

FOCAL POINT



The Newsletter of the Milwaukee Astronomical Society

March 1998

MAS Eclipse Safari

A contingent of MAS members, estimated at up to 20, has elected to pursue a total eclipse of the Sun in the Caribbean on February 26. Several have opted to take a 4 masted, windjammer type cruise combined with a landfall to observe/ photograph the eclipse..... . Known people on this cruise include Lee and Karen Keith, Scott Laskowski et. all. Observatory Director Gerry Samolyk plans to be in Aruba, for a somewhat longer total eclipse window. Unfortunately, the editor was in Arizona when all these departures were taking place. It is hoped that member reports will be available for inclusion in succeeding issues of the F P along with a more comprehensive list of participants. If a means of better quality photo repro can be achieved, photos of the eclipse will be included in future issues of FP.

First Saturday Observatory Night

Vice President Scott Jamieson (along with other keyholders) plan to hold an open observatory night each month for new members who want to learn the rudiments of observing. Also, amateurs with some observing skills, but lack familiarity with the observatory(s) can "break the ice" by going thru some "hands on" use of observatory and portable scopes. Sessions in the observatory and/or meeting room will take place, clear or cloudy, on the first Saturday of each month starting April 4th. This session is only an adjunct to Observatory Director, Gerry Samolyk's First Wednesday meeting. Gerry's sessions cover upcoming observing events, question and answer sessions on various aspects of observing, scheduled scope maintenance sessions etc.

The observatory on these first Saturday nights will begin at nightfall and be open for two to three hours

First Wednesday Nite Meeting, Mar. 4

is at 7:30 PM at the MAS Observatory and hosted by Gerry Samolyk. This is an open form meeting in which forthcoming observing events (if any) are reviewed followed by an open question and answer session with attending members.

Con't. next column.

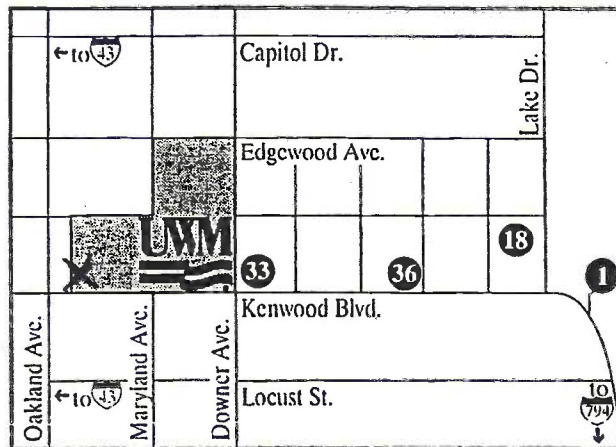
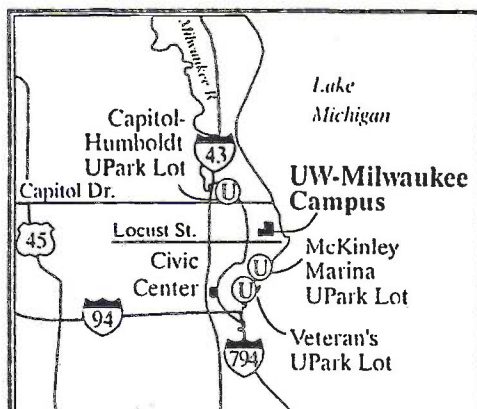
First Wednesday con't

On occasion, training sessions, such as variable star observing have been held as well. Since meeting night may conflict with eclipse trip, call observatory first (see back page for observatory phone no.).

March MAS Events

March 20 monthly meeting will be held per the adjoining box. Once again a speaker is planned, but not available at FP print time. The MAS Board meeting will precede the General Meeting at 7:00 PM. All board members are requested to attend. Be aware that starting with the April meeting we return to the MAS observatory site.

**Next MAS meeting, Friday
March 20, 1998 @ 8:00 PM
Room 133, Physics Bldg
UWM Kenwood Campus
(Corner of E. Kenwood &
N. Cramer St.)**



Memo from National Space Society

November 11, 1997

The ISDC (International Space Development Conference) '98 Organizing Committee is pleased to invite each southeast Wisconsin astronomical clubs and societies to join us as a Cooperating Society for the Seventeenth Annual International Space Development Conference of the National Space Society, May 22nd through the 25th, 1998 at the Hyatt Regency Milwaukee, 333 W. Kilbourn Av., Milwaukee, Wis. 53202. ISDC '98 is being hosted by the Lunar Reclamation Society, Inc., the SE Wisconsin chapter of NSS.

The ISDE is a popular space interest conference that draws professionals working in industry, or for NASA, educators, writers, dedicated space enthusiasts and the general space-interested public from all walks of life. Registration fees are kept low to encourage widespread attendance. We expect over a hundred technical and general presentations, panel discussions, and workshops on all aspects of the immense topic of space, its exploration, resource development, economic potential, and eventual settlement. We expect an attendance in the 500-800 range.

Many individuals interested in space had that interest first sparked or cultivated at the end of a telescope. We encourage your club or society to consider various ways of participating. (a) a star party nearby, outdoors, if we can find a site near the hotel, Friday evening, first choice, Sunday evening rain date; (b) putting telescopes and other equipment on display in the hotel lobby or in the ISDC Exhibit Room. Equipment would be guarded; (c) putting on a demonstration of astronomy software; (d) making a presentation to interested attendees on topics of mutual interest such as observing the Moon, Planets, and Asteroids and/or an update overview on extra-terrestrial planets, with a forecast of discoveries to come; (e) a field trip to a nearby observatory. We would be pleased to discuss any other ideas you may have. Please feel free to call me anytime at 342-0705.

Attached is a copy of conference flyer and registration.

In exchange, you will be listed in the Program Book as a Cooperating Society, and your members will be entitled to a special registration fee of \$45, good for all ISDC events and functions. This compares with the current regular fee of \$60 through December 31, 1997, \$75 January 1, '98 through April 30, and \$90 "at-the-door."

Eds Note: Copies of the flyer and registration forms will be available at the March and April meetings.

Board Doings

No meeting was held in February. In part this was due to members departing for eclipse cruise.

Some Observations

The editor apologizes for the haphazard (& cliché filled) March issue of FP. I attempted to do this issue while on a month plus winter retreat in Tucson, and without my computer on site. It turns out, that I also lost access to my E Mail contacts as well. The April issue will be done back in New Berlin, but on a very tight schedule (the last week of March). The emphasis on our fellow amateur astronomers in Tucson in this issue was simply to highlight how another chapter functions (and thrives). Should we try to be just like them? No, I'd be the last to suggest that. I do like the idea that they make a positive effort to help new members more readily discover the intricacies of stellar and planetary observation. To this end, I think Scott Jamieson's "First Saturday nite" observatory sessions are a very worthwhile attempt.

Another difference between MAS and TAAA is that we have three excellent domed observatories (two 12" Newtonians and a 25" Cassegrain) that are very lightly used except for a few serious amateurs. Admittedly, some light pollution has crept around the club's 11 acre site, but these facilities are still very useful. Z-scope mods will make it even more useful as a CCD imaging tool. By contrast TAAA has \$30,000+ dollars in the bank while looking for a permanent dark site home for a 25" mirror. You would think that in the widespread desert environs of Tucson, AZ, you could find a dark desert patch to buy and call home. Unfortunately, a closer look shows that large chunks of desirable dark sites are owned by Federal, State, or Reservations who are reluctant to part with property. The other problem is urban sprawl. Some poor amateur, who thought he had bought a home on a remote cactus-patch with a dark backyard 15 years ago, now finds he is in a close-in suburb of Tucson! A major vehicle for group observing is their frequent star parties at nearby ranches. These are usually well attended.

It's an interesting paradox. Tucson is a locale with lots of usually good observing sites, with an active club still looking for a permanent observing site. In contrast, MAS has to contend with intermittent "good seeing" but has a great 3 domed observatories (plus many portascopes) that is very lightly used. If you tried to replicate the MAS Observatory today, and acquire a new site, it would undoubtedly involve several hundred thousand dollars.

Our MAS forebears built a great observing site and did a lot of serious observational data acquisition with it. It's still a very usable site and ways to maximize its use should continue to be explored.

Lastly, thanks to my wife, Lorraine, for saving MAS a bundle by typing the master for the March issue at the local Kinkos print shop. She's not an astronomy buff, and gave up vacation time to help me out....I may be pushing my luck!

-Editor

edit

Another Visit to Tucson

Every time I come for a winter sojourn to the Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association, I look forward to the February monthly meeting. It's members nite to give presentations and talks which are diverse and invariably of interest to all. The talks /demos included :

An Easy to Build Digital Focuser as an aid to focusing for CCD imaging given by TAAA member Bill Ball. One of the time consuming problems in CCD imaging is getting the focus exactly at the pixel array plane everytime you set up for another CCD imaging session. Bill bought an optical encoder to attach to his focuser and also purchased a LCD digital counter as a readout. Normal procedure is to bottom out the focuser, zero the the display, then set to previously determined CCD focus settings. The set-up has a 1/100 mm per count scaling with at least a 1/10 mm repeatability (depending on the type of focuser). The LCD display/electronics were purchased from Digikey and the Optical encoder (with electronics?) from Digital Corp.

Planets This Month

Erich Karkoschka, of the Univ. Of AZ Lunar & Planetary Lab, showed two Hubble/ NICMOS images (taken July 28, 19890 minutes apart) of Uranus, clearly showing rotation of several bright Clouds, eight of ten satellites and a Saturn-like particle ring (oval shaped) with a variable density of particles in the ring.

Erich also showed excellent photos of Jupiter with shadows of Io, Callisto, & Ganymede simultaneously traversing the planets surface. He had taken the photos with a borrowed Univ. of N.M telescope. in Las Cruces, N. M. Some asked about the significance of the event. Erich said it did not represent much "science" but was a fairly rare event Less than once per century?).

Foldable Dobsonian Mount I would have like to heard this talk , as a Dob uilder always looking for a way to increase portability. Unfortunately, the speaker was unable to make the meeting.

Image Processing Software Two software packages for processing and enhancing images, Megastar Pro, and MYRA (DOS) ver. 4.5 (\$1000 ?) were reviewed These packages provided various gradient filters (some using fast fourier transform techniques) for enhancing and bringing out various aspects of astro photos.

6.5 Meter Mirror repair(for Mount Graham)

Dean Ketelsen showed photos of the recast 6.5 meter mirror that is scheduled for Mt Graham. The original spin casting was compromised by a leak that developed in the spinning oven. The leak problem was resolved and glass chunks were added to the mirror in proportion to the deficient amount and the entire mirror and added glass were reflowed into the spinning oven. The recast was successful and the final grinding and polishing will be accomplished soon

Dean also exhibited some excellent nite sky photos centered on Orion taken with a F2 Nikon (Kodak elite 100 film) piggybacked on an equatorial drive.

As a side observation, Dean is an example of why TAAA flourishes. He is part of the professional staff at the U of AZ

Contnd next Column

Visit to Tucson Contnd

Mirror Lab(does the computerized grinding & polishing operations ,among other things) which is a leader in large mirror technology. Several years ago, Dean was president of TAAA. I called him (out of the blue) where there meeting was. He not only told me about TAAA, He invited me to a star party to ranch south of Tucson and offered me a ride there(Approx. 40 miles).I politely declined the ride but did accept an offer to tour the large scale mirror lab. Talk about a "Johnny Appleseed "of Astronomy. Dean is a highly capable but readily talks to all level of participants in this hobby of ours. Definitely someone to emulate!

TAAA Board Meeting

The president and board members were gracious enough to allow to sit in on one of their board meetings. I was simply curious how a dynamic club like TAAA operated . There's no question that being at the U. of AZ ,a hub of professional astronomy (Kitt Peak, Large Mirror Lab, Nicmos, Pathfinder etc.) helps contribute to the success of the club. The club has a fair "salting " of membership from the University staff which helps make for a interesting mix.

The board meets on a separate night (from the general meeting nite to allow sufficient time to cover discussion items . A printed Agenda listing major items of discussion with a time estimate of discussion time for each item. between the separate nite, printed agenda ,there is no race to adjournment.

Some items of mutual interest...Investing part of a \$36,'000 reserve fund in equities to hopefully build it up at a better rate. The money is set aside for purchasing a dark site for member use and as a home for a 25 inch mirror telescope for the club. This is not unlike our Gifts and memorials fund which grows at a snail's pace.

Another item of interest, NAOA is in the process of attempt to "privatize" some of the telescope facilities because of reduced federal funding. Its premature what will become of some of the smaller scopes. TAAA is quering the feasibility of amateur sponsorship and potential costs involved, If the door was open to something like a 50inch cassegrain, perhaps even an amateur consortium might be feasible.The club is just making some preliminary inquiries.

Observer Reports

I'm looking for MAS individuals to give me reports on their latest observations & experiences, in an effort to keep the focus of this newsletter on astronomy activities I will be happy to assist any member with the write-up, scan photos etc..

I would also like to develop a forthcoming astro events section which helps newer members to participate in this hobby, but without parroting S7T or Astronomy. I'm exploring a couple of sources that I may try as trial balloons.

Lastly,It would be nice to use FP as a "clarion" to attract more member participation in grazes, occultations, VSO, etc. if an appropriate lead time (1 to 1 & 1/2 months) can be established for pushing these events.

MAS Officers/ Staff

President	Lee Keith	425-2331
Vice President	Scott Jamieson	896-0119
Treasurer	Dan Yanko	453-3382
Secretary	Margaret Warner	327-7427
Observatory Director		
	Gerry Samolyk	529-9051
Assistant Observatory Director		
	Paul Borchardt	781-0169

Focal Point

Editor	Rudy Poklar	786-8931
	Email: rudyp70855@aol.com	
Distribution	Margaret Warner	

Future MAS Events

April 17 Monthly meeting at MAS Observatory

May 16 Election of Officers , Meet at MAS Observatory (to be confirmed)

Spring, Summer, Fall- Schedule of Star Parties and club outings to be announced..Eight star parties tentatively planned. Dates to be announced in April issue.

Keyholders

March

7	Gerry Samolyk	529-9051
14	Tom Schmidtkunz	352-1674
21	Ken Waraczynski	321-0918
28	Wanda Burner	691-2360

April

4	Wanda Burner	646-8229
11	Paul Borchardt	781-0169
18	Greg Cieslak	529-0548
25	Brian Ganiere	961-8745

Loaner Telescopes (available to members for local use)

Scott Jamieson (Waukesha)	896-0119	4" f/15 refractor
Lee Keith (Franklin)	425-2331	8" Dob reflector
Rich Stearle (Greenfield)	543-7479	8" Dob reflector

MAS Observatory 542-9071

Ed's note: To verify first Wednesday meeting, call observatory after 7 PM on first Wednesday date. If you get a recorded message, no one is present, and probably no meeting.

The Milwaukee Astronomical Society

11040 W. Meinecke Ave # 4
Wauwatosa, WI. 53226-1247

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S.Postage
PAID
Permit # 4775
Milwaukee, WI.

Mr. Rudy Poklar
12905 W Crawford Drive
New Berlin WI. 53151