

President's Message - October 2010



The year is rapidly coming to an end, with Halloween just a couple weeks away, with Thanksgiving and Christmas following quickly on its heels. With the end of the year comes the end of my term as president, and the terms of the other officers. We need some new blood to step up and run for the offices of Vice President, and Director at large. We have candidates for President, Secretary, and Treasurer. My thanks to those who have stepped up to run for these positions, but it would not hurt to have an actual contest for some of these positions.

The Society has many active members who help with the school star parties, the Renaissance Faire, WSSP, and other events. It is wonderful that these members come out to support the Society's event. But we need more, we need members to help run the Society. We need YOU!

We all have many events going on. Church, kids, civic organizations and especially work can consume all of our time. I know how easy it is to get involved with other activities and not have time for the administrative tasks of the Society, but we cannot run without officers. Someone must handle the business, write the checks, arrange the programs, and more. None of this is glorious, or likely to get you a Nobel Prize, but it is necessary to the functioning of the Society. I am asking YOU to call me and volunteer to run for office.

A few short items:

- The Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers has accepted our offer to hold their 2011 National Convention here in Las Cruces. Planning is beginning.
- There has been no reported activity on our observatory at Leesburg Dam State Park and we could still use some help with this project.
- The RASC Observer's Handbooks and Calendars have been ordered and should be available at the November meeting. We may have a very limited number of extra copies, and these will be available on a first-come, first served, basis.
- We are working on the plans for the Christmas Party. We are hoping to hold it at the Experimental Aircraft Association's hanger at the Las Cruces Airport.

Don't forget to take a look at Comet Hartley 2 as it passes the Earth on October 20. This green-hued comet is just barely naked eye, but a telescope will make it look better. Be sure to stick to low power so the coma is visible and that you are at a dark site. It would be nice to think that we will soon get a really bright comet to fill our evening sky, but then I am an optimist!

Your Humble President
Bert Stevens



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, 2010

Board@aslc-nm.org

President: Bert Stevens

President@aslc-nm.org

Vice President: Kirby Benson

VP@aslc-nm.org

Treasurer: Janet Stevens

Treasurer@aslc-nm.org

Secretary: John McCullough

Secretary@aslc-nm.org

Immediate Past President
Jerry Gaber

Ppresident@aslc-nm.org

Directors:

Wes Baker

Director1@aslc-nm.org

Steven Shafer

Director2@aslc-nm.org

Education Chairman: Rich Richins

Education@aslc-nm.org

Newsletter Editor: Bert Stevens

blslcnm@comcast.net

Emeritus (life) Member
Walter Haas

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Next Meeting

Society members Steve Barks, Dave Dockery, and Rich Richins attended the 27th Annual Okie-Tex Star Party near Kenton Oklahoma in early October of this year. Touted as having skies darker than TSP by Al Nagler, the ASLC members went to see for themselves what this star party has to offer. Join us at the next meeting of the ASLC where they will provide details on their experience at Okie-Tex.

Officers Needed for 2011

We need to fill the following positions for next year:

- President**
- Vice-president**
- Secretary**
- Treasurer**
- Directors-at-Large (2)**

Please let me know if you are interested in any of these positions.

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. For information on these and other events, please see the ASLC website at <http://www.aslc-nm.org>.



Recent Outreach Activities

By Jerry McMahan

September Moongaze

The September Moongaze was held at the International Delights and was attended by Chuck Sterling, Steve Shaffer, and Jerry McMahan. Chuck brought his 10-inch Meade, Steve had a 4.5-inch Newtonian, and Jerry was using the 5-inch Maksutov telescope.

The usual targets were the Moon, and Jupiter. Some attempts were made at fainter objects, but the light pollution does not make them very practical. One of the more unusual occurrences was an eleven or twelve year old boy who stayed the entire evening and was still there, waiting for his mother to get off work, when Steve and I left at 1:30 a.m. He must have told at least 30 people that he wanted a dog, but couldn't afford one. At the risk of being unfair, I am not sure a dog was really what he was after. Some people gave him money so that he could get a dog. I am mentioning this because he may show up at future Moongazes.

Of personal interest to me was one of my former students from Canutillo High School who also attended the event. Dalila graduated in 2002 and is now working on her Doctorate in Marketing at UTEP..

Two young boys spent a lot of time with us, while their parents were eating. One boy, about six or seven years old, said several times, that he could see an alternate universe through the telescope. The five-inch is apparently a lot more powerful than I thought it was!

FYI Group Home For Girls, October 12, 2010

Chuck Sterling has been busy organizing school parties since he became the contact person for outreach. A second star party, within a month, was set up for FYI group. In attendance were Chuck Sterling, Rich Richins, Jerry Gaber and Jerry McMahan.

Jerry McMahan and Chuck brought the usual scopes, while Jerry Gaber and Rich brought there 16-inch, homemade Dobsonians. Objects observed included the Moon, Jupiter, M57 (the Ring), M27, (the Dumbbell), the Andromeda Galaxy, the Eagle Nebula, the Swan Nebula, the globular M13 and a brief look at the Pleiades were low in the sky.

The girls group was small in numbers, but enthusiastic in their observing..

Tombaugh Elementary, October 14, 2010

The star party at Tombaugh Elementary School is always heavily attended by kids, parents and teachers. It usually requires the most telescopes.

Chuck brought the 10-inch, Jerry McMahan the 5-inch, Steve Shaffer brought the 3.5-inch Questar, Ron Kramer had both the 5-inch refractor and 25x100 binoculars, and Bert (that is not Bert Stevens) had an 8-inch Celestron. Dave Dockery was also in attendance. Sorry Dave, I did not see what you brought.

Also, in attendance, were two graduate students from the NMSU Astronomy Department. They were Teresa Ross and Robert Edmunds. Teresa had an 8-inch Meade, while Robert had an 11-inch Celestron.

Objects observed included the Moon, Jupiter, M13, M57 (the Ring Nebula), and the Double Cluster.

The kids and their parents always enjoy telling you what they have learned about Astronomy in class. It is a big job when you have long lines of people waiting to look through the scopes. It is a big job, but an enjoyable one as well.



SOS – I’m SOL in an RV doing NSP as a VIP with NPS

By Bonnie and Nils Allen

When Nils retired, he and Bonnie discussed traveling to see the country. Bonnie envisioned how they might get a motorhome, where she would ride with her feet up on the sofa and make Nils sandwiches along the road as they breeze by the beautiful countryside. They would stop in lovely campsites and enjoy the view for a few days before moving on to the next wonderful site. Of course, Nils’ vision included taking a telescope to show the world the beauty of the night sky. Anyone who knows these two will know that whatever they get will be the most, shall we say, “economical” option in the class. Well, we got the motorhome, but the 22-inch scope didn’t fit through the door. Also, the tow rating didn’t allow us to pull our vehicle, so Bonnie ended up driving the van behind the motorhome with the 15-inch, 22-inch and binocular set-up plus other support paraphernalia that is “necessary”. Not quite what we had envisioned!

So what is our state-of-affairs now? In just over a year “on the road”, we have been to 20 National Parks, Monuments or Recreation Areas. By the time we get home, in the first part of October, we will have worked six months as VIP’s (Volunteers-in-Parks) and two months for a commercial night sky tour outfit in Sedona, Arizona. Still, we chuckle when we’re sometimes referred to as ‘very experienced astro-volunteers’.



The National Parks System’s VIP Program (www.nps.gov/volunteers) utilizes volunteers in so many ways and at so many facilities that it can

include almost any interests you may have. Most parks require a minimum of a one month commitment. Last spring, Nils connected with the Night Sky Program (NSP) office of the NPS out of Ft. Collins, CO. The NSP, led by Chad Moore, recruits volunteers to go to parks who request assistance in providing night sky programs. The NPS institutions included in the Grand Circle (southern Utah) seem to have the most programs of this type.

Each of the parks we have volunteered in has had their own unique personalities and needs. Cedar Breaks is a smaller National Monument between Zion and Bryce Canyon in the southwest corner of Utah. At 10,350 feet, the park offers fields of wildflowers, wildlife, and an amphitheater of hoodoos, arches and geological layers that shine in the evening sunset. Last year, Nils was this Monument’s first Astro-VIP and helped to assist the staff in developing a beginning program. Bonnie worked as a camp host. We returned this past August for a month to follow up and continue the astronomy work started last year. No bathrooms for us to clean this year! With a small staff they depend heavily on volunteers to continue their program. To support and encourage astro-volunteers, the park has added a few VIP RV sites. This year they added some observing equipment and a night sky pad (viewing site) to encourage campers to bring their telescopes to take advantage of the clear high altitude sky. Again, those who know Bonnie would be amazed to see her showing visitors the Andromeda Galaxy and clusters through binoculars, manning the telescope and pointing out constellations with the laser pointer. This is especially amazing with the temperature on August nights there getting into the thirties. Nils has to get help where he can find it (beggars can’t be choosers)!



We were at Bryce Canyon during July. Bryce is a large National Park with a strong staff of “Dark Rangers”. Things were hopping during their annual Astro-Festival with as many as 50 scopes on the field, most coming from the society in Salt Lake City. The wide range of speakers and visitors makes the Astro-Festival a major attraction with several hundred visitors each of its four nights. Our 22-inch was the second largest telescope there, the biggest being a 24-inch (also from New Mexico!) The day-time found him at the Visitor’s Center or setting up the solar scope on the Rim. Bonnie thought he looked sort of handsome in his “almost-a-ranger” uniform! After the Festival, the normal night sky program has one to two hundred visitors peering through the five or six telescopes

set up following professional quality Ranger presentations. Bonnie took the month off from volunteering, especially to host our grandkids for a week at the park. Not a bad trade! It was a great place to go hiking, camp and even go for a swim or soak in the hot tub at the famous Ruby’s Inn (a perk for being a VIP). We enjoyed meeting some old friends of Bert and Janet from the AL, who were there to plan next year’s ALCON conference at Bryce that will coincide with the Astro-Festival in late June. It should be a great week, full of state-of-the-art observing (hint, hint).

Dinosaur National Monument was our June assignment. Located in northeast Utah on the Utah/Colorado border, the park lies in both states. We were camping on the Colorado side for the first two weeks, then the Utah side for the rest of the month. The Green River ran through the park right next to our camp. It was beautiful to look at, but caused large doses of mosquito spray to be a necessary part of preparing for the night’s viewing. With the dinosaur fossil display (the Quarry) out of circulation for another year due to construction, the park wanted to expand on the other options they could offer. This was another park setting up a brand new astro-program – they had good advance preparation but lacked experience in executing with the public. We achieved success by working closely with the staff. Evening programs often had 50-80 guests who were absolutely in awe of the night sky. The schedule there offered us more time to travel around the area doing sightseeing. We were able to take side trips to Arches NP, Flaming Gorge, Colorado National Monument, and Salt Lake City. It was a very enjoyable experience.

September found us back at Glen Canyon National Recreation Area like last year – it’s a nice month to be here. On the Utah/Arizona border, Lake Powell has more coastline than the entire West Coast. This year there will be four night sky volunteers working with Joan the Night Sky Ranger. It is somewhat of a reunion of folks we have worked with before. The benefits of being at Glen Canyon can include gratis boat trips, river rafting, over-the-lake flights, and Antelope Canyon tours. It’s rough but someone has to do it! Night sky programs are held near the large campgrounds, behind the Lodge by the marina, and several remote sites





like Navajo Bridge and Lee's Ferry. The staff at Glen Canyon is already beginning to plan for the annular solar eclipse in 2012, with Page right on the eclipse centerline. So you may want to consider planning a May 2012 astro-trip in that direction.

During our summer, one reoccurring observation has been that the majority of visitors at any of the parks are from countries other than the United States. There is a real need for volunteers who speak German, French, Italian, or Asian languages, even if only a little. Parlez-vous français?

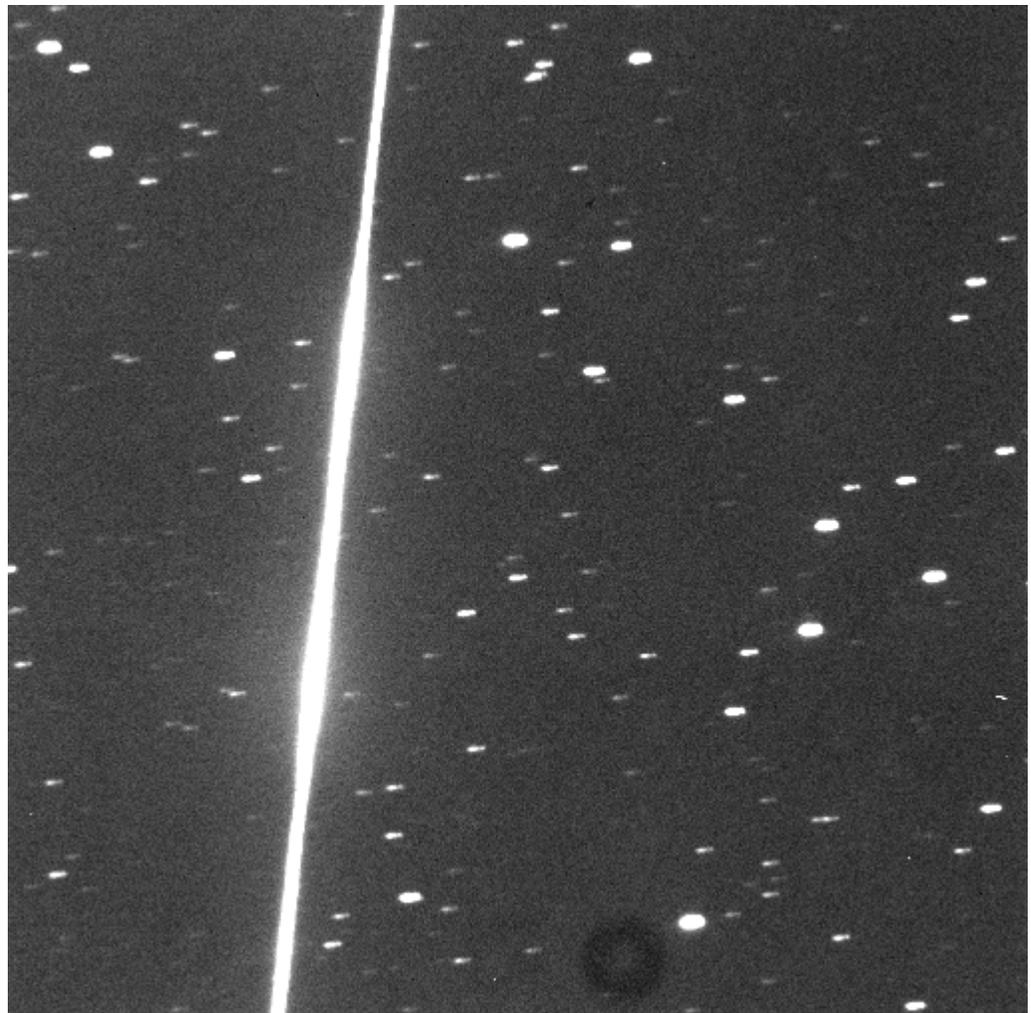
We have enjoyed being VIPs doing NSP for the NPS in our RV, looking at DSOs in dark skies, having new adventures, seeing great scenery, and enjoying lots of new friends. Though this "job" can be tiring at times, we mostly find ourselves "pinching" each other to be sure it is all real! What a life (at least during tourist season)! We have left each and every park with newly acquired friends. Some of our new friends are retirees who volunteer like us, some are younger than our children, but we have enjoyed getting to know them all. However, we do miss our Cruces friends and family, so we are back and will see you soon!!

Meteor!

By Berton Stevens, President, ASLC

It does not happen very often, but every once in a while a meteor shoots through my 13-minute by 13-minute field of view while I am imaging minor planets. Here is one example. This frame was taken October 10, 2010 at 7:49:12 p.m. Exposure time was only 35 seconds, so the time-frame is well defined.

The telescope is a 12-inch f/10 Meade LX-200 with an Apogee AP-7B CCD camera. The images are captured by MaxIm DL under the control of ACP (Astronomer's Control Program) which commands the exposures and makes sure the telescope is pointing in the right place.





Minutes, September 2010 ASLC General Meeting

By John McCullough, Secretary, ASLC

Call to Order:

Bert Stevens, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC), called the meeting to order at 7:30 pm., 24 September 2010, Rm. 77, Doña Ana Community College (DACC), Las Cruces, New Mexico.

President's Comments:

Bert Stevens welcomed the group and recognized new members and/or visitors present. Patricia Conley, a student in the current session of Beginning Star Gazing at DACC, is attending her first meeting.

Secretary's Report:

The minutes for the August meeting were published in the most recent issue of the Society newsletter, the High Desert Observer (HDO). Ron Kramer moved to dispense with reading the minutes; Dave Dockery seconded. There was not an additional Secretary's report.

Treasurer's Report:

The Treasurer provided a report on the status of the Society's accounts. There has been no change in either the savings account or CD balances. Because of the recent depletions to the Society's checking account, the Treasurer strongly encourages members to pay dues and buy Society apparel. Also, Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) handbooks and calendars can be ordered after tonight's meeting. Handbooks will be \$21 and calendars \$17 to members. A copy of the 2010 RASC handbook was passed around for comparison. There was not an additional Treasurer's report.

Committee Reports:

Observatory Committee:

Rich Richins, Committee Chairman, was not present and there was no update on the status of the Society observatory proposed for Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP).

Apparel Committee:

Ron Kramer, Committee Chairman, provided an update on apparel sales and availability. Apparel worth \$1064 has been sold, leaving \$480 in inventory remaining, including one (1) "hoodie". A re-order will be required soon; however, several shirts and caps are available for purchase following tonight's meeting. This is a fund raising effort for the Society.

Outreach Committee:

Chuck Sterling, Outreach Coordinator, was not present. Ron Kramer reported several star parties are planned for October:

- 09 Oct. at WSMR schools,
- 12 Oct. at FYI Girls' Shelter, and
- 14 Oct. at Tombaugh Elementary School.

Refer to the yahoogroups.com for details. Ron will continue coordination with the Mescalero Apache schools for a mass star party during the school year.

Participation in the 2010 Renaissance Arts and Crafts Faire on 06-07 November is still possible (application was due last month) if the Society submits an application now. Ron will direct this effort. Contact him to confirm your availability to support this effort.



The Mesilla Valley Corn Maze opens this weekend. Ron was contacted last year to see if the Society was interested in participating. Because of late planning, participation will be put off until next year..

Tombaugh Observatory:

There was no update on receipt of keys for the new doors at the observatory.

Loaner Telescope Program:

Janet Stevens, Committee Chair, reported she still needs input to establish the status of Society-owned telescope eyepieces or donations of eyepieces to use with Society-owned telescopes. Joseph Mancilla brought eyepieces that fit the Unitron refractor telescope.

There were no additional committee reports.

Old Business:

Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO) Convention - No response to the Society's invitation to hold the 2011 ALPO Convention in Las Cruces has been received.

There was no additional old business discussed.

New Business:

There was no new business for discussion.

John McCullough offered a motion to adjourn; Steve Barks seconded. The motion passed and the business portion of the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 pm.

Announcements:

Items for Sale:

Bill Stein announced that he has purchased Sky & Telescope magazine on CD. He has hard copies of the magazine going back to 1963. He will donate the collection to a suitable organization or offer it to members to complete their collections.

No items were announced for sale.

Recognitions/Achievements:

No recognitions or achievements were announced.

Announcements:

ALCon (Astronomical League Convention) 2011. Bert and Janet Stevens attended this year's event in Tucson, AZ. The Astronomical League (AL) is working with the National Park Service (NPS) to hold ALCon 2011 at Bryce Canyon National Park. The proposed dates are 30 June, 1-2 July 2011. Rooms, camping and RV sites will be available at Ruby's Inn, UT (rooms \$80 per night, down from \$150), altitude 8200 feet. This will be an observing meeting with the observing site at 9000 feet available to ALCon attendees. The closest airports are Salt Lake City, UT, and Las Vegas, NV.

Monthly Meetings. Ron Kramer announced that DACC Rm. 77 has been reserved for the 4th Friday of the month for the next year. However, the December meeting will probably be held at the Experimental Aircraft



Association (EAA) facility and the 4th Friday in November is the day after Thanksgiving. Jerry Gaber moved that the November meeting be moved to 19 Nov. Ron Kramer seconded. The motion passed by acclamation.

Program Presenters. Kirby Benson needs presentations for the rest of this year. Steve Barkes will present on the Okie-Tex star party at the October meeting. Articles for the HDO are always needed.

There were no additional announcements made.

Presentation:

The September program was presented by Society members Dave Dockery and Joseph Mancilla. Their topic was “It’s Jupiter Season! - The Latest News, Weather, and Observing Tips”. Once again, Jupiter is favorably located for study as the Earth swings in toward closest approach. Their talk covered the recent disappearance of the South Equatorial Belt and possible comet and asteroid impacts that have been captured by amateur astronomers over the past few months. There were also tips on how amateurs can contribute to planetary science with images and observations of Jupiter.

Joseph demonstrated some techniques for producing sketches of observations.

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/>.

Bert Stevens wrapped up the meeting by emphasizing the following:

- A nominating committee is needed to draw up a list of potential officer candidates for 2011. Bert will chair the committee and will be looking for volunteers.
- Planning for the December meeting/holiday party needs to begin.

The September 2010 monthly meeting concluded at 9:00 pm.

-Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary



Calendar of Events October-October (MDT)

Oct. 28	7 p.m.	Venus at inferior conjunction
	30	6:46 a.m. Last Quarter Moon
Nov. 05	10:52 p.m. MDT	New Moon
	07	3 a.m. Daylight Savings Time ends.
	13	9:38 a.m. MST First Quarter Moon
	17	3 p.m. Leonid meteor shower peaks
	19	7:30 p.m. ASLC General 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
Las Cruces, NM 88004



ASLC - Sharing the Universe
 With Our Community
 for Over 50 Years

