

The

Fremont Peak Observer

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OBSERVATORY STATUS

The Observatory is really shaping up - with all the little detail items being completed. Thanks to PG&E we now have electricity (no more running 200 yds of extension cord up the hill!) in the building. Kevin Medlock engineered a winch assembly to open the sliding roof, so now one person can open up the Observatory (before it took three!).

The interior has been painted, and the trim installed. The final task, carpeting, is scheduled for mid-May.

The scope itself is scheduled to be down from about May 2nd to around the 23rd, in order to re-coat the optics. Kevin attempted to clean the primary, which was covered with 6 months worth of construction dust. He cleaned it so well that the coating came off with the dirt! (Actually, the re-coating has been planned all along). Meanwhile, two new Takahashi focusers have been installed on the scope.

The 20mm Nagler, donated by Dr. Jack Marling, performs superbly on the 30-inch. Views of M51 and M104 with that eyepiece are simply stunning!

After the 30th of May, the scope will be available to members and sponsored groups for use during non-public program evenings. To schedule time on the scope, contact John Gleason, keeper of the calendar, at 415-790-9250.

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FPOA PUBLIC NIGHTS

The FPOA opens its doors to the public for the first time on May 30th, 1987. Loren Acton, NASA Astronaut, will be our guest speaker for the evening. The program, which will include tours of the Observatory as well as evening stargazing through the 30-inch reflector, is tentatively scheduled to begin around 4:00 PM.

The FPOA will be sponsoring public programs on Third Quarter and New Moon weekends from May through October. A detailed schedule of our summer program will be available at the Observatory.

We need volunteers to help staff these public programs. If you would like to volunteer to help for a particular night, sign-up sheets will be available at the Observatory as well.

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OUR ANNUAL GET-TOGETHER **AUGUST 29, 1987**

Reserve Saturday, August 29th 1987 for the annual FPOA No Host "Star-B-Q"!

Last year's barbeque and Star Party was such a success we decided to do it again! The FPOA will provide the basic meal: a hamburger, bun, condiments, and soft drinks. We will need volunteers to supply the niceties, like salads, cookies, cakes, etc.

If you would like to help organize this years "Star-B-Q", call Frank Dibbell at 408-255-6386.

It won't all be fun, however. It is, after all, our Annual Meeting as well, and we do have some administrative things to take care of, like elections of Board Members.

As you know, the FPOA Board of Directors is composed of nine FPOA members, each of whom serve a three year term of office. Terms of office are staggered so that we only elect one-third of the Board in any one year. If you are interested in serving on the FPOA Board, call Charlie Carlson, head of the nominating committee, at 923-7592.

To be eligible to run for the board you must have been a member for 1 year by August 29th, 1987. Don't be shy!

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A MAYBE IN A LIFETIME

By Landon Curt Noll

Since I was about 7 years old, I have had a list of "must see" and "hope to see" events. Some of the items, such as seeing Earthrise on Mars, will probably never be realized in my lifetime. Yet the will and desire to try for them remains. On February 28th, 1987, I was able to witness one of those "maybe in a lifetime" events: the naked eye sighting of a supernova.

I can still remember reading the IAU Circular (posted to a national computer bulletin board), which was only a few hours old:

A supernova was discovered by Ian Shelton of the University of Toronto, Las Campanas station at Feb 24.23 UT. The object was 5th magnitude at R.A. 5h 35m.4, Decl -69 16' (equinox 1987.2)

I was on the phone calling the Australian Consulate in San Francisco to start the processing for a visitor's visa when a friend of mine joked, "Why don't you just go and see it?" My friend didn't know me that well!

It was an experience in itself to try to fly around the world with only two days notice. Friends in Canberra, Australia, a good travel agent, understanding consulate people, and a boss who was on vacation all helped make it possible.

The travel time to Canberra was 30 hours (the best that can be done on such short notice). Since I didn't sleep the night before the flight, I was able to snooze on the trip, helping my body adjust to local Canberra time. Even so, I did have the pleasure of watching Polaris drop below the horizon, and pointing out other interesting astronomical phenomena to an otherwise bored cockpit crew.

My friends in Canberra (David and Nina Bell) planned an early dinner for me on my first night in country. Just before sunset I went outside to watch. As the sun set, I recalled how the Large Magellanic Cloud looked last year (while Halley watching); a uniform fuzzy cloud about 20 degrees from the South Pole. But there, in the otherwise uniform fuzziness, was this 4.7 magnitude reddish point of light: Supernova 1987A. At +50 kiloparsecs, it was the most distant single star I had ever seen! That night alone made the trip worth the effort.

The supernova was in a good position, always in the sky for most Southern latitudes, and at upper culmination at sunset. The folks at the Mt Stromlo Optical Observatory, and the radio dishes at

Tibmendilla Radio Station, both near Canberra, were making use of the favorable conditions. During my four day stay I was able to relay by phone a number of their measurements to the astrophysics department at UC Santa Cruz. I was also able to notice the supernova change from red to yellow white, and from 4.7 to 4.3 in magnitude.

I strongly recommend to any serious amateur to visit the southern skies at least once (anyone for a Star Party at Alice Springs, say Feb 1988?). It is strange to see things like Orion "upside down", or observe Sagittarius directly overhead. Without doubt, Omega Centauri and the Eta Carinae nebula are two of the finest objects visible from either hemisphere. Of course, aligning a scope without a Pole Star is a bit of a pain!

I am in debt to David and Nina Bell for opening up their home to me on such short notice. I also wish to thank Frank Dibbell for the use of his photographic equipment and advice on picture taking. I am grateful to my employer for keeping my job open when I returned, and lastly, I am happy that the FPOA folks accepted my excuse of "Landon is unable to attend the Star Party this month because he is off looking at a supernova!"

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MISCELLANEOUS NOTES

The *FREMONT PEAK OBSERVER* has moved to larger quarters. My new address is:

Frank Dibbell
10281 Parlett Place
Cupertino, CA 95014

By the way, if you, too have changed addresses, drop me a line so that I can update the Membership files, thus insuring

that you will continue to receive your newsletters in a timely manner.

FPOA T-Shirts, anyone? Charlie Carlson had a prototype FPOA T-shirt made up, and he is willing to get them done for members who would want one. The cost per shirt will be around \$15.00, maybe less if enough people are interested and we can get a group discount. Charlie will have a sample available at the May 30th Public Night.

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PARKING AT THE 'PEAK

Parking behind the Ranger's house has become a literal zoo. Remember, this is his private residence; vehicles are permitted by invitation only. The proper procedure is to park your vehicle in the lot, the camp grounds, or in Coulter Camp, then walk to the Observatory. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

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The purpose of the Fremont Peak Observatory Association is to provide educational and interpretive services of astronomically related topics to visitors of Fremont Peak State Park. The "Fremont Peak Observer" is published quarterly, and is the official publication of the Fremont Peak Observatory Association. Articles for publication, letters, and inquiries should be sent to:

Frank Dibbell, FPOA Newsletter
10281 Parlett Place
Cupertino, CA 95014

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