of the Society’s accounts. There was not an additional Treasurer’s report.

Committee Reports:

Apparel Committee:

Ron Kramer, temporary Committee Chairman, noted that jackets, “hoodies”, shirts, caps, and other items will be available after the meeting. Although Ron has a number of items and sizes available, he is assembling a “wish list” in preparation for submitting another order. Vince Dovydaitis asked about the availability of Society polo shirts with a chest pocket; Ron will consider adding those to the list. Ron will continue to fill in as temporary committee chair, but a new, permanent chair is required.

Education:

Rich Richins, Committee Chairman, was not present at tonight’s meeting. There was no committee report.

Fund-Raising and Grants:

Sidney Webb, Committee Chairman, reported that the NASA/New Mexico Space Consortium has matched \$2600 in Society expenditures to establish operations at the ASLC Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP). The grant includes \$500 for repairs to the 16” Meade LX200 which may be needed. Sid believes a good working relationship has been established between the Society and the Space Consortium. The grant runs through 2013 with a final report of qualifying expenditures due in December 2013.

Society Library:

Brenner Fody, Society Librarian was not present. There was no Library report.

Loaner Telescope Program:

Ron Kramer, Committee Chairman, reported the program is doing well. There are currently five (5) telescopes active in the program: 12" and 10" Dobsonians, two (2) ETX 90s, and a Unitron refractor. Ron continues to work on smaller telescopes to add to the program. Some eyepieces are also available as part of the program.

Membership:

John McCullough, Committee Chairman, encouraged members to find and check off their attendance on the sign-in sheets. If a member's name does not appear on the list, please let John or Trish Conley know of potential omissions as the sign-in sheets are generated from the Society's dues roster. That roster is also reported to the Astronomical League (AL).

ASLC Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP) Committee:

Jerry Gaber, Committee Co-Chair, reported on the First Light events held on 20 April. He feels the entire event was very successful with many individual member telescopes on hand. The 16" Meade functioned well and the projected image from the 8" came across well. The ranger program and slide show in the amphitheater also were well received. The 16" telescope does need some repairs that Chuck will address. The Society now needs to plan monthly star parties. Jerry would like to schedule these events for the Saturday closest to 3rd quarter Moon to not conflict with the regular Moon Gaze at IDC, but this needs further discussion. Jerry thanked everyone who helped with the event.

Ron Kramer, Committee Co-Chair, reported that 193 people attended the 1st Light events, including campers at the park. Ron also thanked everyone who helped. Ron is working on "Music under the Stars" events that will also take place at LDSP and he and Jerry will work out the schedule. These events can include individual telescopes to encourage star gazing.

Jerry needs volunteers to learn how to operate the 16" and how to use the video camera on the 8" for projection purposes.

Fred Pilcher asked about the status of repairs on the 16" mount. Chuck Sterling reported that he intends to disassemble the drives to determine the extent of the repairs required and that the telescope may be down for 4-6 weeks.

Tombaugh Observatory:

Steve Shaffer, Committee Chairman, reported that he has been kept busy sweeping sand and dust out of the observatory building.

Outreach Committee:

Chuck Sterling, Outreach Coordinator, reported on recent events. Jerry McMahan and Steve Shaffer covered the Moon Gaze at International Delights Café on 20 April while most of the Society members were at LDSP for the First Light events. The next Moon Gaze at IDC will be 18 May. The Society did not participate in the Earth Day 2013 events at Young Park on 21 April because of the full slate of events on Astronomy Day 2013, 20 April. "Count Me In" events will take place on 23 May at the Field of Dreams. This is a Las Cruces schools event for high school students. Jerry Gaber said that a range of giveaways are provided by local businesses, including a decent late model used car. Jerry Gaber, Wes Baker and Rich Richins will attend with solar telescopes (this is a day-time event). There will be a star party at the El Paso Archeological Museum on 18 May. Ron Kramer will attend and can use assistance.

Publicity:

Daniel Giron, Committee Chairman, reported on announcements about the Society that he is getting into the local media. He reported there were several good news items before and after the First Light events at LDSP. Although he submitted announcement notifications, there was no notice of tonight's meeting in either the Las Cruces Sun News or Bulletin. There was a notice in the Pulse, but unfortunately, the incorrect DACC campus was announced.

There were no additional committee or officer reports.

Old Business:

1. State-wide Star Party - Ron Kramer has been working on this with the TAAS (The Albuquerque Astronomy Society) president. The current date is 02-03 November at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge north of Socorro. Participating clubs are expected to include Albuquerque, Silver City, Carlsbad, El Paso, Alamogordo, Socorro, and Las Cruces. There will be no attendance cost to participants other than transportation. This has potential to be the largest star party in New Mexico. 8-10 members expressed interest in attending.
2. McDonald Observatory Field Trip - William Wren, assistant director at the McDonald Observatory, has offered the Society a "behind the scenes" tour of the facility. Ron Kramer is still working on the details, but the date is 22 June (day before full Moon). Attendees will have at least four hours of access to the 36" telescope and possibly the 82" telescope. The \$250 fee is being waived if enough members attend; eight (8) members have committed to date. The vehicle size will be determined by the final count and Ron needs a co-driver. The plan is to depart Las Cruces at 9:00 am on Saturday and return by approximately 4:00 am Sunday. Cost to members will include a box lunch, snacks, transportation, and dinner at the Observers Lounge at the Observatory.
3. Texas Star Party – TSP is 05-12 May. Four (4) members present at tonight's meeting plan to attend.

There was no additional old business discussed.

New Business:

1. Society of Astronomical Sciences (AAVSO) – Vince Dovydaitis reminded attendees that the 2013 annual symposium will be 21-24 May in Big Bear, CA. This is a professional/amateur meeting with workshops and paper and poster presentations. Contact Vince for more information.

There was no additional new business for discussion.

Items for Sale:

No items were announced for sale.

Announcements:

Ron Kramer needs articles for the *High Desert Observer*. Ron is also editor-in-chief of the Astronomical League's (AL) quarterly newsletter, the *Reflector*; he would like Society members to submit articles that can be published in the *Reflector*.

Robert Williams announced the Chaco Canyon Star Party the weekend of 11 May. Contact him for details.

There were no additional announcements made.

Recognitions/Achievements:

John Kutney announced his latest observing achievement, completion of the AL's Northern Arm list. Receipt of the award certification is pending.

There were no additional recognitions or achievements announced at tonight's meeting.

Fred Pilcher offered a motion to adjourn and Ron Kramer seconded. The motion passed by acclamation and the business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 8:02 pm

Presentation:

This month's presentation was made by New Mexico State University Astronomy professor, Dr. R.T. James McAteer on "The Wrath of Ra – Space Weather in the Modern Era". Dr. McAteer is an assistant professor in the solar research group at NMSU. Prior to this he held fellowships at Trinity College Dublin (where he remains an adjunct lecturer), NASA (where he remains a team member for the Solar Dynamics Observatory and STEREO spacecraft) and Queen's University Belfast (where he remains a visiting scholar). He is a Co-Investigator on the ROSA instrument based at the National Solar Observatory, the Rosse Observatory in Ireland, the Solar Orbiter mission and the Solarmonitor project. His presentation is also available through his outreach web page at http://astronomy.nmsu.edu/mcateer/Site/Public_Outreach.

The April meeting of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces concluded at 9:10 pm.

-Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary

Photo of the Month

HiRISE image of 20-meter-wide basin, exposing ejected ice from subsurface of Mars

