



the Webfooted Astronomer

News from the Seattle Astronomical Society

September 2007

Share and share alike

SAS members divulge “secret” observing sites

The August meeting of the Seattle Astronomical Society was devoted to a show-and-tell on favorite observing sites.

Jon Bearscove talked about a recent excursion to Rattlesnake Lake, and reports that, even without our former special access, the viewing isn't too bad there if one can avoid the mosquitoes. Mike Langley reviewed Paramount Park, the Jacobsen Observatory, and Tiger Mountain. Tim McGuire recently spent a couple of days as a volunteer fire lookout at Suntop Lookout northeast of Mt. Rainier. Tim said he got “burned out” getting up every hour to check on viewing conditions, which is a funny thing to happen at a fire lookout. Tim also had a few words about Sunrise Point. Anita Eclissi talked about observing and hiking at Deception Pass and passed along Scott Hill's reports on Oregon and Mt. Bachelor star parties. Inside are details of Scott Cameron's presentation on Dominion Observatory in Victoria and some of Maxine Nagel's photography from Table Mountain.



Weather was an issue at times at this year's Table Mountain Star Party. Photo by Maxine Nagel. More on page 6.

NEXT MEETING

Sept. 19, 2007 — 7:30 p.m.
University of Washington
Physics/Astronomy Building,
Room A-102

Dr. Ron Hobbs **“Barnstorming the** **Planets”**

Dr. Ron Hobbs, public programs assistant at the Museum of Flight and solar system ambassador for NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, will be our guide as we travel through the wonders of the solar system via the latest pictures and scientific data from NASA's New Horizons probe, Cassini, the Mars Orbiters, the Rovers - and more.

We don't need spacesuits to visit Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars; Dr. Hobbs will take us there with his vivid, enthusiastic presentation!

For more information:

http://www2.jpl.nasa.gov/ambassador/profiles/Ron_Hobbs.htm

SAS Calendar

September 11 — New Moon

September 13-16

Brooks Memorial Park Star Party,
Goldendale. Contact: Karl and Judy
Schroeder.

September 14-15

Orion Nebula Star Party, Table Mountain

September 19 — 7:30 p.m.

Seattle Astronomical Society Meeting
Guest speaker: Dr. Ron Hobbs,
"Barnstorming the Planets". Details on
page 1.

September 19 — 9 p.m.

UW Observatory — Public viewing night

September 19— First quarter Moon

September 22 — 7 p.m.

Seattle Astronomical Society Star Parties

- ◆ Green Lake, Seattle
- ◆ Paramount Park, Shoreline

September 23 — 2 p.m.

Astrophotography/Imaging SIG meeting
Contact: astrophoto@seattleastro.org

September 29 — 6:30 p.m.

Amatuer Telescope Makers SIG meeting
Contact: atm@seattleastro.org

October 3 — 7 p.m.

UW Observatory — Public viewing night

October 13 — 7 p.m.

Tiger Mountain star party (members only)

October 17 — 7:30 p.m.

Seattle Astronomical Society Meeting
Sonny Tremoulet, master telescope builder

Brooks memorial star party set for Sept. 13-16

The annual SAS star party at Brooks Memorial State Park near Goldendale will be held the weekend of September 13-16. The event is organized each year by Karl and Judy Schroeder.

The park, which is about 13 miles north of Goldendale, is about a four-hour drive from Shoreline. The site is about 2,500 feet in elevation, with excellent dark skies. It features clear views to the north and south. There is a ridge to the east that blocks any objects below about 20 degrees. Viewing to the west can be a challenge because of trees.

SAS stargazers will be set up in the group camping area, on the left side of highway 97 as one proceeds south. The fee for the entire weekend is just \$10 per adult. Kids are free. Karl will collect on-site.

For more information about Brooks Memorial State Park, and other attractions in the area, visit the State Parks Department Web site at:

<http://www.parks.wa.gov/parkpage.asp?selectedpark=Brooks%20Memorial>

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Why be a member?

*From the president's desk
By Jon Bearscove*

At our banquet in January when I was being “inaugurated” as the new president of the SAS, an intriguing question was posed at my table. The question was a very simple but powerful one. Why join the SAS when the newsletters are free online, the meetings are free and open to the public, and the star parties are free to attend and enjoy.

In other words, one could theoretically belong to the SAS for free, participate in all events, keep up-to-date with our online newsletter, and even join in the fun at our star parties. I didn't have an answer because these are all great points and of course true. I was thinking about this question because it's quite compelling if you really think about it.

One really could enjoy all the perks of being part of a non-profit organization without ever really officially joining. But this might be in direct contrast to joining the club and not enjoying all the perks and participating as a paying member.

In other words, is there really any difference between being an active non-member or an inactive member? Both of these concepts sort of rub against the grain of the whole concept of forming and maintaining a club or society.

There really are different levels of membership in any organization, and the SAS is probably typical in nature. There are those who try to attend every outreach event and meeting, those who mainly enjoy reading the newsletters, those who might not have time for outreach or the meetings, and perhaps some enjoy just the observing, and others may only enjoy the meetings and don't like observing.

The reality of the SAS is that most members remain (or appear to remain) inactive and uninvolved. This isn't necessarily bad or something to be critiqued too heavily, but is perhaps the nature of the SAS. It was like this when I was interested in running for president several years ago, and really hasn't changed. Naturally participation issues are a concern for anyone who is on the board when activities and volunteer opportunities present themselves.

So far this year we have had many great opportunities to get to know each other better, and help share our hobby with both children and adults alike including the Boy Scout Camp, the SAS annual picnic, the Japanese Garden Moon Viewing Festival, and even a variety of star parties. We've had great times together at these events, and my only wish has been that more members would join in and take advantage of some of these perks of their membership.

For those of you who have been at our events this year and have been helping out, you are the ones who are providing the face of the SAS to the public, and your service so far has been outstanding. Scopes and smiles. That's what it comes down to sometimes.

There are all kinds of reasons for joining a club like ours, and it's even possible that the original reason you may have joined has evolved over the years. A lot of friendships have evolved through the SAS, and I'm willing to bet that a lot of members remain a part of the SAS due to these friendships alone...clear skies or not. This is what it really comes down to...the people.

“Why be a Member?” continued on page 5

Dominion Astrophysical Observatory

Victoria facility attracts lovebirds with “stars in their eyes”

Presenters at the August meeting of the Seattle Astronomical Society shared some of their favorite observing sites and astronomy attractions. Scott Cameron talked about Victoria’s Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, which turns out to have an interesting attraction for the newly married.

The observatory features the 1.8 meter John Stanley Plaskett telescope, named after the celebrated Canadian astronomer who designed the instrument and became the first director of the observatory. When it opened in 1918 it was, for a short time, the largest telescope in the world. It is 15 meters long and weighs 42 tons.

The mirror blank for the scope came out of Antwerp, and they barely got it out of Europe before the start of WWI. The mirror was ground in Pittsburgh by John Brashear, one of the top telescope makers of the time.

Plaskett used his namesake scope to discover “Plaskett’s star,” which is still the most massive known binary star. The instrument is still used for scientific research today.

“Unfortunately, you can’t go and put your eye to the eyepiece any more,” Cameron said, “but they hook up a CCD and shoot pictures of stars on the side of the dome as part of their demonstration.”

They once nearly burned the place down. When replacing the original mirror, it was left leaning against the wall, with the slit in the dome open. Eventually, the Sun hit the mirror, which reflected it up and melted part of the dome.

What’s the attraction for young lovers? We don’t know, but two people in attendance at the meeting reported having visited the observatory on their honeymoons.



The Plaskett Telescope in the Dominion Astrophysical Observatory, on Little Saanich Mountain near Victoria, B.C. For a time, the 1.8 meter scope was the largest in the world. The observatory and the adjacent “Centre of the Universe” interpretive center are open to the public.



New SAS Google Group: “Through the Clouds”

Have you checked out the new SAS Google Group yet? “Through the Clouds” was noted in last month’s newsletter after being created in late July. The group is an easy way to communicate with all members, and the site will have various files, maps, and articles posted, and discussion pages on a variety of topics.

As of this writing 36 SAS members had signed up for “Through the Clouds.” Joining is easy and free, though one must first create a free Google account.

Check it all out at:

http://groups.google.com/group/Seattle_Astro

Maxine Nagel shot this photo of our galaxy at this year’s Table Mountain Star Party

“Why Be a Member?” continued from page 3

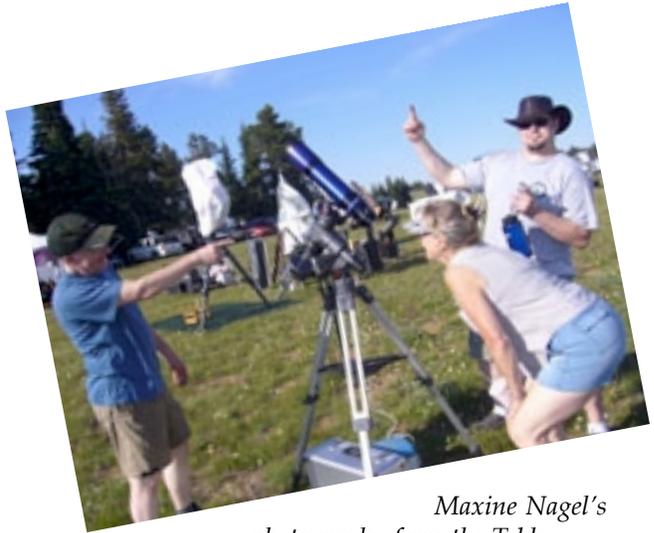
In closing, I’d like to encourage everyone, especially our newest members, to join in our outreach events. These are really important for the SAS. Even if you don’t have a scope, I’m sure you have a smile you can contribute, and the questions we get asked for the most part are very easy to answer. We really do need your help sometimes, and no experience is necessary. After all, everything is free! Oops...pardon the Freudian slip. I meant to say that we should all try to make the most of our membership.

Jon Bearscove
President





SAS Gallery



Maxine Nagel's photography from the Table Mountain star party. Clockwise from the upper left: The photographer with John Dobson, who spoke at the party; helpful astronomers with advice on where to look; Anita Eclissi finds romance on the mountain; scopes soggy but safe after a thunderstorm; SAS members Mike Langley, Tim McGuire, Andrea Torland, and Burley Packwood livin' la vida loca as the Table Mountain "Breakfast Club."



Congratulations!

SAS member **Zach Drew** recently received his Lunar certificate. To qualify for the Lunar award, one of the many observing awards through the Astronomical League, one must record observations of 100 objects on the Moon. Way to go, Zach!

To learn more about the various observing clubs, visit the Astronomical League Web site:

<http://www.astroleague.org/observing.html>

Contact Mike Langley, SAS VP for education, for more information.

Future file: upcoming meeting topics

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 17, 7:30 PM

SONNY TREMOULET
MASTER TELESCOPE BUILDER

Sonny Tremoulet will bring his award-winning 16" f-4.5 Newtonian telescope and share about its design and construction - including the mirror which he created on his homebuilt, computer controlled, grinding, polishing and figuring machine. He will also share about the mirror making machine itself and the interferometer he uses to test mirrors.

The scope Tremoulet will share with us is outfitted with digital encoders that connect to a Sky Commander setting circles unit, then to a laptop computer. He also built an equatorial platform for this telescope which allows it to track objects without manual adjustments.

For anyone who has dreamed of making their own telescope, or who would just like to understand the innards of their store-bought Newtonian reflector better, this is a wonderful opportunity to learn from and ask questions of an expert!

Orion Nebula Star Party at Table Mountain Sept. 14-15

The annual Orion Nebula Star Party will be held Sept. 14 and 15 up at Table Mountain. This informal, free event typically attracts between 20 and 50 astronomers.

The ONSP is hosted by Jim Bielaga, proprietor of **Aurora Astro Products** in Everett. Bielaga, by the way, announces later hours at the shop on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. The new hours:

Monday, Thursday, Friday: 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.
Tuesday, Wednesday: Noon to 8 p.m.
Saturday: 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Aurora Astro Products is in the Silver Lake Plaza shopping center, 11419 19th Avenue SE.
Web site:

<http://www.auroraastro.com/>

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Co-Treasurers, Rod Ash and Maxine Nagel
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NEXT MEETING
September 19
"Barnstorming the
Planets" with Dr.
Ron Hobbs
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Who could this be but Maxine Nagel, peering through binos at Table Mountain Star Party, July 2007.