



President's Message - August 2011



The Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (A.L.P.O.) Annual Conference is behind us, and was a great success. With about 30 participants, plus several A.S.L.C. members joining the paper sessions, cookout and banquet, a grand time was had by all. The two tours (VLA and NSO) went off without a hitch (not including the 50 degree drop in temperature between Las Cruces and Sunspot). I would like to thank all the ASLC members who helped in the planning and coordination of the event and a very special thank-you to Bert Stevens, the Chair of the event.

Walter Haas and Fred Pilcher gave wonderful presentations at the Banquet. It was really good to see Walter up and around.

Several ASLC members visited the Tombaugh Observatory on the NMSU campus. The instrument (12.5" Cassegrain, with gravity powered tracking system) offered a great view of Saturn. According to the Observatory records, it was the first time someone used the instrument since 2007. We are in the process of cleaning the building and making the instrument usable for outreach programs and research. Steve Shaffer has been spending a lot of time on the facility but we could use a few more volunteers. Please let me know if you can lend a hand.

At the July meeting we elected a Nominating Committee for the upcoming elections. Please consider running for President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer or Director-at-Large. Any voting member can run for office, and elections will be held at our Annual Meeting in October. If you are interested in running for office, please contact the Nominating Committee (see the July meeting minutes for details).

Don't forget we also have a variety of apparel items, including shirts, hoodies, hats, etc. available for sale. Your Society earns \$1.00 per item sold which helps our Treasury. Contact Ann McPhee for details.

Also, please don't forget to pay your dues; it's our major source of income which is needed for many of the projects scheduled for 2011 and 2012. Thanks.

I hope you're able to attend the August 26 meeting. The monthly "Show & Tell", chaired by David Anderson, will start at 7:00 p.m. Please check our website for details on the monthly presentation (aslc-nm.org).

Your President,
Ron J. Kramer



The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC) is dedicated to expanding public awareness and understanding of the wonders of the universe. ASLC holds frequent observing sessions and star parties and provides opportunities to work on club and public educational projects. Members receive the High Desert Observer, our monthly newsletter, membership in the Astronomical League, including AL's quarterly A.L. Reflector. Club dues are \$30.00 per year, including electronic delivery. Send dues payable to ASLC with an application form or note to: Treasurer ASLC, PO Box 921, Las Cruces, NM 88004

ASLC members are entitled to a \$10.00 discount to Sky and Telescope magazine.

ASLC OFFICERS, 2011

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Next Meeting

Mike Sherick will give a presentation covering the design of the Sagrada Observatory, and demonstrate its operation. He will also do a short demonstration of image processing using existing image data. To wrap things up, he will give a brief talk on the progress his 24-inch Ritchey-Chrétien telescope project.

If the weather is forecast to be clear, folks are welcome to bring their telescopes to setup on his observing deck next to the observatory. The meeting will be held in his courtyard, but if it is raining, the meeting will be held inside his home. In either case, folks can see the robotic observatory, and he will demonstrate its operation remotely even if the weather requires the dome to be closed.

Articles Needed

The High Desert Observer is **your** astronomical society newsletter. The quality of the newsletter can only be obtained if we get high quality articles from people like **you**. Please take some time and write an article on what you are doing in astronomy that you would like to share with your fellow amateur astronomers. Thanks in advance for your efforts!.

Events

ASLC hosts both a deep sky viewing and imaging at our dark sky location in Upham and a public in-town observing session for the public at the International Delights Cafe. Both sessions begin at dusk. We also frequently provide solar observing at the Farmer's Market on Saturday mornings. For information on these and other events, please see the ASLC website at <http://www.aslc-nm.org>.



August Outreach Activities Roundup

By Jerry McMahan

Moongaze - July 11, 2011

The July Moongaze was held July 9, 2011, at the International Delights. Those in attendance included Steve Shaffer with a 4.5-inch Dobsonian, Chuck Sterling with the 10-inch Meade Schmidt-Cassegrain, and Jerry McMahan with the 5-inch Meade Maksutov-Cassegrain.

Again, we had a pretty enthusiastic crowd, with one large family staying a long time, both observing and taking pictures with their cell phones. I will leave out the part where one drunk participant, who never looked through a scope, but stayed several exasperating hours. Others saw Saturn and the Moon.

The Moon phase was just past first quarter with the crater Copernicus near the terminator. The rim was visible all evening with the floor in darkness. By the end of the session, part of the floor became visible and the top of the central mountain peaks were reflecting Sun light. The seeing was very good, giving impressive views of Saturn in Chuck's scope. The storms in Saturn's northern hemisphere were visible. The August *Sky and Telescope* magazine has an excellent picture of this series of storms that were first seen in December 2010.

Despite our tipsy visitor, it was a very successful outreach program with a surprising number of visitors, as have the last couple before it, considering the time of year when there are not as many NMSU students in town.

Moongaze - August 6, 2011

The August Moongaze was attended by Chuck Sterling, Steve Shaffer, Dave Anderson, and Jerry McMahan. Chuck had his 10-inch Meade, Steve brought the 4.5-inch Dobsonian, Dave had a 8-inch Criterion Schmidt-Cassegrain, and Jerry brought the usual ETX 125-mm Meade. I was fascinated by the Criterion Dynascope since I remember admiring them in the advertisements before I ever had a telescope.

The targets were, as usual, the Moon and Saturn, with the addition of the double star Alberio. This will probably be the last time this year that we will have Saturn at the Moongaze. Luckily, Jupiter will soon be taking its place.

We had a fairly good spectator turnout, especially early on. Later, one woman was so fascinated by the Moon that she spent a lot of time observing and asking questions. The sky was clear and the seeing was not bad, so I would count it as another success.

2011 Association of Lunar and Planetary Observer's Conference

By Bert Stevens

The ASLC hosted the 2011 A.L.P.O. Conference from July 20-23, 2011. Wednesday and Thursday were excursions to the National Solar Observatory at Sunspot and the Very Large Array at Socorro. Both excursions went well and those who went on those trips enjoyed themselves immensely. Friday and Saturday were papers sessions, full of interesting papers on observing and upcoming events. The Friday evening was the barbeque hosted by Stan and Carol Chiochio. Saturday evening was the banquet at the NMSU Golf Clubhouse. Walter Haas gave a great speech on the early years of ALPO. Fred Pilcher then gave a survey talk on amateur contributions to the science of asteroids. Thanks to both of these fine gentlemen for the excellent talks.

I want to thank everyone who helped out during the conference. I am going to try to name everyone, but if I miss someone, please accept my apologies. My thanks go out to: (in no particular order)



Ann McPhee and her husband
 Ron Kramer
 Trish Conley
 Robert Williams
 Vince Dovydaitis
 Fred Pilcher
 John McCollough
 Steve Shaffer
 Dave Dockery
 John Kutney
 Stan and Carol Chiocchio
 Janet Stevens

These fine people contributed greatly to the success of the Conference. It would have been impossible to have run this event without their help. Next time you see one of these folks, please shake their hand and thank them for making the ASLC look really good to the rest of the astronomical community.

Thanks also to Jim Murphy and the NMSU astronomy department for co-hosting the event. They provided a great venue for the talks.

The Las Cruces Visitor's Bureau provided activities and calendars along with plastic bags for registration. Sodexo provided break food while Ralph's Catering did the barbeque and Lorenzo's Italian catered the banquet.

The Early Years of the A.L.P.O

By Walter H. Haas, Director Emeritus



Once upon a time the Pennsylvania Railroad ran Accommodation trains, which stopped at every village, on its main line from Pittsburgh to Chicago. The conductor would call out the name of the next village as the train approached. Thus a puzzled passenger heard a series of biblical names like: Enon Valley, New Canaan, East Palestine, and so forth and asked; "What is next – the New Jerusalem?" "No" came the answer, "New Waterford."

Perhaps you will kindly indulge some personal notes. I was born in New Waterford, Ohio and spent most of my childhood there. It was then a village in a diverse farming region with 491 inhabitants in the 1930 census. A lifelong interest in astronomy was sparked when I decided to learn the constellations on August 13 and 14, 1933 with the help of my mother's retained copy of CA Young's Lessons in Astronomy from her high school days. This interest was at first a solo effort, but I somehow came to the attention of Mr. John H. Chase, the superintendent of the Youngstown, OH playgrounds. He gave me the loan of his six-inch reflecting telescope, encouraged my interest in astronomy and in July of 1935 offered me the remarkable choice of either a year in college or a summer studying with Harvard retired



Professor William H. Pickering in Jamaica, British West Indies. Pickering is now best known as the discoverer of Phoebe, a faint satellite of Saturn, but in



1935 was famous for some amazing ideas about plants and even insects on the moon. The proper economic choice during the Great Depression in the 1930's was obvious but I picked the visit to Jamaica.

That summer determined much of my later life. I met my future wife, who was Pickering's occasional secretary and invited me to visit at her nearby home. Thus I was exposed to British culture and the inevitable tea break. On the scientific side I acquired a deep interest in the visual study of the Moon and the five bright planets, soon studying them alone under the tropical skies. In later years I have often wished the Professor had been a little younger or that I had been a few years older during that summer.

I now began to publish minor papers in astronomy journals, in turn leading to correspondence with other amateur astronomers who liked to watch our Solar System neighbors. These eventually included an attorney in Madera, CA, a grocer in Uniontown, PA, a

teacher in Waco, TX, a machinist in Owensboro, KY, a civil servant in the UK and others. I was mean-while spending three years at Mount Union College (BA in math, 1939), a year at the Case Institute of Applied Science and two years at the Ohio State University (MA in math, 1941). My thesis there dealt with computing the orbits of meteorites. Later studies at the University of Pennsylvania were interrupted by WWII. The group of observers noted above corresponded with each other, exchanging notes and drawings of Mars, Jupiter, and lunar features. Copying a detailed drawing to show to others was a challenging business!



The activities of the growing group of enthusiastic observers increased, but free time from my job at the University of New Mexico did not. Thus I welcomed the idea of a modest journal or leaflet to go to all the observers as a supposed means of saving limited time. Perhaps only Columbus had more mistaken ideas! Thus the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers was born in March, 1947 with the "Strolling Astronomer" as the name of the journal. It was suggested that recipients send back one dollar (1947 dollars) in order to receive six more issues. Some

people wanted to add "American" to the group's title, but I preferred to look international; and many wanted the much less whimsical name of "The Journal of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers," a choice later discussed at considerable length at annual conventions.



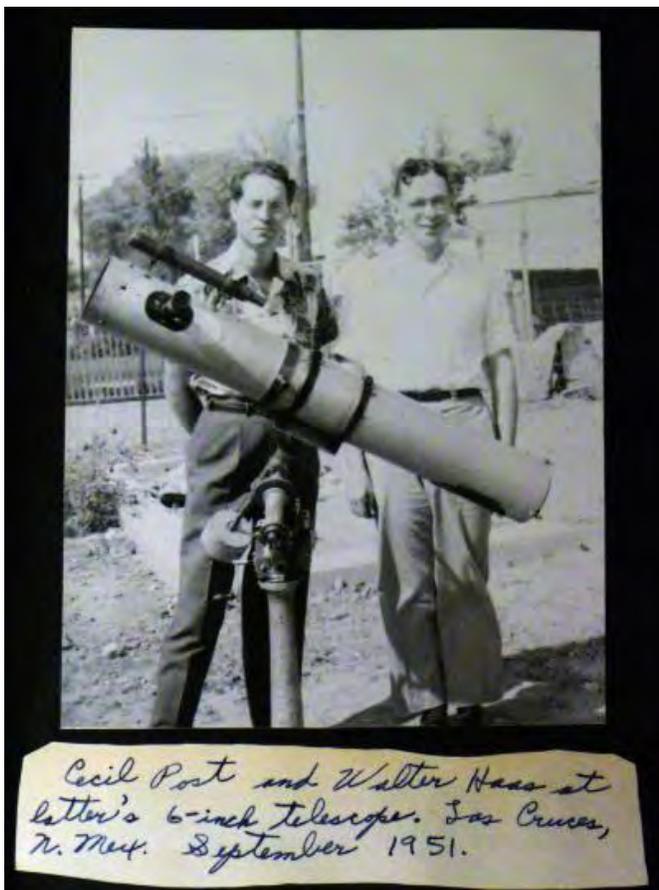
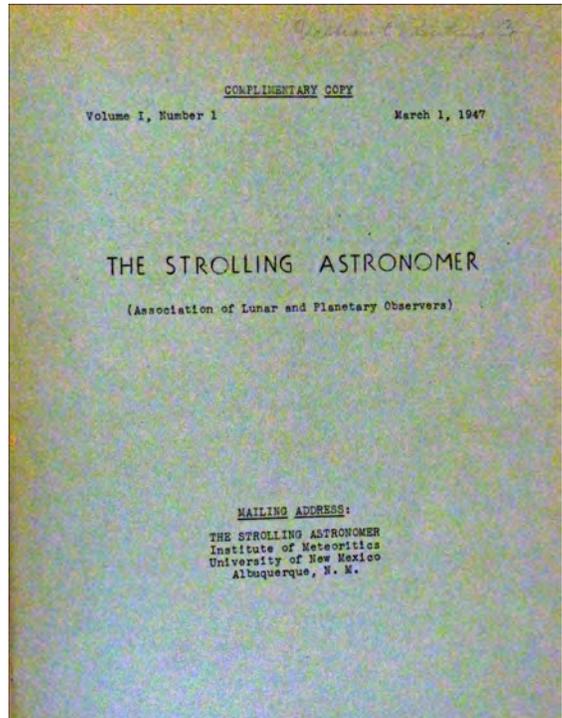
The proposal enjoyed a very warm reception. Several professional magazines helpfully carried an announcement of the ALPO's birth. There followed a number of years of slow but steady growth, no doubt fostered by the enthusiasm for rocket science among young colleagues in the 1950's. One youngster wrote that he would appreciate my sending him everything about astronomy and space and that he would appreciate a fast reply.

Readers of a journal often think of themselves as contributors. Thus the "Strolling Astronomer" soon carried an article on suggestions for improving the reflecting telescope (most subscribers would be buying or making reflectors rather than the more expensive refractors) and another article was an appreciative obituary about an outstanding visual observer of the early 20th Century. It was natural to report on the planets by



“apparitions”. For the two inferior planets this was the interval between consecutive superior conjunctions and observations were centered on greatest elongation east or west; and for superior planets, like Mars or Jupiter, an apparition was the interval between consecutive conjunctions and was centered on their oppositions. It was an unending struggle to receive the observations soon after they had been made.

It soon became evident that the proper study of the submitted observations was much more than I could accomplish alone. Thus we made the British Astronomical Association our model and selected “recorders” to supervise the study of each bright planet or some selected astronomical subject, like meteors or lunar domes. Eventually the “recorders” became “coordinators” and their duties were far more than just recording what came to their attention. They were expected to study the submitted notes, drawings and photographs, to inform the observer how to improve his or her work, to encourage other readers, to make the desired observations in the needed fashion (an undated drawing of Mars has little scientific merit), to publish articles on each apparition, and so forth. As is to be expected in all amateur societies, a few persons carried out these duties extremely well, and others simply stopped doing anything after a short time. Appointing Assistant Recorders to lighten the loads for Recorders had only limited success.



Articles intended for publication arrived in various styles. Some were beautifully type written, but others were in a scarcely legible long hand. It was thus necessary to print whatever went into those pages which would become an issue of “Journal ALPO,” with the accompanying photos, drawings, or sketches properly placed. My wife was very helpful in finding a long succession of typists to perform this chore, my typing skills being zilch. In retrospect it was an undo chore to impose upon Peggy, who somehow preferred gardening and roses to looking at stars through a telescope. One of the major delights of final proof reading the printed pages was finding a missing or repeated line in the middle of a paragraph!

The contents of the submitted articles also varied greatly. Whatever schools of the period taught, it was surely not spelling or grammar! Some articles were rejected, as when an unknown amateur sought to improve on Einstein’s theories. Perhaps the published articles of greatest scientific merit were analyses by Elmer Reese of intermittent outbreaks of subsurface activity on Jupiter (long called South Equatorial Belt Disturbances).



It was natural for amateur astronomer to wish to meet with each other. The ALPO had such limited resources that it usually needed to meet with either the Astronomical League or the Western Amateur Astronomers. These conferences included papers by amateur and professional speakers, exhibits, tours to nearby astronomical sites and a final banquet. There were three attempts at a gathering of all American amateurs held in Colorado in 1964, 1969, and 1977. Though the ALPO long prided itself on contributing many of the good papers and avoiding the long business sessions of the League, these happy days have vanished with regular business meetings which often employ modern digital phones for any absent Board member.



The question of the value of amateur studies such as those the ALPO has conducted, to professional scientists must always exist, perhaps especially in the minds of young people. You have heard papers here about how the ALPO in 2011 seeks to do good work on these problems in science which are thought to be important in 2011. They July be seen as nonsense in 2021 or even sooner. Meanwhile, we must do our best.

It has been a personal pleasure to speak to old friends and new acquaintances at this meeting. Long ago it was suggested that Man might be more likely to fly to the moon than to use steam to propel ships across the great Atlantic Ocean. Perhaps current prophecies about the future of space exploration are no closer to future realities. The ALPO is ever glad to have a share in such activities. Thank you for your attention and warmest good wishes for clear skies and steady seeing.



The Association of Lunar and Planetary V. I.P.s post for a group photo after the Banquet at this year's A.L.P.O. Conference help here in Las Cruces.



Minutes, July 2011 ASLC General Meeting

By John McCullough, Secretary, ASLC

Call to Order:

Ron Kramer, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC), called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m., 15 July 2011, Rm. 77, Doña Ana Community College (DACC), Las Cruces, New Mexico.

President's Comments:

Ron Kramer welcomed the group, noting that tonight's meeting was again preceded by a "Show and Tell" session organized by Dave Anderson. Ron also reminded those present that the July meeting is being held on the third Friday of the month because of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO) conference next week. There were no new members or guests present at tonight's meeting.

Secretary's Report:

The Secretary, John McCullough, reported that the minutes for the June 2011 meeting were submitted for publication in the July edition of the Society newsletter, the High Desert Observer (HDO). Steve Barkes moved that the minutes from the June general meeting be accepted as submitted; Robert Williams seconded. The motion passed by acclamation. There was not an additional Secretary's report.

Vice-President's Report:

The Vice-President, Tracy Stuart, as chairman for presentations, reported that there was no change to the presentation schedule. Phil Simpson has agreed to postpone his presentation (scheduled for tonight) until his book is closer to publication release. Tracy is already scheduling speakers for 2012. There was no additional Vice-President's report.

Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer, Janet Stevens, continues to recuperate from a broken ankle (see below) at home and was not present. Bert Stevens, Past-President, provided a report on the status of the Society's accounts. There was not an additional Treasurer's report.

Committee Reports:

Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO) 2011 Convention Committee:

Bert Stevens, Committee Chair, reminded those present that the convention starts next week. A session's agenda/presentations schedule has been released. Bert noted that the Saturday afternoon paper session had been canceled because of a shortage of papers. There are still banquet seats available for Saturday evening. Volunteers for a second registrar and shuttle drivers Friday and Saturday are still needed (see Bert after the meeting).

Thirty (30) registrations for the conference have been received so far.

Meeting space in Guthrie Hall has been committed and the excursions are booked (one opening is available to Sunspot on Wednesday). If Society members would like to attend the social events of the conference, a \$20 fee for the Friday evening BBQ or \$30 for the Saturday evening banquet is required. The BBQ will be at 5:30 p.m. at Stan and Carol Chiochio's, Las Casitas Encantadas, 636 S. Alameda. Ron Kramer thanked Bert and the rest of the planning committee for their efforts.

Apparel Committee:

Ann McPhee, Committee Chairman, reported that \$798 of inventory remains and that \$1,455 of apparel has been sold. Items will be available for purchase following tonight's meeting.



Loaner Telescope Program:

Janet Stevens, Committee Chairman, was not present (see Treasurer's Report above). There was no activity to report.

Astronomy Day 2011:

Astronomy Day will be held the first weekend in October. A chairperson/coordinator volunteer is needed. There were no volunteers at tonight's meeting. Ron will put out a call for volunteers on the yahoo group.

Membership:

John McCullough, Committee Chairman, has contacted several public information web site administrators to publish the Society's calendar of events and contacts. Several suggestions of locations to place Society brochures have also been received.

Leasburg Observatory Committee:

Ron Kramer, Committee Chairman, reported that the LDSP manager is ready to proceed with the observatory construction. The State's architect is actively working on the plans.

Tombaugh Observatory:

Ron Kramer reported that the first training session was held last night, 14 July, conducted by Dave Dockery. Although the Observatory is in need of maintenance, particularly extensive cleaning, the group that attended the training is ready to go.

Outreach Committee:

Chuck Sterling, Outreach Coordinator, reported the star party at White Sands Missile Range on 30 June was clouded out but a lively Question and Answer session was held. The Carlsbad Caverns bat flight and star party was discussed.

2011 Renaissance Arts Faire:

Tracy Stuart, Committee Chairman, reported that all information for the 2011 Faire is still pending from the Dona Ana Arts Council (DAAC).

Society Website:

Steve Barkes, web master, stated that he needs to receive timely inputs and event updates. Tracy Stuart stated he will provide the program schedule for the remainder of 2011.

There were no additional committee or officer reports.

Old Business:

Society Bylaws:

Two-thirds (2/3) of the current membership (40 of 59) must vote to accept the proposed alterations to the Society By-Laws. Ballots continue to be received, however, an insufficient number (15) of ballots have been received to determine the fate of the Bylaws changes. The deadline was extended to 15 July and members were urged to submit ballots either by email or regular mail. More ballots were received at tonight's meeting, but were still insufficient.

Janet Stevens:

Janet broke her right ankle after the Board of Directors meeting on 05 July. She had surgery last week and will be recovering at home for the next 6-8 weeks.



Walter Haas:

Walter is home and doing better, though home-bound. He is planning to attend the A.L.P.O. conference and banquet next week.

August Monthly Meeting:

Tracy Stuart reminded the group that the August presentation will be by Mike Sherrick at his home observatory. He also noted that the September meeting may conflict with the Okie-Tex Star Party.

There was no additional old business discussed.

New Business:

Board of Directors Meeting:

Ron Kramer gave a synopsis of topics discussed at the Board of Director’s meeting on 05 July. The budget for 2012 was discussed and will be available to the membership for review and approval. A Nominating Committee for 2012 officers needs to be selected at the July (tonight’s) meeting. Robert Williams, Ann McPhee, and Fred Pilcher volunteered to serve on the committee. Tracy Stuart moved to elect those members as the Nominating committee by acclamation, Bert Stevens seconded. The motion passed.

Annual Audit:

An audit of the Society was last performed in 2007. Another one is now due. Chuck Sterling offered to check on the availability of an accountant to perform the audit.

There was no additional new business for discussion.

Announcements:

Items for Sale:

The 25-inch Obsession for sale in El Paso is available with all accessories to astronomers in El Paso, Las Cruces, or Alamogordo for \$8800.

An older C8 with all accessories is available for \$300-\$500. Contact Ron Kramer if interested.

No additional items were announced for sale.

Announcements:

Bert Stevens needs articles for the HDO. If he does not receive articles, the HDO will consist of the President’s message and the meeting minutes. He also reminded members to pay their dues! There are a number of astronomy-related books available for free of donations to the Society after the meeting.

There were no additional announcements made.

Recognitions/Achievements:

There were no recognitions or achievements announced at tonight’s meeting.

Chuck Sterling moved to adjourn the business portion of the meeting, Bert Stevens seconded. The motion carried. The business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Presentation:

This month’s presentation was by Tracy Stuart, Society Vice-President, on string theory entitled “Are They

The High Desert Observer



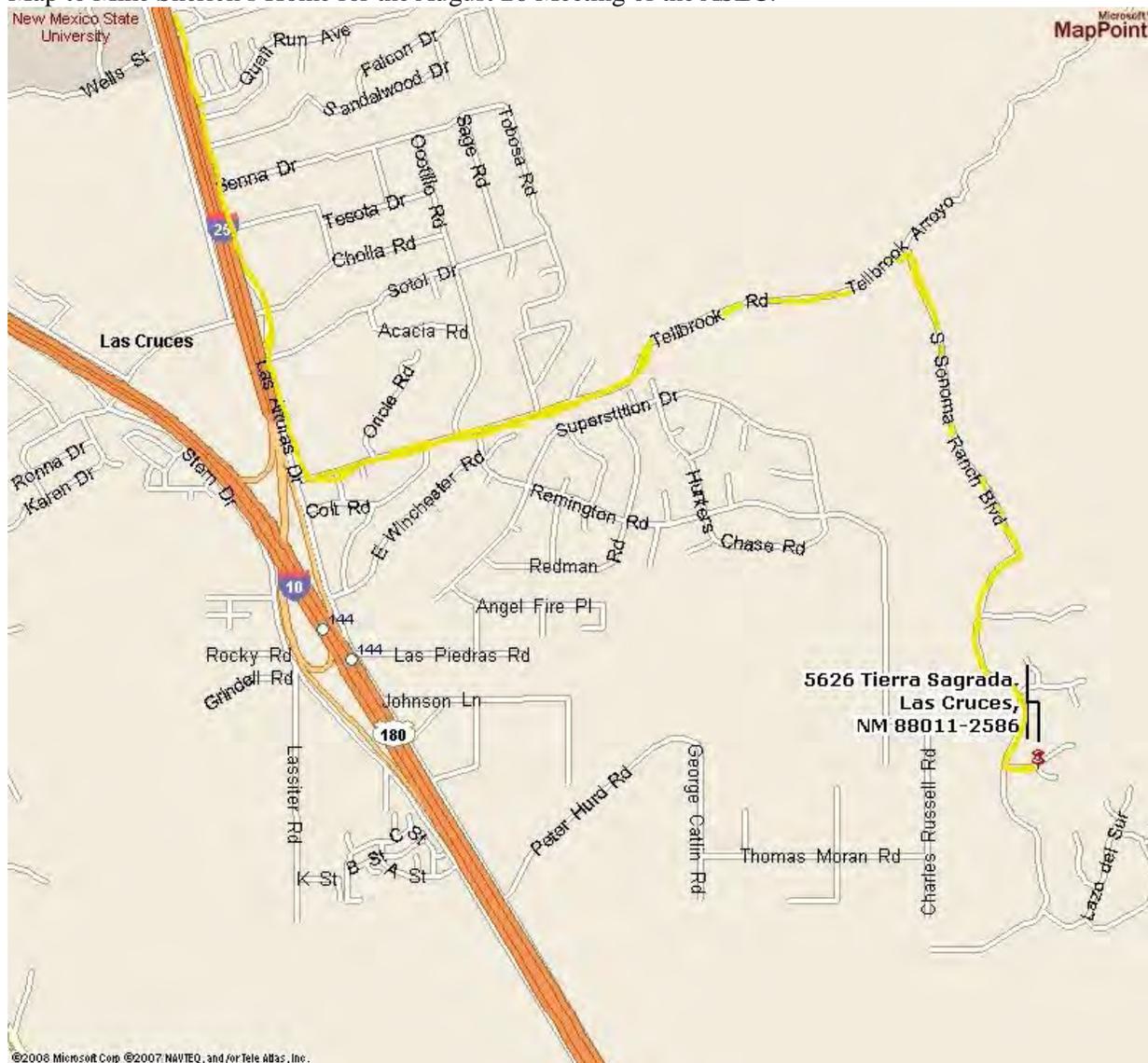
Stringing Us Along?“. Questions about the origin and structure of the universe began very early. Ancient Greeks recognized four elements and four properties. The developing science of chemistry kept stirring things up. Atomic theories only confused things more. String theory tries to explain the structure of the universe and tie all the theories together. We need to test the current string theories and one of the three proposed tests may have the answer. However, the result may be that string theory just doesn't hang together!

This presentation was not recorded for rebroadcast on the Internet. Other meeting presentations can be accessed on the web at <http://www.aics-research.com/lectures/aslcnm/>.

The July meeting of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces concluded at 8:40 p.m.

-Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary

Map to Mike Sherick's Home for the August 26 Meeting of the ASLC.





Calendar of Events August/September 2011 (MDT)

Aug. 24	7:30 p.m.	August ASLC Meeting
28	9:04 p.m.	New Moon
Sept. 03	Midnight	Mercury farthest west of Sun (18 degrees)
04	11:39 p.m.	First Quarter Moon
09	Morning	Mercury 0.7 degrees north of Regulus
12	3:27 a.m.	Full Moon
20	7:39 a.m.	Last Quarter Moon
23	3:05 a.m.	September Equinox
23	7:30 p.m.	September ASLC Meeting

Be sure to visit our web site for the latest updates: <http://www.aslc-nm.org>

ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY of Las Cruces
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ASLC - Sharing the Universe
 With Our Community
 for Over 50 Years

