



The Observer

SAN BERNARDINO VALLEY AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS

Member of The Astronomical League

<http://sbvaa.org/>



Volume #63, Issue5

Since 1958

May, 2021

Meeting:

May XX, 2021

Location:

First Christian Church
2102 E. Foothill Dr.
San Bernardino, CA

Whenever the club meets, telescopes will be set up (weather permitting) 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!

Program

*Self Created in Your Own
Back Yard*

Good News (at last)

Grandview: Gerald has obtained a reservation for us for the below dates. As long as there is no flair-up of the virus, we should be good to go. YEAH!!! The August dates need to be confirmed but keep your fingers crossed.

Club Meetings: The church will be open to us starting on June 19. We will still observe the wearing of masks and social distancing.

Summer Activities: Status of the “summer social” and the club BBQ is still undetermined. July 17, will either be the “social” at Sizzlers if they are open or a club meeting at the church. September 18, is the planned date for the annual club BBQ but the availability of a site must still be confirmed.

Star Parties: July 10, and Sept. 4, were scheduled for Pioneer Town. But... we may have an alternate site available at Oak Glen for those who don't care to drive out to Pioneer Town.

In the mean time, keep looking up! Utilize your hi-tech backyard locations for those all-important photon fixes.

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Calendar of Upcoming Events (If all goes well!)

Jun. 10 - 13, Star Party, Grandview

Jun. 19, Club Meeting at the church

Jul. 10, Star Party, Oak Glen (Pioneer
Town will be available for
those who want to go there)

Aug. 5 - 8, Star Party, Grandview

Aug. 14, Club Meeting at the church

We'll keep you posted as more info develops.

Father Crowley Overlook
Star Wars Canyon



By Martin Carey



Star Wars Canyon

Dark Sky Fever had gripped me once again, and our nearby sites were just not dark enough. Why have a 20" telescope when you can't bury your nose into the galaxies? So I poured over the Google Earth maps, and suddenly I found it, "Star Wars Canyon." Away from city and traffic at 4000 ft. elevation, this was a perfectly wild but accessible place to park a telescope. We had never been there—just what we needed for our get away. Sharon and I booked a room in Lone Pine, loaded up our van, and headed up 395 for our one-night star-gazing adventure.

After a day exploring Alabama Hills and the Museum of Western Film, we headed southeast on Hwy 136 towards Death Valley. The road had little traffic, and the stars kept getting brighter and brighter. Our headlights showed the Father Crowley Overlook turnoff, and found an empty parking lot and a smooth, wide sidewalk. When we stepped out of the van, we were hit with the immense silence—no sound but little breezes whispering in the rocks. Just a few feet away a white railing guarded the edge of a jagged cliff that dropped into the chasm 1200 ft. below us. Even at night, the ragged rocks and steep cliffs nearby, and distant mountains and valleys off in the distance felt very unearthly.

They call it “Star Wars Canyon” for good reason. Navy pilots practice low altitude, high-speed maneuvers in that canyon during the day, and can be observed at eye-level and close range. Photographers and tourists line the railing with cameras, ready to capture the F-18s and other aircraft screaming by, almost brushing the rocks.

Now after sunset there was no hint of all that commotion. The stars ruled here. Overhead, the Great Bear loomed even bigger than usual in the north, while Leo climbed to his place of dominance. The winter Milky Way was arching westward, taking Orion down into the west. A few small light domes were scattered along the southern and western horizons, but not enough to annoy. This place was truly exquisite, exactly what we hoped it would be. It was time to set up the 20”, which took awhile, especially because—well I’ll admit it, I was getting rusty. But hey, no one was there to laugh at my clumsiness, and the galaxies were beckoning.

Finally the 20 was ready, and I pointed it to M46 in Puppis, a “moderately rich cluster” of about 100 stars. M46 delights because a little green planetary nebula sits in the foreground. It popped out boldly with no filter needed. Uh-huh, that’s what I’m talking about! Next target had to be Orion’s M42 nebula, before it sank out of sight. M42 seldom disappoints, although this night, the turbulent seeing made the Trapezium stars big and soft, like blobs of melting vanilla ice cream. Even so, the delicate, swirling blue-green nebular clouds filled the view. I realized poor seeing didn’t matter when we were hunting nebulae and galaxies. Next, Sharon and I studied the curious shapes of the Trio in Leo, spiral galaxies M65, M66, and their mysterious neighbor, NGC 3628, the “Hamburger Galaxy.” M66 showed a definite twisted shape, with its arms suggesting a stubby pinwheel.

Who can forget the galaxies in Coma Berenices, like the The Whale, the Hockey Stick, and the Black Eye galaxy? Under dark skies, they start to look like odd, peculiar selves. We know that The Whale is a she, with her bright eye, delicate fin, and her calf swimming alongside. There in the dark, she looked alive.

Now of course, we had to get caught in Markarian’s Chain, that magnificent galaxy cluster in Virgo. There you can capture great handfuls of galaxies, from 7 to 12 of them in one field of view, all of different angles, shapes, and sizes. Astronomers study their complex dance, the gravitational attraction they have together. This sublime sight alone made the trip to Star Wars Canyon worthwhile. I was not disappointed by the sky, although I did notice that a very slight haze softened some of the views. No worries, it only makes this site more tantalizing, knowing that it can be even better.

To put a cherry on top of our starry feast, the moon rose just after midnight. We watched the sky glow ever brighter in the east until the yellow gibbous orb hugged Telescope Peak many miles away. It was the perfect ending. The next day, we drove back to Father Crowley Overlook to mingle with the tourists and marvel at the great cliffs and grand vistas. It’s a great place by day, but night time by the cliffs is truly stellar. Perhaps some of you might want to join us there sometime. It’s about 3.5 hours from here, and 45 minutes from Lone Pine. There’s even a decent restaurant 12 minutes away at Panamint Ranch. I’ve noticed that many of you haven’t been out under the stars lately. The deep sky is calling!

Things to See While in “Quarantine”



May 3, conjunction of the Moon and Saturn

May 4, conjunction of the Moon and Jupiter

May 6, nu-Aquariid meteor shower

May 8, nu-Lyrid meteor shower

May 11, M5 well placed and New Moon

May 12, conjunction of the Moon and Venus

May 13, conjunction of the Moon and Mercury

May 15, conjunction of the Moon and Mars

May 23, Saturn enters retrograde

May 26, full Moon and Lunar eclipse

May 28, M4 well placed and conjunction of Venus and Mercury

Some of the above events may require you to be out quite early or quite late so check the weather and dress appropriately.

[As always, check your sky charts and star guides.](#)