

Promoting Public Education in Astronomy

The Fremont Peak Observer

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Successful Mars Watch

On September 17th, the Planetary Society, the Astronomical Association of Northern California, and the FPOA jointly presented a Mars Gazing evening at Fremont Peak. Before the event, Rick Morales had commented that if 1% of the 7000 Planetary society members showed up with family and/or friends, we might have more than 200 people, close to a record. He underestimated the attendance considerably.

Between 400 and 500 people showed up at Fremont peak that night! Besides the 30" scope, John Hiles manned his 20", Earl Watts brought his 20", and Kevin Medlock made his 8" refractor available. Of particular interest was the pair of giant binoculars (we're talking two 20" dobsonians!) brought by Rick Decker. Although he had some trouble getting them set up, they were definitely a hit.

Many other smaller scopes (and their owner/demonstrators) were there as well. Tom Mathis brought his computerized scope and Apple MacIntosh running the Voyager program.

The event was crowded, but smoothly run. If there were any complaints, no one was listening (Hmmm..., perhaps I could have phrased that better). Rangers Rick Morales and Dan Martin used their radios to find parking places for cars as they arrived, working until past 11pm until the outflow of cars finally began to exceed the influx. Dan, by the way, is the new ranger at the peak and a new member of FPOA. Rick praised the many people who carpooled to the peak. The waiting line for a view through the 30" got up to an hour at its worst, but most visitors seemed excited and happy.

Although all went well, and the visitors had a good time, more than one worker at the event felt it would be alright if we didn't get quite that many people at a public viewing night again for a while!

Ranger Rick Recognized

The Board of Directors, at the suggestion of Kevin Medlock, voted to recommend Rick Morales for the G. Bruce Blair Gold Medal at the January meeting of the Western Astronomical Association.

The Western Astronomical Association (WAA), is an umbrella organization to which most astronomy groups in the western United States belong. Groups in the remainder of the country belong to the Astronomical League. G. Bruce Blair was an active member of the WAA whose service to the group was remembered after his sudden death by the creation of this award given annually for service to amateur astronomy.

Past winners of this award have included Patrick Moore, the british astronomer, and John Dobson. Rick has been of great service not only to our group, but to all who come to Fremont Peak to learn about astronomy. In the spirit of public education and service to the wider scope of amateur astronomers, Rick would be an excellent choice for this award.

Graphic Improvements

Several graphic improvements are planned for the organization. The board is looking for a logo or design for a patch that volunteers can wear on their jackets or hats while at the peak. This should help visitors to identify FPOA people. If you have an idea, sketch your version of the FPOA patch and send it in. The permanent address for the organization is FPOA, P.O. Box 110, San Juan Bautista, 95045.

The Newsletter editor has placed an order for a new scanner to work with his desktop publishing software, and will finally be able to include photographs in the newsletters. If you've got some good ones, send them in!

Questionnaire Results

Back at the beginning of the year, you received a newsletter containing a questionnaire. Everyone filled out the questionnaire before even reading the rest of the newsletter and mailed it right in. (Do you believe me so far?) Unfortunately, a roving pack of wild dogs must have attacked many of the letter carriers around the Bay Area that day, because most of the questionnaires never arrived. Nevertheless, you've probably been eager waiting ever since to find out what gems the newsletter staff could glean from those few questionnaires that got through. (Right?) Here goes:

There were six questions posed in the great "1988 FPOA Membership Questionnaire". The first asked where the respondent learned of the FPOA. The most frequent answer was "Other". In each case, the comments indicated that they met someone from FPOA at another astronomy related activity. "Newspaper article" and "an Associate" tied for second. No one claimed to have been attracted by literature posted at the peak, or by "accident".

Almost everyone indicated they were "very familiar" with the goals and objectives of the Association, although one comment indicated that the educational nature of the FPOA was less well known among other astronomy groups than it should be.

The question about what "one new thing" our facility needs was interesting in that several of the items have either been provided this year or are under discussion. Requests for toilet facilities, and for a cover around the 30" to keep out stray light have been fulfilled. Setting circles are planned soon, and the board recently discussed establishing a program that could be sent to schools before they visited the peak. Other suggestions include: a declination slewing motor, polar aligned concrete piers for C-8 and related scopes, organized parking on public nights, and a couch.

In response to the question about "one more benefit of membership", respondents suggested Discounts for astronomical supplies, a list of local astronomy equipment dealers, an IBM compatible computer on site, and a better method for welcoming and including new members in association activities.

For additional services, members suggested Lectures and slide shows for High School Students at their schools, Courses and/or lectures in astronomy, Telescopes for visitors, Astrophotographic coaching/ supplies/ displays, and a CCD camera for use on the 30".

To the "Parking at the Peak" question, most respondents threw up their collective hands. There were recommendations to only let in cars that had paid the park fee, to urge members to carpool, to install better signs, to park at the top and walk, and to only allow a certain number of cars other than in the parking lots.

There you have the questionnaire results. The shortage of responses (that is, responses that made it past the wild dogs) leaves the board with less than a clear picture of what the membership would like to see happen. If the responses described here don't sound like yours, please make an extra effort to get your opinions to board members during 1989! (You wouldn't want everything to go to the dogs, would you?)

Membership Renewal

As the new year begins, you will again receive your membership renewal notice. The annual fee remains a lowly ten dollars. All memberships run for the calendar year, and thus new members who joined anytime this past year will also receive renewal notices.

As you prepare to send in that renewal check, consider upgrading your subscription to the Contributing class (\$30) or Sustaining (\$50), or just including a donation to help maintain and improve the observatory. Many of the improvements in progress are being made by the labor of our members when a few extra bucks in the treasury would let us buy the needed items. Our highly skilled volunteers could then concentrate on those items that must be custom-made (digital setting circles, any- one?).

Please also think ahead to volunteering some of your time in support of our public programs. The schedule is now in the planning stages, and will be presented in detail in the Spring newsletter. Most of the visitors are relatively new to astronomy, and are thrilled to see the craters of the moon or a planet. You need not be a "whiz" at finding things in the sky to provide a wonderful service to these people.

We are also beginning to develop a Docent Training program, so that those of you who may be uncomfortable with the idea of speaking to a group of visitors can learn more about the park, the observatory, and the materials available for presentations. We will also arrange for you to work with an experienced presenter your first few times.

January WorkDays

January will be maintenance month at the Observatory. Pick a Saturday (any Saturday) and come help with the work. The board has scheduled work days for January 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th. You ought to be able to fit one of them into your schedule.

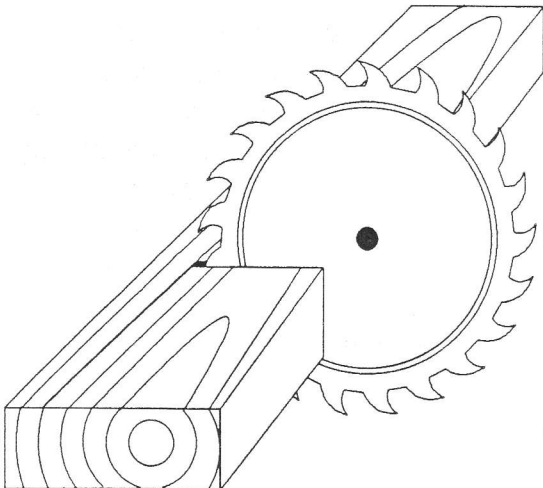
The major "attraction" of the January 7th work day will be the removal of the 30" mirror for it's annual maintenance and recoating. The mirror, together with the cell it sits in drop off the back end of the telescope (figuratively, of course). Since the mirror alone weighs about 130 pounds, several strong bodies are needed to make sure the removal goes smoothly. The 30" scope will be out-of-service for about a month.

The January 14th workday will coincide with the next meeting of the Board of Directors. Workers that day can take an hour or two off to observe their representatives in action.

A number of projects are scheduled for completion during January. The overhead trellises above the decks must be bolted down, and the shingles fixed in several areas. We will be installing several AC outlets outside the building, and putting low-level lighting under the steps. The shutter doors will be rebuilt, and a new sign constructed and mounted outside.

Inside the building, there is painting to be done. Several display cabinets will be constructed and hung, and vertical mini-blinds installed.

Set aside a Saturday to spiff up the observatory and say "Hi" to fellow members. With a good turnout, it will be light work for all.



From the Log

An important item of equipment at the observatory is the log book. Although it was intended to record basic activity and problems, it has become a community "open diary".

Last issue we presented interesting excerpts from the first few months of the log. In this issue, we continue our "catch up", with the plan to eventually make recent excerpts a regular feature.

July 20, 1987 - John Gleason

Video images of Saturn. Windy, cloudy, cold, poor seeing. Couldn't be better!

July 27 & 28, 1987 - Kevin Medlock & Dennis Merrill

No fog either night, but sky was still dark enough to see M33 naked eye. We came to photograph and for two nights that's what we did. Both nights sunset to sunrise.

August 20, 1987 - Carter Roberts & Don Stone

With Rick's help, we showed Saturn to 80 Girl Scouts from Watsonville. Photographed M20, M57, M45. Very damp night. Gave up about 3 AM.

August 29, 1987 - Fred Schumacher

Observed a wide array of Messier objects. Seeing not as clear as it appears visually. Moderate wind out of NW causing some instrument motion. Temp approx. 15 deg. C. Objects observed in not the following order: M57, M31 Double Cluster, Saturn, and Jupiter at prime focus. Problem is that the camera cannot be racked in far enough. Wind coming up out of the West about 1 AM. Temp still about 15 deg C. Photographed Jupiter using negative projection. Film Ektachrome push exposures 1/500, 1/250, 1/125. Disregard focusing problem statement. Problem resolved due to operator error.

Sept. 2, 1987 - Bill Marble & Bob Head

First night on the scope. Significant cloud cover on arrival. 1st Qtr moon, started to shine through at approx 2030 hours. We viewed terminator and switched eyepieces to get a feel for what's available. Hoping clouds will clear to let us see more.

(Continued on back page)

More from the log...

Clouds finally broke about 0100 hours. Spent the rest of the night looking at Jupiter, Andromeda, Orion Nebula, etc. We were unsuccessful at finding the Ring Nebula, M57. Had great time and are looking forward to future nights.

Sept. 22, 1987 - Charlie Carlson

2100 hours, Warm and lightly windy. Missed Richard Berry here by an hour or so: he was here and took pictures of the observatory to get ideas for his own observatory.

October 24, 1987 - Donn Mukensnoble

Opened to slowly clearing skies. Still twilight and some high clouds. Bradfield's comet bright, with starlike nucleus and good coma... Showed an ad-hoc group of Rick's friends (15 or so). Saw M27, M56 after everyone left... M36, M37, M38, M1. Finished up on M42 as it was just rising. A fitting end to a wonderful year. Closed 2355 hours.

November 5, 1987 - Rick Morales

Opened observatory for a class of 31 seventh graders from Chaldorf School in Sacramento. Students looked at the 30" and we rolled the roof back to show them how it works. Using the 8" reflector and the C-90, students were able to view the Moon, which was full this evening, and Jupiter. A little mud was tracked in the building but no serious problems.

The 1 1/4" eyepieces that we have fit the 8" reflector but not the 4" refractor. Hmmmm....

February 13, 1988 - Skip, Jack, and Kevin

Clear skies. Wind 5 to 20 mph. Objects were M42, NGC1973, 5, 7, Horsehead, M64, 2903 (3193, 3195, 3187 and some uncharted galaxies.) (NGC 2931, 2930, 2929), (2946, 41, 33, 34, 28, 49, 23, 43).

The Coma Cluster? The whole constellation is a galaxy cluster! The Uranometria is wrong. Where they have galaxy groups, to each one they should add 15 to 20 more. The Copeland Septet of galaxies in Leo had 35 extra members we could count. Closed at 0330 hours.

March 19, 1988 - Jack Zeiders

Scope opened by John Gleason? No one home. Arrived with Kevin Medlock at 1830 hours. Attached RCA 2000 Video Camera to 30" prime focus. Good views of Moon, Jupiter, Venus, and Trapesium. No nebula.

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John leaves to sit at Rick's house. Jack and Kevin start visual. Orion, M42, M41, 4565, M51, Moon, Jupiter, M65, M66, 3628, various fuzzies in Virgo (We didn't have a chart.) Kevin crashes. Jack scans Virgo (about 50 galaxies viewed), Leo (about 30 galaxies).

EARTHQUAKE!!! about knocks me off the ladder. Short break, wait for nerves to calm down.

March 16, 1988 - Kevin Medlock

Arrived 2 hours before sunset. Entertained a group from Hollister High School until 2200 hours. Showed them Jupiter, M42, M51, M53, 2392. They seemed to have a good time. Next, Dennis Merrill and I set up for photons. We have captured some photons and are taking them back to HQ for interrogation. Will have to wait to see what develops. Quit around 0430 hours because glare from very large GE lightbulb on Eastern horizon. Saturn is a marvelous sight! Yawn, Zzzzzzz, Snore.

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The FREMONT PEAK OBSERVER is published quarterly and is the official publication of the Fremont Peak Observatory Association. The Association is a tax-exempt, not for profit organization dedicated to providing public education and interpretive services in Astronomy using the resources available at Fremont Peak State Park.

Basic membership in the Association is \$10.00 per year, plus a one-time \$10.00 initiation fee. Membership in the Association runs the calendar year. There is no pro-rationing of dues. For further information, contact any Board Member.