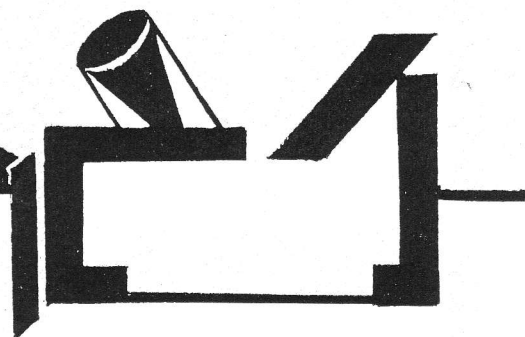


THE
FREMONT
PEAK

OBSERVER



Volume Ten

Number Three

October 1994

Editor - Denni Medlock

AUGUST 13TH STAR-B-Q A HUGE ASTRONOMICAL/GASTRONOMICAL SUCCESS!

The grand weather that has resided at the Peak this summer stayed around for the annual FPOA/AANC Star-B-Q on August 13th. Temperatures in the eighties with a light breeze, keeping the flies away, brought out swarms of people instead. I stopped counting at 150.

RAGING WATERS - FREMONT PEAK STYLE

While most attendees showed up behind Ranger Rick's house just before the barbecue was to start at 5 PM, there was a good deal of fun going on for the hour or so before hand. Usually the task of picking up spare picnic tables, loading them on to the park truck, driving them back to the barbecue site and unloading them is a tedious chore no one wants to get drafted for. This year FPOA's contingent of young astronomers (that is, all the kids) hopped on the truck with supersoaker water guns in hand and rode shotgun through the park along with the adults. Need it be said that all involved were soaked by the time the picnic tables were delivered and arranged. It was too hot to mind getting wet, except perhaps the camper in the far campground who abruptly had his cigarette (illegal because of the high fire danger) doused by a passing park truck!

ENCOUNTERS OF THE GASTRONOMICAL KIND

5 PM arrived and brought the main crowd, who brought all the assorted and wonderful side dishes that have made this event one of the best in the astronomical community in the area. Every year the AANC (Astronomical Association of Northern California) sponsors a contest for the best dish with an astronomical theme. This year the gourmet cooks in the crowd outdid themselves. There were such entries as Gauteux Jupiter/Comet cake (Diane Tokugawa and Alan Gould, Lawrence Hall of Science), Starry Starry Nights jello and fruit (Susan Roper), the Pomological Fruit Belt of Jupiter (Becky Steinbrunner, San Mateo A. S.), and Black Hole Chocolate Bundt Cake (Tom Watney, Mt. Diablo A. S.). Winners from the FPOA included Island Universe Egg Rolls (Linda Fingerhut), Fornax Fruit Salad (Mary Henderson), Solar Granules Macaroni Salad (Tammi LeClert), and Cratered Chip Dip (Cindy Smith). My personal favorites by name were Tunguska Chicken (Susie McWilliams, Tri-Valley Stargazers) and Superluminous Salsa (Joe Wujek, Eastbay A. S.). Prizes included two \$25 gift certificates to Lumicon, a Sky and Telescope T-shirt, planispheres, a water clock and astro-posters.

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RAFFLE

A pair of good binoculars and an observing chair, donated by Orion Telescope Center, were the top prizes in the FPOA raffle, which John Stewart reports actually *made* money this year. (We've never tried to make money on the Star-B-Q. It has always been considered a gift to our membership for the great job of support it gives to the observatory every year.)

EMPEROR DIBBELL HONORED

The FPOA set time aside to honor Frank Dibbell, past President and member *extraordinaire*. Frank has probably single-handedly put in more time than any one member in the capacity of President and Newsletter Editor and that is saying quite a bit when one considers the hard working, generous volunteer corp that built and operates the program at the Peak. Every year Frank faithfully paid his membership dues, so the FPOA Board of Directors, in honor of all Frank's dedicated effort, gave him a Life Membership to the Association. The FPOA and its individual members, especially those of us who have work side by side with him, are going to miss Frank and his family when they move to Colorado next year. Thanks for the memories, Frank!

NEW BOARD MEMBERS ELECTED

FPOA board member elections were held during the Star-B-Q on August 13th. Voting was brisk with a large turn-out due to the well-attended picnic. Those elected to the two open board positions were Chris Angelos, who is sitting on the board for the first time, and Denni Medlock, who is returning to the board after a two year hiatus. They were elected to serve three year terms.

FIREBUG TARGETS FREMONT PEAK

There was far more behind-the-scenes excitement at Fremont Peak the two days before the Star-B-Q than when the crowd was there. On Thursday afternoon (Aug. 11th) Ranger Rick was just leaving to go down to San Juan Bautista, Carmen and Tony in tow, when he noticed a car speeding off and a patch of grass on fire by Doe Flat. Jumping out of his own car, Rick was able to stomp the small blaze out with his feet. Continuing on down the road he came across a larger blaze beginning to spread up the hillside near the Reeves' ranch entrance. Much too large and on much too steep a hillside to personally handle, Rick rushed back to the park with the intent of calling 911 from the phone in the lower parking lot. But by the time he arrived smoke was pouring out of the lower campground. A fire was growing in rapid proportions from a site there. Camp host Art Loyd, who lives in a trailer by the old abandoned ranger's residence near the upper parking lot, was already evacuating. A quick response by the California Department of Forestry firefighters sent a borate bomber to the site, soon followed by ground crews. That fire was contained in about an hour.

However, this determined firebug had managed to set another two fires along the ridge bordering Fremont Peak and Hollister Hills. The firecrews were not so lucky in putting these two blazes, which soon merged into one larger one, out. By Thursday night, according to Channel 8 ("From high atop Fremont Peak"), the fire was proving very stubborn in the steep terrain, spreading to a second ridge to the south. The road was closed to provide fire equipment full access, at that point making us wonder if anyone was going to be able to get up to the observatory for the Perseids on Friday night and the Star-B-Q on Saturday.

Fortunately, CDF firecrews are equally, if not

more stubborn, the feeling being that this was during an explosively dry period of weather. Stop this fire soon or fight it for days over a larger area.

By Friday noon, according to Channel 8 (which for some reason I get perfectly clear in San Leandro without cable), the fire was contained, with the following announcement that the road would be open for traffic by 1 PM. However, Perseid watchers were kept in San Juan Bautista until about 6:30 PM before that became fact.

No arrests have been made, even though Rick was able to get a description of the arsonist's car. Later on Thursday there was several grass fires set along the highway through Pacheco Pass as well. Same person?

The hero of this story is, of course, Rick Morales. The fire he put out near Doe Flat was downslope from the observatory. Generally, without a wind to push them otherwise, fires travel *uphill*, spreading as they go. The CDF, its dedicated groundcrews and pilots, deserve applause, also. Working together they saved much of which we consider valuable - not all of it grasslands. Imagine what it would be like to not have the observatory or the 30", the campgrounds or the public programs.

Next time you see Rick, let him know what he did was appreciated. I'm certain he'll just say it was part of the job.

DIGITAL SETTING CIRCLES TO BE INSTALLED

Dave Barosso plans to install the long-awaited digital settings circles on the 30" telescope early this fall. Originally planned for installation several years ago different areas have proven to be problems. The last two - replacing the software lost in the Oakland Hills

Firestorm of 1991, and a lack of a suitable computer on which to run the program - will hopefully prove to be minor obstacles.

Dave recently contacted Steve Bisque, of Software Bisque, who agreed to replace free of charge, *TheSky*, a program FPOA purchased several years ago. Matter-of-fact, we were Steve's first customer! (Software Bisque is responsible for the recent remote observing being done with the 24" on Mt. Wilson. See *Sky and Telescope*, July, 1994, page 38.)

This leaves the FPOA in need of a PC based, 486 computer with a VGA card. Yes, we are asking for a donation! If you or anyone you know has cheap access to such a system, or even a 386 since we can inexpensively upgrade those, let Dave Barosso know. He can be reached at (209) 887-2106.

Installation of the digital setting circles will make the job of finding objects *soooo* much easier! Even I'll be able to use the scope.

DEATH OF A COMET - THE VIEW FROM FREMONT PEAK

The days of July 16th to July 22nd saw more telescopes throughout the world trained on a single point in the sky than ever before. What observers witnessed over that period of time was the death of Comet Shoemaker - Levy 9. This former periodic comet came to the end of its cosmic lifetime rather dramatically, giving scientist and laymen much more than they had imagined.

At Fremont Peak Observatory the 30" was reserved throughout "Comet Week" by members who wished to see if they would be able to spot what they thought at the time were going to be "tiny" impact markings on the surface. Vance Chin, Holly Jessop, Bruce deGraff and Landon Noll were among others

ANOTHER COMET RENDEZVOUS PENDING?

Recent reports concerning Comet Machholz-2 from Brian Marsden of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory have pointed out that this newly found periodic comet, discovered by Don Machholz of Colfax, California, will very likely be crossing the orbital plane of Earth in its future. Comet Machholz-2 (1994o) is very similar to Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 in that ten days after its discovery, the comet experienced an outburst, after which four companions (faint comets) have been observed travelling with the main comet. All parts are within 0.8 degree of the comet. At the time of the outburst the comet went from magnitude 10 to magnitude 7. Its periodic orbit is 5.44 years.

The question now is whether Jupiter's gravitational pull can influence this comet enough to tug it out of Earth's way. It will be interesting to see what circus the news media makes of this story after the "success" of Shoemaker-Levy 9.

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who viewed Jupiter and the Comet with interest throughout the week.

It soon became clear that Comet Shoemaker-Levy 9 was going to surpass expectations when reports began coming in that impact "craters" could be seen using only a 4" refractor.

Through the 30" however, they were **spectacular**. Cloudy weather occluded planet observing on Wednesday and Thursday nights, but by Friday viewers were easily seeing the major strike locales that were visible between the 30°S and 50°S latitudes. Nor were the "craters" fading with any apparent swiftness. By Saturday evening, July 23rd, about 100 visitors came up for the special Jupiter/Comet program the FPOA was holding. Easily visible were hits Q, R & D/G. Strikes D/G were so close together on the planet that they soon merged into an elongated oval visually in the 30".

By the evening of the Star - B-Q on August 13th, the strike zones were still quite dark and visible in the telescope at the Peak. We were fortunate to have dark, stable seeing

that night, allowing over a hundred and fifty people to view the phenomenon through the 30".

ANTIQUE TELESCOPE SOCIETY TO MEET LOCALLY

The 3rd Annual Convention of the Antique Telescope Society will be meeting at the University of Santa Clara on October 21-24, 1994. The theme of this conference is "Unique Glass by the Bay" and will include trips to Chabot Observatory, Lick Observatory to see the Crossley, and Richard Observatory at the University of Santa Clara.

For more information please contact Dr. Walter Breyer, ATS Secretary, 30 Green Valley Road, Wallingford, PA 19086.

OBSERVATORY PROGRAM SCHEDULE

Oct. 1 Public Program
- Jack Murphy & Doug Padrick

Oct. 8 Public Program
- Rob Toebe & Carter Roberts
8 PM