



THE OBSERVER

SAN BERNARDINO VALLEY AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS

Member of The Astronomical League

2009, International Year of Astronomy

<http://sbvaa.org/>



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Since 1958

February 2009

Meeting:

February 14, 2009

Main Feature:

Wonders of The Winter Sky

Location:

San Bernardino County
Museum, 7:00 p.m.
Redlands, CA. California St.
exit, I-10 Fwy.

Pre-meeting Dinner, 5:00 p.m.,
Hometown Buffet, Loma
Linda, CA

After the meeting telescopes
will be set up for viewing and
members will be available to
answer questions. Bring your
telescope to observe with us.

*No telescope is too humble, and
beginners are always made
welcome!*

After viewing the group will
head for Coco's in Redlands,
Tennessee exit, I-10 Fwy.

Program

Wonders of The Winter Sky

Our very own Chris Clarke will bring us the wonders of the winter sky. Chris will be discussing and illustrating the numerous and varied constellations and deep sky features of our dark winter sky. Chris is well qualified to bring us this program, both from personal experience and from his work with the planetarium at San Bernardino Valley College.

If you can, bring a guest, adult or student, and introduce them to the night sky.



Come observe with us after the meeting!

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Calendar of Upcoming Events

February 14, Club Meeting at the Museum

February 18, Outreach, Smiley School, Redlands

February 21, 2009, Star Party, Loc. TBD

March 3, Outreach, Lincoln School, Colton

March 5, Outreach, Mission School, Riverside

28 March 2009, *Messier Marathon [Riverside
Astronomical Society's GMARS Site in Landers, CA.]*

Editor's Message

By Jim Sommer

Tis the season for good dark winter skies and great viewing from your favorite dark site. This is a great time to introduce someone to the wonders of astronomy. Bring a friend or neighbor or a student to a club meeting and/or star party. You can kindle someone's interest, fire their imagination and touch the future.

*"The contemplation of celestial things will
make a man both speak and think more sublimely and
magnificently when he comes down to human affairs."*

*Cicero
106 - 43 BC*

Upcoming Outreaches

By Chris Clarke

Well, the new year has brought with it a new list of outreach events for the club! Scheduled for mid-February and early March we have visits planned to Smiley School in Redlands, Lincoln School in Colton and Mission Bell School in Riverside.

On Wednesday, February 18 from 6 pm to 8 pm, we'll be at Smiley School (located at 1210 W. Cypress Ave., Redlands) sharing views of the crescent Venus and Saturn with its rings nearly edge-on.

On Tuesday, March 3, we'll be over at Lincoln School (located at 444 E. Olive St., Colton) from 6:30 to 8:00 pm enjoying the same planets along with a first-quarter moon.

On Thursday, March 5, we'll be at Mission School (located at 4020 Conning St., in Riverside) sharing similar views to Sharon Carey's class as well as to the rest of the school, from 6:30 to 8:00pm. Setup time is about a half hour before each event.

Depending on local sky conditions, we may also get to enjoy views of M42, the Pleiades and other winter sky objects that may be within reach. The kids and their parents always get a big kick out of these sessions. Most have never looked through a telescope before and this a wonderful opportunity for members to become real ambassadors for astronomy.

This year also marks the 400th anniversary of the initial use of the telescope for celestial observation and 2009 is officially designated the "International Year of Astronomy" to mark that milestone. With this as our banner, let's all share the wonders of the universe and make people aware of the progress we have accomplished since then. I can guarantee that you'll never regret sharing the views with an excited child! Stay tuned for further events!!

December Star Party Report

By Cliff Saucier, "Reporter at Large"

Sojourn To Afton Canyon

The scheduled December 27th star party in Johnson Valley came just after our big Christmas storms that blanketed the High Desert with snow. The skies had cleared and most of the snow was gone, but it was still desert winter cold. You know what I mean. Tom Lawson was in attendance, along with Steven Bauer and his family for a total of four with two telescopes. Tom said the seeing was excellent, and especially good...no wind!

The Clear Sky Charts indicated just average transparency that night, but with holiday vacation time for some, a few of us made plans to go out on Monday night instead. Monday afternoon found me packing up my truck when Martin called. Last minute change of plans! Because of the ski resorts lights reflecting off the snow, he suggested the Afton Canyon campsite as an alternative. Afton Canyon is about thirty miles past Barstow, off of the I-15. One hundred and six miles from Cal State (actually my house, one half mile away, but everyone knows were Cal State is). I've been there once, and Martin twice. Amusingly, we were both there for our first night at opposite ends of the campground. Leaving the next morning we ran across each other. Anyway, it's a nice dark site, but we would be spending the night if we traveled that far.

I went back and got more of my cold weather stuff, than thought about just how cold it was going to get. Went back again and got *all* my cold weather stuff. I was raised Lutheran, and it feels wrong somehow to spend more on underwear than most of the women I know, but I wasn't going to get cold this time! Two of my friends from the astronomy club in Apple Valley were going to join us for the evening. Their president, Gary Witt, and their star party guy, Tony Rogers. Both good observing friends for the last few years. SBVAA was represented by Martin Carey, Nick Carey and Rudy Rodriguez.

We all arrived as it was getting close to sunset. Martin came loaded for bear with his twenty-inch, Rudy his twelve, Tony had a twelve-inch Discovery, and I filled out the bill with my ten. The western sky was outfitted with Venus, a thin crescent moon, and down lower Jupiter and *Mercury*. Low horizons are great! The

temperature was dropping rapidly as we set up, and the mirrors needed some time to catch up, so Martin pulled out his Stellarvue, matched with his 40mm TMB Paragon, a really sweet eyepiece. We had a field of view of 2.8°. The new sliver of a crescent moon just floated in the eyepiece, earthshine bright on the darkness. The Double Cluster was wonderful, the Pleiades magnificent, the Andromeda galaxy...these large fields of view are very pleasing to me! Finally time had come and we drifted off to or respective instruments. The sky was terrific, with some skyglow toward Barstow in the west. It was dark enough that Venus was washing out that part of the sky! Once again, absolutely no wind. Looking like the Michelin Man, I was set for the night.

It wasn't long before we were all enjoying some fine views of our favorite objects and new challenges. Then the act of seduction by Martin's twenty-inch dobsonian wonder-scope began. We kept drifting back to our smaller scopes less and less. That much aperture under a crisp night sky is an unforgettable experience. Almost as dark as Grandview, but Orion and the winter part of the sky sparkling bright, rather than the summer sky.

List of the observed items gets boring quickly for those that weren't there, but in particular we liked the Fornax cluster of galaxies. I don't think any of us had been there before. It's a treat that's only enjoyed by those of us living at the southerly latitudes. It gets as high as Scorpius gets, and it's an area just full of fairly large and bright galaxies. Gary Witt somewhat took over the twenty for a bit, shouting out "here's another, two more, come see this edge-on!" It was great! NGC 1300 (a barred spiral) looked like a water sprinkler. But our fever was about to deepen.

Orion was nicely placed, and we were all working on the Flame Nebula, NGC 2024. This is just off of Alnitak, the left most of the belt stars, and where you first start looking for the Horsehead Nebula, something I've lusted after for some time now, pursuing her at every opportunity. If the Flame is good, then maybe, just maybe, you can see the Horse. Rudy had a hydrogen-beta filter, which is said to help quite a bit, and we started our stalk in the twenty. Using a photograph to orient ourselves with the stars in the field, we were getting some glow from the background emission nebula, and seeing dark areas. We tried a couple of different eyepieces and finally hit on a good

combination. There it was! Undeniably, there it was! We all looked for quite awhile, just quietly amazed. We should have tried some of the smaller scopes to find out how much aperture was our minimum, but I don't think any of us thought of it. We were just dumbstruck.

It was now a little after midnight, and we had a full evening. Things were dewing up, and the dew was turning into ice. Gary and Tony said their good-byes. Saturn was about 20° up now, so we made that our last object of the evening. The ball of the planet bisected by a bright line! It looked very strange, very geometric. All turned in, very satisfied with the night. We had seen many things we never viewed before.

The next morning I awoke to Rudy saying quietly, "Cliff, are you OK?" Opening my eye and looking out the breathing gap in my sleeping bag and blankets, I could tell he was a little worried about me. I was covered in ice!



Rudy took some pictures, and I sent one to Gary. He emailed me back. "You look like a groundhog that really doesn't want to come out of his warm burrow!" I guess I did, but it was the best trip in a while. And I was warm!



*(Photos curtesy of Rudy Rodriguez,
"Photographer at Large")*

For Sale

Intes MN56 Maksutov-Newtonian Telescope. Newer glossy white model with 1/8 wave optics and original Russian focuser. Currently sells at Teton Telescope for \$1020. Get this one for \$400.

Tom Bennett

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In The Belly Of The Lion (A January 09 Star Party Report)

By John Deems VP

The date: 1-24-09. The place: Johnson Valley. On this date at this place two senior members of the SBVAA club witnessed some of the best dark sky the SoCal area has to offer. The sky was very dark registering 21.47 on Martin Carey's dark sky meter. The transparency and seeing were above average, with not one cloud and with the temp at around 40 degrees F. it was not that cold. Sorry to say that Martin and myself were the only members to show up, however, that did not dampen our spirits a bit. We spent most of the night enjoying great views of many galaxies, some for the first time. The scopes we had were Martins 4" Televue along with his 12" Lightbridge and my 10" Dob, (however we both forgot to bring a star map with us). Lets start with Saturn, oh(!) he was striking, with a pencil line piercing him through the middle. Next we spied all manner of galaxies, M81-82 stood out, both showing structure with knots all though M82, and we could make out the arms of the spiral in 81. We hunted and found many others also including M106, M109, and another face-on galaxy near the the bottom of the Big Dipper. (Please forgive me, as I have not found my star map to ID all we found.) Of course there was M101, M65-66 and the NCG object near them. We also looked up some old friends like the "owl" "the flame" M46-47 along with the small planetary in M47 looking very much like the "ring" along with it's central star! We found the "Running Man" nebula, and then there was M42, which was stunning! The trapezium with it's four stars sitting in the middle of what looked like a black hole in space, (Martin told me that at one time people thought it was a doorway to the deeper heavens!) The whole cloud formation looked 3-D -- just unbelievable! So by now you may be asking yourself "what does all of this have to do with the belly of the lion?" Well it seems I remembered that if you draw a line between Regulus and the bottom star in the lions hind quarters, (the one right above M65-66) at about the halfway mark there are 3 NCG objects. I had seen these a few times before, and thought that with such a great night I would try to find them again. What we stumbled across was not just three galaxies or four, nor five or six, but no less than seven and maybe a few more. All of them right there in a line, in fact "in the belly of the lion". All in all it turned out to be one of the very best nights either of us could remember at the Johnson Valley site.

I hope to see you all at the next star party. Keep looking up.

Tuesday night, Feb. 3, your club was invited to put on a public outreach at Cal State San Bernardino. Over a dozen scopes of various sizes and types were set up. Although the event was not widely advertised, there was good interest from students and visitors and several people expressed interest in coming to our next meeting. Here are a few photos. (Photos courtesy of Matt Wedel.)



Left: Jim Butts trying to find Orion through the glare of the parking lot lights.

Fidel's classic refractor never fails to create interest.

