

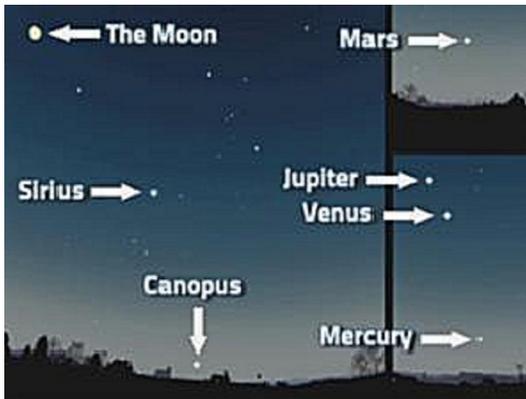


President's Message - March 2012

Our meeting on February 24th featured Pat Hynes, Director of the New Mexico Space Grant Consortium. She spoke about some of the programs her department has recently funded and some of the plans for the future. I want to thank Pat for a very entertaining presentation.

The General Membership present at the February meeting also approved the FY 2011 Budget, presented by our new Treasurer, Patricia Conley. Copies of the Budget were in the February HDO. In July the Board of Directors will start discussions on the FY 2012 Budget, which runs from October 1, 2012 through September 30, 2013.

March will be a rather interesting time for observational astronomy. Most of the brightest objects in the sky will be visible for much of the month. As the graphic at right shows, four planets, two stars and the Moon can be seen simultaneously. Mercury will be below the horizon at sunset by the end of March, but it will be a great time for visual observations.



The State of New Mexico's Parks Department's Archaeologist has performed her due diligence on our planned Observatory site and found nothing in the way of historical or pre-historical artifacts. Once the paperwork has been cleared by the various governmental entities, we should be able to plan our groundbreaking ceremonies for the Leasburg Dam State Park Observatory. We are hoping for a construction start in May, 2012 and "first light" before the end of the year.

We are looking for a Chair of our Fund Raising Committee. The Chair should have experience in writing grants and in general fund raising activities. Please contact me if you are interested. We will be working towards raising the funds to add equipment to the new Observatory, including a CCD imaging system, computers, etc.

We are also looking to revamp our Loaner Telescope Program. Janet Stevens has resigned as Chair (due to health reasons) and Ron Kramer has taken over as Acting Chair until a permanent Chair can be found. If you are interested in heading up this important program, please contact Ron. As part of the revamping process, we need to identify which members of the ASLC currently have any Society-owned instruments, tripods, mounts, eyepieces, filters, etc. Please contact Ron by April 1 if you are in possession of any of this equipment.

Don't forget we still have plenty of apparel for sale, including hats, t-shirts (short- and long-sleeved), hoodies and denim shirts. Please talk to Ann McPhee if you're interested in purchasing this gear.

I hope to see you at the March 23 meeting, starting at 7:00 p.m.

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.

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Next Meeting

Our March meeting will be held on Friday, March 23, in Room 77 at Doña Ana Community College, starting at 7:30 p.m. Don't forget that Show and Tell will start at 7:00 p.m.

We do not know who the speaker will be at this time.

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 <http://www.aslc-nm.org>.

Outreach

Outreach is a very important ASLC activity. We can always use more volunteers to help educate the public. Even if you do not have a telescope, we can always use more members to help answer questions at the events and point out constellations in the sky.



March Outreach Activities Roundup

By Jerry McMahan

Memorial Service for Patsy Tombaugh - February 12, 2012

The service was held at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Las Cruces, which she and Clyde helped found. Rich Richins was in attendance in his capacity as President of the church congregation. A slide show, featuring Patsy, was being shown in the lobby. Rich appeared in one of the slides, wearing shorts. He referred to it as his signature photograph.

Presentations were given by Clyde's son, Alden Tombaugh, and daughter, Annette Tombaugh-Sitze. Annette gave a biography of her mother and father that was worthy of publication. I hope it was recorded.

School Star Party at Desert Hills Elementary - February 23, 2012

Society members in attendance included Ron Kramer, Trish Connelly, Chuck Sterling, Steve Schaffer, Bert Verstraete, Jim Idoux and Daniel Giron. Chas Miller and Michael Hayden, from the NMSU Astronomy Department, were also in attendance. I apologize if I left anyone out since my memory is good for about one day, and the party was a couple of weeks ago. That reminds me that, I, Jerry McMahan, was there also.

There were a lot of thin clouds, but there were enough breaks and the clouds were thin enough that many of the objects were available for viewing. Lately, I have had trouble seeing even the South Equatorial Belt on Jupiter, as the Earth moves further away and Jupiter gets smaller. Chuck had his 10-inch on Jupiter, looking through thin clouds. I was very surprised to see, not only the belts, but a lot of atmospheric detail on the planet. I guess it is really true that thin clouds can improve seeing conditions.

Clyde Tombaugh Observatory - March 2, 2012

The NMSU Astronomy Department held their open house the night before we held our Moongaze. Steve Shaffer, Tracy Stuart, Jim Idoux and Jerry McMahan were in attendance manning the Society's 12.5-inch Cassegrain. The wind was very bad that night. The dome provides protection unless you are standing by the open doors, as I learned. Okay, it did take me a few minutes to figure that out and move to another location.

Steve applied some oil and the tracking, on the Moon at about 68 power, was very good. Later, Steve pointed the telescope at Rigel to show people an example of a double star.

Moongaze - March 3, 2012

Chuck Sterling, Jim Idoux, Steve Schaffer and Jerry McMahan were at the International Delights for our Moongaze. Chuck had Venus in his ten-inch early in the evening. The seeing was good enough that the planet's phase was easy to see. He also had his 100-mm refractor on the Pleiades. Later in the evening, Mars cleared the building, but the seeing had deteriorated to the extent that Mars could be seen to twinkle with the unaided eye. The image in the telescope was boiling so badly that it looked like double vision with just one eye. Chuck brought a computer and showed the Moon on the screen via a web camera, while his 10-inch was on Jupiter. A Cub Scout group had asked about a star party at one of the previous school star parties. Chuck told them about the Moongaze and they did show up at the Moongaze. They kept us pretty busy for a while. They were a very good group of kids and they may come again to the next Moongaze.

Bright Beginnings Pre-School - March 6, 2012

Members present included Brian Ottum (he paid for dinner at the Village Inn so he gets top billing), Rich Richins, Chuck Sterling, Steve Schaffer, Dave Anderson, Trish Connelly, Ron Kramer and Jerry McMahan. The



wind was pretty bad during set up and was predicted to remain bad. By the time spectators showed up, the wind died down and we had a good star party. Jupiter, Venus, Mercury, Mars, the Moon, the Orion Nebula and the Pleiades were observed. The Red Spot on Jupiter was visible through Brian's refractor. It seems a refractor, with the better contrast, is the way to go for the Red Spot. The party was set up for pre-schoolers, but there were plenty of adults present as well.

Jornada Elementary School - March 7, 2012

This party was postponed due to wind and dust. Members attending included Chuck Sterling, to tell the school the party was being canceled, and me because I didn't read my e-mail. Better luck next time.

What is an Amateur Astronomer?

By Berton Stevens

The science of Astronomy has grown slowly over the centuries, with the early discoveries based on simple naked eye observations. Claudius Ptolemaeus developed one of the first models (although incorrect) of our solar system based only on visual observations. Another visual observer, Tycho Brache, measured the positions of the planets for over twenty years without a telescope. His observations were so consistently precise and complete that when Kepler determined that Tycho's observations did not fit the esthetically pleasing circular orbits Kepler believed the planets followed, he discarded the "perfect" circular orbits and started working with elliptical orbits which gave a better fit of Tycho's data. This eventually led Kepler to discover his three laws of planetary motion.

Galileo and the invention of the telescope followed almost immediately, and most astronomical research shifted from visual to telescopic. As telescopes have increased in aperture, the "leading edge" of astronomical research has been done on progressively larger instruments. This has left the amateur astronomer with fewer and fewer scientifically useful programs on which to work. Today, it seems that the amateur astronomer has been left in the back waters of astronomical research. Even the meaning of the word "amateur" has been corrupted. Webster defines amateur as "one who cultivates any art or pursuit for the enjoyment of it, instead of professionally or for gain, sometimes implying desultory action or crude results". Unfortunately, many people remove the word "sometimes", making all amateur work "crude, lacking finish, skill or other facilities".

Amateur work need not be "crude or lacking of skill". Planetary photographs and drawings done by the amateur astronomer members of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO), visual photometry by the American Association of Variable Star Observers (AAVSO), precision occultation timings by the International Occultation Timing Association (IOTA) and photoelectric photometry done by the International Amateur-Professional Photoelectric Photometrists (IAPPP) are not crude. They represent careful, skillful, and systematic work done by amateur astronomers in conjunction with professional astronomers. Unfortunately, there are so few amateurs doing real research that the professional astronomer has come to regard the amateur astronomer as "one who does trivial astronomy in his spare time and with equipment that is not normally suitable for serious research."

While many professional astronomers do not look favorably upon amateur astronomers, they need to conduct research programs that they have neither the time nor the funds to do at a professional observatory. Many professional telescopes are booked months in advance, and getting telescope time requires the professional astronomer to compete with other astronomers for use of the available telescope time. This is where the amateur comes in with his own equipment and efforts. We must educate the professional astronomer that the amateur is a dependable, careful, conscientious observer whose results may be relied upon as accurate to the limits of his/her equipment. This will call for sacrifices on our part, such as getting out of a warm bed at three in the morning to go out and observe clouds, but it is the only way to improve the standing of the amateur in the astronomical community.



Robert Stebbins of the University of Calgary has made an effort to systematize an understanding of the amateur role as it relates to the professional in a number of diverse areas, including astronomy. He identifies several levels of interest and proficiency in a field. These levels range from a low level in the "general public," through a broad class of "hobbyists," to a redefined class of "amateurs," and finally to the "professional" level of interest and proficiency. "Hobbyists" are distinguished from "amateurs" in that the hobbyist is one whose involvement is casual and undirected despite a high level of interest and proficiency. The "hobbyist" effort does not result in the creation of new understanding of, or contribution to, astronomy.

The "amateur" is characterized by Stebbins as having an intense and serious interest directed to the application of rigorous, near professional methods to astronomy with varying levels of proficiency, but with programs dedicated to making a contribution of value to astronomy. The membership of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces runs the gamut from the "general public" to the "amateur", with a few professionals thrown in for good measure. The majority of our membership falls into the "hobbyist" classification. The true "amateurs" are the dedicated few of the membership that are conducting astronomical research, either individually or as part of a larger group effort.

It seems that these classifications leave out the segment of our membership that handles the administrative functions of the ASLC. These are the current and past officers and board members who have given selflessly of their time to provide the rest of us with an enjoyable and enlightening organization. It also includes the committee chairs and other volunteers that support the ASLC. We should not forget those who have toiled so much on our behalf.

Amateur astronomers really contribute to astronomy in a way which will enhance our knowledge of the universe. Perhaps as the winter observing hiatus comes to an end, we should each look at our own observing programs and think about adding on some real "amateur" astronomy. You can help make the ASLC a contributing member of the scientific community, or just another group of hobbyists pursuing their fun and games. It is your decision.

Minutes, February 2012 ASLC General Meeting

By John McCullough, Secretary, ASLC

There was some confusion between the Astronomical Society and Dona Ana Community College regarding the Society's monthly meeting resulting in Room 77, the usual meeting venue, being locked until about 7:35 p.m. As a result, there was no Show and Tell session and, at the request of the presenter, the Presentation was the first portion of the meeting.

Presentation:

The speaker for tonight's meeting was Patricia Hynes, PhD, Director of Spaceport America programs. Dr. Hynes briefly introduced herself and some of the programs she directs at New Mexico State University (NMSU). She also discussed the "New Mexico NASA EPSCoR Program". She discussed the astronomy programs the Spaceport Consortium funds, which can be found on their website at: http://www.nmspacegrant.com/nasa_epscor.php. Four (4) astronomy projects funded by the program can be found by scrolling to the bottom of the page where hyperlinks are located. Although Dr. Hynes is not an astronomer, should anyone have questions on the projects, please e-mail them to her and she will do her best to get answers.

Dr. Hynes also spoke on the educational work being done with K-PhD. programs across the country. She had material describing the work being done by grantees of the program. She also discussed the International Symposium for Personal and Commercial Spaceflight and the Community Partnership luncheon.



Call to Order:

Ron Kramer, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC), called the business meeting to order at 8:31 pm., 24 February 2012, Room 77, Dona Ana Community College, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

President's Comments:

Ron Kramer, President, welcomed the group, thanking everyone for their patience with the confusion on the meeting room and the change to the meeting order. Ron welcomed a number of visitors to tonight's meeting: first time visitors Matt Korpi from Wisconsin, Cynthia Sommers, a retired WSMR employee and her husband, Harry Crane, Carly Tencza, Ken McLennan, Glenn Brookshire, Jim Ottun, and James Idoux, and repeat visitors Louis Corl and Tony Velasquez. New member Jim Morgan was also present.

Secretary's Report:

The Secretary, John McCullough, reported that the minutes for the January 2012 meeting were submitted for publication in the February edition of the Society newsletter, the High Desert Observer (HDO). Tracy Stuart moved that the minutes from the January general meeting be accepted as corrected; Chuck Sterling seconded. The motion passed by acclamation. There was not an additional Secretary's report.

Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer, Trish Conley, provided a report on the status of the Society's accounts. She also reported all dues are up to date and she had received Thank-you's for the donations to Mesilla Valley Hospice and Las Cruces Symphony Association in memory of Patsy Tombaugh. Expenditures for the year so far have exceeded income and the Society is currently at a deficit of over \$300. There was not an additional Treasurer's report.

Committee Reports:

Apparel Committee:

Ann McPhee, Committee Chairman, was absent from tonight's meeting. Ron Kramer noted items will be available for purchase following the meeting.

Loaner Telescope Program:

Janet Stevens, previous Committee Chairman, has resigned the position because of health reasons, necessitating a new chairperson to setup and administer the program as well as locate Society-owned equipment. Ron Kramer will be acting chairman for the interim. Contact Ron if you are willing to take over this outreach program or if you have Society equipment in your possession.

Membership:

John McCullough, Committee Chairman, asked that members register their presence on the forms provided at the room entrance.

Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP) Observatory Committee:

Ron Kramer, Committee Chairman, reported that a verbal agreement has been made with the State Parks Department to build and equip an observatory for the 16-inch Meade LX200 on loan to the Society from the NMSU Astronomy Department. The entire committee, Ron Kramer, Fred Pilcher, Chuck Sterling, and Jerry Gaber, were present. The required archeological survey of the proposed site has been completed with no issues to date.

Tombaugh Observatory:

Neither Steve Shaffer, Committee Chairman, nor Steve Barkes were present.

Outreach Committee:

Chuck Sterling, Outreach Coordinator, reported that Rich Richins and he will hold a star party at Bright

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Beginnings on 06 March. Jornada Elementary will have Science Night on 07 March and the Society will be there with telescopes. Desert Hills Elementary had a star party last night, 23 February. There will two (2) Moon Gazes next month on 03 and 31 March.

Volunteers are always needed and welcome. Ron Kramer noted he interfaced with 160 students at Cesar Chavez Elementary on 26 January and again with a solar scope on 03 February.

Publicity:

Raymond Madson, new Committee Chairman, was not present.

Society Website:

Steve Barkes, web master, was not present.

There were no additional committee or officer reports.

Old Business:

Fundraising Committee:

The Society needs a “go-to” person for grant proposal writing and other fundraising efforts. Let Ron know if you are familiar with this process or know of someone who can help the Society.

ASLC P.O. Box:

We are still looking for the third key. Trish Conley has one and John McCullough has one.

There was no additional old business discussed.

New Business:

2011 Fiscal Year Budget:

The 2011 budget has been presented and approved. The 2012 budget is undergoing final review.

Society By-Laws:

The Society will distribute the proposed by-laws revisions to the membership via email and USPS. Ballots will follow and members will have 30 days to respond.

Monthly Meeting Time/Format Change:

Currently, the Society’s monthly meeting is planned as:

Show & Tell	7:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Business meeting	7:30 to 8:00 p.m.
Presentation	8:00 to 9:00 p.m.

After comments from some members, the following format was proposed:

Business meeting	7:00 to 7:30 p.m.
Show & Tell	7:30 to 8:00 p.m.
Presentation	8:00 to 9:00 p.m.

Following discussion, mostly unfavorable to the proposed changes, Ron Kramer moved to keep the meeting schedule as is, Fred Pilcher seconded. The motion carried, allowing for changes to accommodate presentations.

Organ Mountains Star Party:

The Friends of the Organ Mountains is planning a “Music Under the Stars” invitation-only event with music,



Calendar of Events March/April 2012 (MST)

Mar. 19	11:14 p.m.	March Equinox
22	8:37 a.m.	New Moon
23	7:30 p.m.	March ASLC Meeting
26	12:00 p.m.	Venus 1.8 degrees north of the Moon
27	2 a.m.	Venus greatest distance east of the Sun (46 degrees)
30	1:41 p.m.	First Quarter Moon
Apr. 03	8 a.m.	Venus 0.5 degrees south of Pleiades star cluster
06	1:19 p.m.	Full Moon
13	4:50 a.m.	Last Quarter Moon
15	6 a.m.	Mars stationary
15	12 p.m.	Saturn at opposition
18	11 a.m.	Mercury farthest west of Sun (27 degrees)
21	1:18 a.m.	New Moon
21	11 p.m.	Lyrid meteor shower peaks.
27	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

