FOCAL POINT

Newsletter for the *Milwaukee Astronomical Society* April 1991

From The Editor

First the Equinox Vernal, then Virgo. With the Sun's spring return to the Northern Sky, winter's bright open clusters give way to dim galactic glimmerings. Now an especially darkened sky is required to provide the backdrop to reveal the secrets of the "realm of the galaxies". MAS members can enjoy the mystery of light slivers and cosmic strings by traveling to the dark sky campout at Greenbush on May 10-11.

But before our eyes gaze at cosmic distances, let us enjoy the cosmically closer April activities, including: the NCRAL Convention (April 13), National Astronomy Day (April 20); and the Spring Field Trip (April 27th). For specific details/registration information on each, see the March Focal Point or call, respectively, Dan Koehler, Lee Keith, or Tom Renner. Your editors Matthew and Tom will be glad to answer questions too. Hope to see you soon!

Matthew McNeeley

Saturday Nite Keyholders

Mar. 30	John Pfannerstill	475-6494
Apr. 6	Frank Roldan	608-787-1730
Apr. 13	Terry Ross	784-2093
Apr. 20	Gerry Samolyk	529-9051
Apr. 27	T. Schmidtkunz	784-0253
May 4	Peter Smitka	785-0926

Program/Meeting

There will be no Program/Meeting this month. Instead, plan on attending the MAS Spring Field Trip, to the Adler Planetarium and other Chicago points of interest, April 27th, 1991. See March Focal Point or call Tom Renner at 392-2799.

Astronomy To Go

Thanks to Matthew McNeeley, Tom Gill, Lee Keith, Jeff Annis for bringing their scopes and enthusiasm to the "Ski and Stars" event at Pike Lake on February 9th 1991. I thought I got pretty excited when finding a new Messier object, but everyone within earshot knew when Matthew found M46. His enthusiasm affected us all and helped to make the event a resounding success.

The event came about as a result of talking with the Pike Lake Rangers who I knew were enthusiastic about astronomy. Park Superintendent John Wald and Terry Jensen were also very helpful with the details of the telescope area. Over 800 people attended and about half checked out the telescope viewing area. We had perfect weather, good seeing and a great location—a clear view of the Northern, Western and Southern horizons with a small Eastern hill blocking stray light from Slinger. Taking astronomy to the people (by incorporating viewing with another outdoor event) is a great way to help others discover the wonder of astronomy.

Thanks to the Northern Cross Science Foundation who cordially extended an invitation to other Southeastern Wisconsin Clubs. (CON'T ON BACK PAGE)

Calender of Events

April 3, Wednesday ..... First Wednesday Meeting
7:30 at the Observatory

April 8, Monday ..... MAS Board Meeting
7:30 at the Observatory

April 13, Saturday ..... NCRAL Convention
DePere, WI

April 20, Saturday ..... ASTRONOMY DAY
2:00 to 10:00pm at the Observatory

April 27, Saturday ..... Spring Field Trip (see above)

Saturday Nights—Member night at Observatory—Call key holder

Library News

There aren't any straight edges! Imagine looking at an enormous jigsaw puzzle depicting a star, several planets, a good number of moons, some dusty areas and wisps of gas, thousands of rocky worldlets, and million of conglomerated lumps of ice and soot. Now imagine taking the puzzle apart piece by piece in reverse order from that which it was constructed over 4 1/2 billion years ago. Mindful of unseen electromagnetic and gravitational influences which have acted on them during the eons, you are to return each piece to its original place in the "box".

This is somewhat analogous to the task of the scientists who have contributed their specialty chapters to The New Solar System, 3rd Edition, edited by J. Kelly Beatty and Andrew Chaikin, 1990. The book resembles a compilation of major articles from Scientific American or National Geographic in that it is outstandingly illustrated and printed on heavy, glossy stock. The content is current having been reworked since the end of the the Voyager encounters. It's written for the informed layperson–detailed, but not overwhelming. The authors are careful to identify that which is still theoretical as they interweave theory with corroborating data.

From the (inferred) metallic heart of Mercury to the evolving (how?) nitrogen atmosphere of Titan to the icy swarm of comets in the (theoretical) Oort Cloud, there is a general scheme of composition within the system that bears a distinctive relation to the (assumed) vapor pressure in different parts of the prosolar nebula. Moreover, the giant planets and their systems of moons and rings may have evolved from their own subsidiary nebulae within the larger one. The (observed) patterns of impact cratering on all bodies of solar system help provide a probable time line to accretion processes. The book includes a section of photographic planetary maps taken by spacecraft.

Scientists are making use of every scrap of evidence available, be it from orbital or spectral analysis or actual sampling, in an effort to "unmake" the puzzle. Understandably, almost every author urges further planetary exploration and material retrieval from comets, asteroids, moons and even atmospheres of other planets.

Other recent additions: The Origin of Comets-Bailey, Clube & Napier, 1990, is an exhaustive, critical review of every comet theory since the Babylonians. Perhaps ancient terror of those "atmospheric portents" was supported by an enhance influx of meteoric debris when a giant comet disintegrated. Since the time of Tycho and Helvelius, however, a cosmic origin has been accepted, and the current debate involves the evolution of the Oort Cloud. Were comets formed with the primordial solar system or are they captured from the interstellar medium through events of galactic proportions? (see review April *Sky & Telescope*).

Comets, the Swords of Heaven-Ritchie, 1985, donate by Scott Laskowski and The Comet is Coming-Calder, 1981, donated by Jim Mayer, were written in anticipation of Comet Halley's reappearance. They cover much the same ground as The Origin of Comets but are aimed at the popular-level audience.

-Sally Waraczynski

(CON'T FROM FRONT) Northern Cross had seven members attending and it was a good opportunity to meet with members from other clubs and make new friends.

Pike Lake has a lot to offer Milwaukee astronomers. It's close to Milwaukee (35 minutes from downtown) and has first-rate skies. Also, it's not necessary to rent a campsite to observe. A map and rules about observing will appear in a future Focal Point or by calling the rangers at 1-644-5248 between 8am-4pm. If anyone from MAS would like to give a talk at Pike Lake, or have an observing session, call the Rangers. They will gladly spread the word for you. If you have any other questions, call Tim Burris at 783-6572.

 -Tim Burris

MAS INFORMATION

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