



President's Message - March 2011



Spring is coming! Spring is coming! Hopefully, those nice, balmy (15°F) evenings are behind us and we can start looking forward to warmer days. Nighttime observing should be a bit more comfortable (it's difficult to assemble a telescope with 5 layers of clothing and 2 pairs of gloves). With Saturn rising at a reasonable hour, views of the ringed beauty should be quite a treat for all.

We had a great February meeting. Fred Pilcher entertained us with a wonderful presentation "Highlights from the October 2010 Convention of the Division of Planetary Sciences of the AAS." We also discussed the upcoming A.L.P.O. Conference (volunteers are still needed, so please contact Bert Stevens), the new work-in-process color brochure for our

Society and the future ASLC Observatory at Leasburg State Park.

The Society's By-Laws are being revised (most recent version is from 1967) and will be presented at a future meeting. In addition, a formal Budget for 2011 and 2012 will be presented to Society members shortly.

Kudos were handed to David Dockery for his attaining the Caldwell Club Award.

We still have a number of projects on our slate for this year, including a membership drive, fundraising and creating of a Publicity Committee. Please let John McCullough or I know if you have any ideas on these (John is the Chair of the Membership Committee).

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.

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. Dues paid in March which cover until the end of the year are \$25.00. Thanks.

Our presentation in March is entitled "Astrophilately, A Rising Star" and will be presented by your President. It will describe the relationship between Astronomy (and Space Science, N.A.S.A., famous astronomers, etc.) and philately (stamp collecting). This is a fascinating field of collecting and some artifacts of the early space program will be shown).

I hope you're able to attend. Please check our website (aslc-nm.org) for details..

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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

Ron Kramer will present "Astrophilately, A Rising Star". He will describe the relationship between Astronomy (and Space Science, N.A.S.A., famous astronomers, etc.) and philately (stamp collecting). This is a fascinating field of collecting and some artifacts of the early space program will be shown).

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>.



February Outreach Activities Roundup

By Jerry McMahan

Star Party at Lynn Middle School - March 2, 2011

This was the first star party of the year where the weather was warm. The wind had died down and the sky was clear. We had a large turnout of observers. Bernie Joplin also made an appearance, but as a parent, not as an observer. Club members included Chuck Sterling, Steve Shaffer, Bert Verstraete, Dave Dockery, Ron Kramer, Patricia Conley and myself, Jerry McMahan.

Chuck had two scopes, including his 10-inch Meade and the 100-mm Orion refractor. It should be mentioned that when Chuck arranges a star party, he gives the teachers at that school star maps and lists of things that might be observed. Steve had his 8-inch Dobsonian while Dave had the 120-mm Orion refractor on the Meade goto mount. Ron and Patricia were on the 5-inch Meade refractor and the 100-mm binoculars and I had the Meade EXT 125. Since my mental notes also come with a mental eraser, I have forgotten which telescope Bert was using.

Some of the objects observed included Jupiter, the Pleiades, the Orion Nebula, the double star Castor, and the open star clusters M46, M47 and M41.

Cesar Chavez Elementary School, March 11, 2011

This school star party was previously scheduled, but was canceled when the Earth shifted on its axis and we became an Arctic region (don't worry, it shifted back a few days later). Ron Kramer had given a presentation to kindergarten kids even though the star party was canceled.

Since the deadline for submission to the HDO is here, I will just state who has indicated that they will attend. Chuck Sterling, Steve Shaffer, Steve Barkses, Bert Verstraete, Ann McPhee, Ron Kramer and Jerry McMahan told Chuck Sterling that they could support the star party. I know Chuck told Chuck does not make much sense, but I am not changing it. If some of the above can't make it, I will print a retraction next time.

Moongaze - March 12, 2011

To be continued. Suspenseful, huh?

The ASLC Eighth Annual Messier Marathon

By Steve Barkses

Well, here we are in March and that means there are two really significant events to get ready for: The first is MY BIRTHDAY, and the second is the Annual ASLC Messier Marathon. Our Society marathon is significantly younger than me, as it was born in 2004. This will be our eighth society Messier Marathon.

Every year in late March or early April, it is possible to see a large number of the Messier objects in a single night. Given our latitude, during a short period from March 24th to March 30th, it is possible to observe all 110 objects in a single night! But the ability to observe them all can be hampered by several factors.

The biggest issue with observing all of the Messier objects is the Moon. When it's high and bright, it can prevent us from locating dim objects in the sky. So normally the Messier Marathon is scheduled around a new moon. Since most of us still work for a living, Saturday is preferred over the other days

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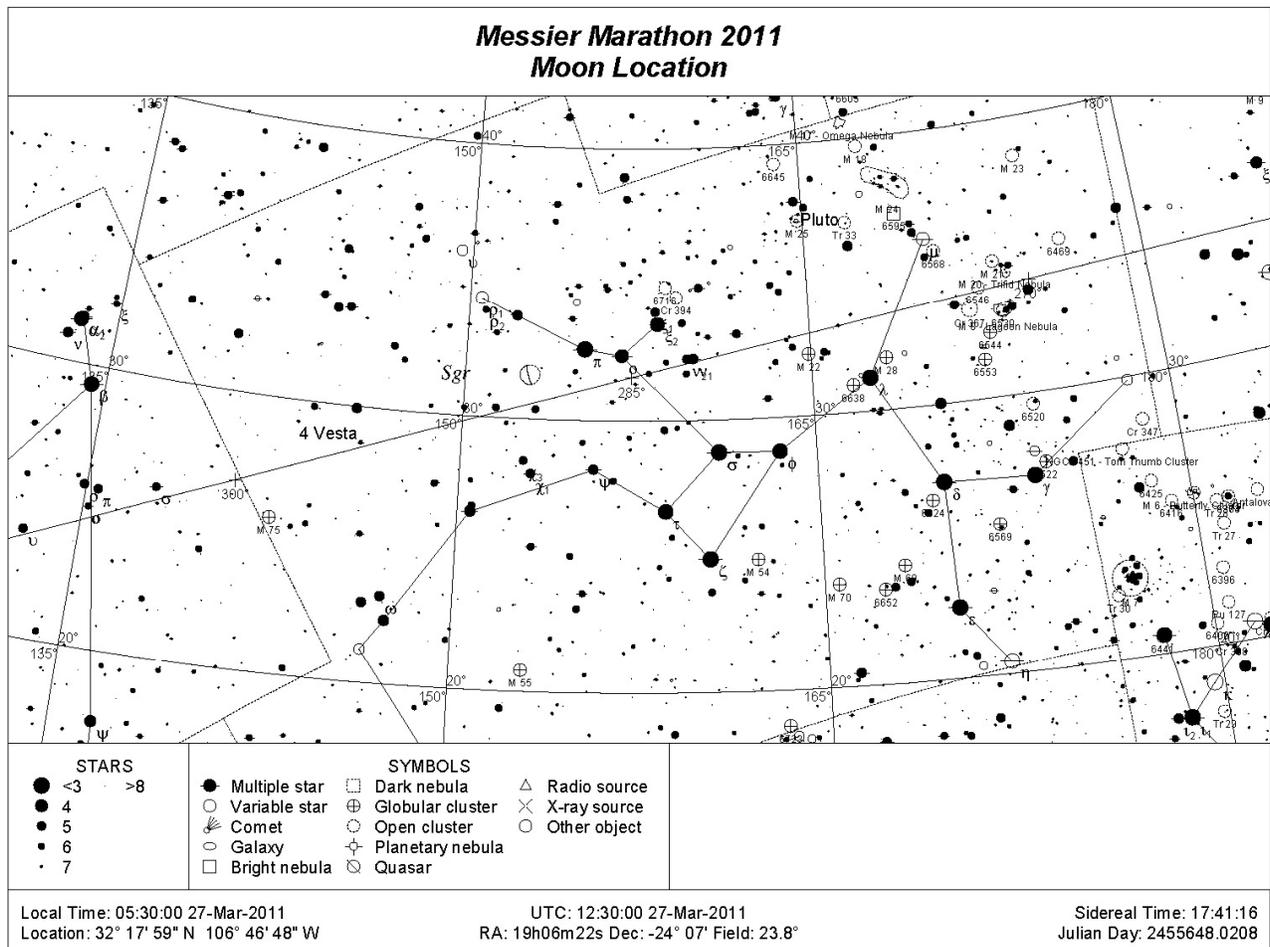
of the week. Going to work after observing the night before from dusk till dawn can get pretty ugly.

Given the factors of the moon phase, the limited range of dates for observing all these objects, and the desire to observe on a Saturday, there are many years that getting 110 objects is just not possible. But that is no reason not to go out and try for 109, or 99 or even just nine. It just means that if you have never gotten them all, you have a limited number of opportunities.

For our Sixth Annual Messier Marathon held on 28 March 2009, we had four of our members observe all 110 Messier objects. Steve Smith, Jerry Gaber, Joseph Mancilla and I all did this. In addition, Rich Richins imaged all 110 objects that night. But not everyone got all 110. Given the conditions stated above, the next real opportunity for us to observe all of the objects does not happen until March of 2014!! Will it be clear that night?

Dave Dockery and Joseph Mancilla have done some investigative work, and determined where the moon will be located on Saturday, the 26th of March of this year. The Moon will rise late, so most of the objects will be unaffected by its glow. When the moon does rise, it will be in area of the sky populated by brighter Messier objects.

Looking at the chart below, we can see that the third quarter moon will be near Sagittarius. Most of the objects in that area are globular clusters which are easy to pick out even in moon glow, or large and bright nebulas that will not be completely washed out.





So there may be hope for those wanting to bag all 110 objects before 2014. This year we are going to try something different as far as our scheduling goes. Rather than holding the primary Marathon event on a Saturday close to New Moon, we're going to schedule this one on the night of the third quarter moon.

So the dates for the Eighth Annual Messier Marathon are:

Primary: Saturday, 26 March 2011

Secondary (cloud/rain date): Saturday, 2 April 2011

As I've stated often in the past, the Messier Marathon is mostly a social event, and not a competition (PLEASE, no wagering!!). So even if you have no desire to stay out all night, you should consider coming out to participate. Your goal may be to observe 110, or 100, or 50, or 10 objects. Maybe observe twice as many objects as you did last year, or two more objects than last year. You can choose to use a telescope or binoculars, goto or push-to, or maybe even naked eye!! At least five objects (M24, M31, M42, M44 and M45) are visible without optical aid from Upham. It does not matter as long as you participate, and have fun.

Hope to see you on the 26th!!

Minutes, February 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 pm., 25 February 2011, Room 77, Doña Ana Community College (DACC), Las Cruces, New Mexico.

President's Comments:

Ron Kramer welcomed the group and recognized new members and/or visitors present. There were none.

Secretary's Report:

The Secretary, John McCullough, reported that the minutes for the January 2011 meeting were submitted for publication in the Society newsletter, the *High Desert Observer* (HDO). Two (2) clarifications were noted: John will chair the Membership committee and the Vice-President, Tracy Stuart, will schedule the speakers' presentations for the regular meeting sessions. Vince Dovydaitis moved that the minutes from the January general meeting be accepted with the clarifications; Chuck Sterling seconded. The motion passed by acclamation. There was not an additional Secretary's report.

Vice-President's Report:

The Vice-President, Tracy Stuart, reported that the speaker for the April meeting will be Adam McKay, a NMSU Astronomy Department graduate student. His topic will be "Observing Comet Flybys". Ron Kramer reported he is trying to arrange a speaker from the Las Cruces Codes Enforcement office to speak on the light pollution ordinance at a future meeting. There was no additional Vice-President's report.

Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer, Janet Stevens, is home and continues to recuperate from triple bypass heart surgery. Bert Stevens,



Past President and acting Treasurer, reported on the current status of the Society’s accounts. There was not an additional Treasurer’s report.

Committee Reports:

ALPO 2011 Convention Committee:

Bert Stevens, Committee Chairman, noted that Vince Dovydaitis has done most of the work to date and deferred to him. Vince reported that Dr. Jim Murphy, NMSU Astronomy Department head, has not responded to a request that NMSU sponsor the venue for this summer’s convention but may be in the process of obtaining approval from upper administration. Mrs. Weber, NMSU Housing Administrator, has not confirmed use of campus housing during the convention. Vince has talked to the Ramada Inn about banquet facilities but has not committed the Society to using their facilities; projected cost is \$20-\$30 per person. Fred Pilcher will check other hotels in the vicinity regarding availability of blocks of rooms. Bert noted an Excursion Chair is still needed to coordinate day trips to local sites of interest, i.e., Sunspot/Apache Point, or the VLA. If someone does not volunteer to chair this effort, directions and maps may be made available. Bert is also trying to set up a page on ALPO’s website to post details on the convention. He also needs volunteers to handle publicity, both local and international, and someone to set-up a “swap table” during the convention. A list of positions that need to be filled is in the current issue of the *High Desert Observer* (HDO).

Apparel Committee:

Ann McPhee, Committee Chairman, still has items available for purchase following tonight’s meeting but would like to know if members are interested in other items with the Society logo embroidered on them. She reported that \$1247 of merchandise has been sold to date and that \$660 of inventory remains as of 04 February. This is a fund raising effort for the Society.

Loaner Telescope Program:

Janet Stevens, Committee Chairman, was not present to provide a status update. Dave Dockery donated a 40 mm Plossl eyepiece to the program. Ron Kramer stated his belief that if additional hardware donations were not forthcoming, the Society may have to allocate funds to support the Loaner program.

Education Committee:

Rich Richins, Committee Chairman, was not present to provide a status update.

Membership:

John McCullough, Committee Chairman, reported he expects to utilize the proposed Society brochure extensively to inform the wider community of Society activities and promote membership. John has contacted Andy Oliver, editor of the Reflector (the Astronomical League newsletter), regarding multiple issues being delivered to the same address. Mr. Oliver has not responded yet. John has also reviewed some of the materials and suggestions available through the Astronomical League to enhance membership in the Society and expects to utilize some of these in the future.

Leasburg Observatory Committee:

Rich Richins, Committee Chairman, was not present to provide a status update. However, he had forwarded an email he had received from the park manager to Ron Kramer. Ron read the email to the membership. The gist was that the State of New Mexico is still interested in partnering with the Society on this effort, but that the cost will be higher than when first proposed (in 2005). Rich is still trying to arrange a meeting with the park manager, Ron, and himself.



Tombaugh Observatory:

Steve Barkes brought keys (10 of 12) for the new doors at the observatory and gave them to Ron Kramer. Steve will retain one copy in his office on campus and another for his use. These keys cannot be duplicated. He reiterated that if a member checks out a key and subsequently loses it, it will be the member's responsibility to pay for a replacement. Training on the operation of the telescope in the observatory will be required before a member can check out a key. Contact Ron Kramer for availability.

Outreach Committee:

Chuck Sterling, Outreach Coordinator, reported on the star party schedule for the near term: 02 Mar. at Lynn Middle School, 11 Mar. at Cesar Chavez Elementary, and 12 Mar., Monthly MoonGaze at International Delight Café. Refer to the yahoo.com for details.

Society Website:

Steve Barkes reported he is getting sections of the website up-to-date. Members should contact him or Ron Kramer with inputs for the site, however, Steve does not have time to do extensive background research on topics, so members must provide that.

Education Committee:

Rich Richins, Committee Chairman, was not present to provide a status update.

Historian:

Joseph Mancilla, Society Historian, was not present to provide a status update.

There were no additional committee or officer reports.

Old Business:

Membership Dues

The new dues schedule is now in place. All members should make an effort to become current through the end of the year.

Society By-laws

Nils Allen and Kirby Benson started working in 2008 to update the By-laws, primarily by modernizing the language. Ron Kramer and Tracy Stuart, President and Vice-President, respectively, will continue this work over the next month(s) for presentation to the membership.

Society Brochure

Ron Kramer presented the first draft/run of the proposed brochure that was used at the recent ShareFair 2011. An updated version is being worked on. Ron is absorbing the cost of the first run of 50 copies. The finalized version is expected to cost:

- \$200 500 copies
- \$250 1000 copies (should cover 2011)

Vince Dovydaytis suggested not printing an events calendar on the glossy stock, but photocopying events as an insert to the brochure. The Society logo could be included as well as generic events. It was suggested that additional ideas be posted to the yahoo.com page.

Recording Equipment

Jerry Gaber has the equipment and software purchased by the Society to record and post meeting presentations on the Internet.

There was no additional old business discussed.



New Business:

Earth Day 2011:

This year’s Earth Day will be 16 April at Young Park. Ron Kramer needs a volunteer to chair/coordinate the Society’s participation. If no one volunteers tonight, he will post a request on the web pages. The Society’s application is pending the naming of a chairperson:

American Astronomical Society, Solar Physics Division

The annual meeting will be held in June at the Las Cruces Convention Center. Does the Society wish to sponsor, participate, or volunteer to work at this event? Discussion followed, focusing mainly on the proximity to the ALPO 2011 Convention. Steve Barks moved that the Society not officially be a part of this meeting, Dave Dockery seconded. The motion passed by acclamation.

There was no additional new business for discussion.

Announcements:

Items for Sale:

No items were announced for sale.

Announcements:

Bert Stevens needs articles for the HDO. He also asked who posted the meeting announcement in the Las Cruces Sun-News. No one knew.

Ron Kramer displayed Stardust NExT images of comet Tempel 1 versus pre-Deep Impact images showing erosion on the comet surface. Additional information is available on NASA’s website.

There were no additional announcements made.

Recognitions/Achievements:

Dave Dockery was presented with his silver membership (70 of 109 objects) in the Caldwell Club. Congratulations.

No additional recognitions or achievements were announced..

Fred Pilcher moved to adjourn the business portion of the meeting at 8:10 pm, John Kutney seconded. The motion carried.

Presentation:

The February program was presented by Society member Fred Pilcher on “Some Highlights from the Convention of the Division of Planetary Science” held in San Diego last fall. Although there were multiple oral presentations going on simultaneously, Fred picked five (5) that he thought would be of interest to the membership and discussed those.

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/>.

Ron Kramer will provide a presentation on Astro-Philately at the March general meeting.

The February meeting of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces concluded at 9:00 p.m.

-Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary



Calendar of Events March/April 2011 (MDT)

Mar. 19	12:10 p.m.	Full Moon
20	5:21 p.m.	March Equinox, Spring begins
22	7 p.m.	Mercury greatest distance east of Sun (19 degrees)
25	7:30 p.m.	March ASLC Meeting
26	6:07 a.m.	Last Quarter Moon
Apr. 03	8:32 a.m.	New Moon
03	6 p.m.	Saturn at opposition
11	6:05 a.m.	First Quarter Moon
17	8:44 p.m.	Full Moon
19	2 a.m.	Mercury 0.8 degrees north of Mars
22	7:30 p.m.	April ASLC Meeting

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

ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY of Las Cruces
PO Box 921
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ASLC - Sharing the Universe
 With Our Community
 for Over 50 Years

