

Martian Chronicles

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April 2006

Attention!

The next MARS club meeting will be held at MOSI in the Saunders Planetarium on April 14 from 7:30 - 9:00 PM.

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****Your Article, Story, . . . could be here. This Newsletter is for all M.A.R.S. Club members. Please send your Newsletter contribution to tanjad@mosi.org ****

Up Coming Club Events.

April 2006

8th SkyWatch at MOSI
Sundown to 10 PM.



14th M.A.R.S. Club meeting. Program: Solar Observing and Hydrogen Alpha (Ha) Filters. Open to everyone.

MAY 2006

6th Astronomy Day at MOSI 10 AM – 10 PM
SkyWatch at MOSI Sundown to 10 PM

12th M.A.R.S. Club meeting.



The Scope of Things

Dennis Farr

President

Astronomy: It's more than telescopes.

Probably the most common way folks get interested in astronomy is through using their first telescope. It may have been a Christmas present, or inherited from someone. After looking at the moon and a couple of planets, most people shrug and ask: "is that all there is?"

Let's see what this is really all about. Astronomy, it's more than looking through a telescope. Astronomy is in fact, a science. Science is experimentation in search of the truth. Astronomy logically has to be the oldest of the pure sciences because ever since intelligent beings could look up in the sky they surely wondered what was up there.

We can see a lot just with the naked eye. Early stargazers could see a lot more. (Darn that Thomas Edison!) In an effort to begin to define their existence, early astronomers divided the sky into 88 constellations. Constellations, by the way, are not just the formation of stars that make a familiar pattern, but the area of the celestial sphere in which those formations reside.

Having divided up the celestial sphere into manageable sections, early searchers of the truth began to experiment to determine what was there. Some dots of light became stars. Stars began to take on physical properties. Other dots became distant galaxies, nebula, and so on. Some of the dots moved in relation to the others. They were the planets, comets and asteroids. And so it went. Entire maps of the heavens were produced long before Galileo raised one of the first telescopes to observe the heavens in 1609.

Even today, understanding the location of things in the sky should be the basis upon which the beginning astronomers search for the truth begins. The modern goto scopes can be a curse in disguise. They satisfy the instant gratification requirements of many neophytes, but after the thrill wears off, the search for the truth ends. You can look at something for a long time, and never understand what you are seeing. Or never find anything, because of the difficulty in setting up these scopes.

As with most of the pure sciences, there are many disciplines within astronomy. Astrometry, astrophysics, and cosmology to name a few. The study of the galaxy and the planets in our solar system, star formation and life cycles. There really is more than any of can realistically expect to learn in the rest of our life times. So why do we care? Why do we study astronomy? Because we want to know what's up there. If you didn't want to know, you wouldn't be an astronomer, a scientist.

So, let's concentrate on finding what's out there. Not just looking at it.

Solar Observing and Hydrogen Alpha (Ha) Filters

April 14, 2006 M.A.R.S. Club Meeting Presentation

Kurt Kuechenberg, Manager of Interpretive Programs at MOSI, will give a presentation at our meeting about using the Hydrogen Alpha filter to observe the sun. He will bring pictures, and he may also bring a scope. MOSI will be providing solar scopes for Astronomy Day and will need M.A.R.S. volunteers to man the scopes. There will be a Hydrogen Alpha filter and a regular filter with scopes. Please email Tanja if you would like to volunteer to man the scopes for a shift on Saturday, May 6, 2006. We provide the scope and the filter; you provide the body. ☺ tanjad@mosi.org Thank you.

Computers, the Internet and Astronomy

Dennis Farr, President

The Internet and personal computers have revolutionized all facets of our lives, not the least of which is astronomy. The advances in processing power and the ability to share data and programs almost instantaneously have touched all our lives.

The Internet has become the library of 20 years ago. Now, all the world's information is at our finger tips and simply waits to be found.

Since there are so many new comers to astronomy, and the number keeps growing on a daily basis, one of the best things to find is an introductory course.

There are literally hundreds of web sites that come up when doing a search on 'introduction to astronomy'. Most of them are posted by colleges and universities and are simply course schedules and/or syllabus listings for their classes.

There is one site, however, that actually has the course material listed and includes a number of extremely helpful graphics to assist in the teaching of the material.

Oddly enough, a link to the web site is located on the home page of the club web site at <http://www.marsastro.org>. The site is <http://www.opencourse.info/astronomy/introduction>.

The first five of 15 listed topics of the self paced courses are: The Science of Astronomy, The motion of the Stars and the Sun, The Motion of the Earth, The Motion of the Moon, and The motion of the Planets.

The graphics are very good and go a long way toward making the material interesting and understandable.

Astronomy and Flight-Space History

- Apr 1, 1960 - First weather satellite, Tiros 1, launched.
- Apr 2, 1845 - First photo of the Sun taken.
- Apr 3, 1966 - First lunar orbiter, Luna 10.
- Apr 11, 1960 - First radio search for extraterrestrial civilizations started by Frank Drake (Project Ozma).
- Apr 11, 1986 - At 65 million km, Halley's Comet is closest to Earth for this apparition.
- Apr 12, 1961 - First man in space, Yuri Gagarin, makes one orbit aboard Vostok 1.
- Apr 12, 1981 - First Space Shuttle (Columbia) launch.
- Apr 24, 1970 - China launches its first satellite.
- Apr 25, 1990 - Hubble Space Telescope is deployed.
- Apr 26, 1920 - Famed Shapley-Curtis debate on the nature and distance of spiral nebulae, a.k.a. galaxies, takes place in Wash DC.

StarHopping For Beginners: April 2006

Tanja Diederich

Don't forget the time change April 2. Set your clocks one hour ahead.

For April 2006 keep an eye on Jupiter. He's been coming up every night a little earlier in the east. Mars is almost straight up (a little to the west) at sundown hanging out in Taurus, slowly easing towards Gemini. Saturn is still in Cancer the Crab

On April 13, the full moon will be hanging out near the bright blue star, Spica. Spica is the brightest star in Virgo representing the piece of wheat she holds in her hand.

On April 22, we have the peak of the Lyrid Meteor shower. Your best chance to catch these meteors is in a dark sky after midnight. Lie down, get comfortable and let your eyes adjust to the darkness. This will increase your chances to spot one of those elusive streaks of dust.

For the May 6, SkyWatch we should be able to watch Jupiter before we close up at 10 PM.

Astronomy Day Plans for May 6, 2006 Update

Astronomy Day will be very busy this year, so this will be a great year to get Astronomy to the People. MOSI is hosting the Science Olympics and Fandango on May 6, and Bodies has been extended to September 4, 2006, so MOSI will be packed with people. Astronomy Day will go from 10 AM to 10 PM. We need volunteers throughout the day.

MOSI's Flight and Space Team will add two shows to our regular Saturday schedule: 10:30, 11:45, 1, 2:15, 3:30 and 4:45. We will also offer a public Challenger mission from 1- 4 PM. We will set up Solar Telescopes during the day, and regular telescopes in the evening.

In the past the M.A.R.S. Club has been responsible for Astronomy Day. MOSI would be very happy to have people volunteer to man tables with Astronomy exhibits, bring and/or man solar scopes and telescopes in the evening. Please bring any ideas you have to Dennis. Let Dennis know what you plan to do for Astronomy Day and what shifts you plan to volunteer for. We'll be talking about this at the April 14th M.A.R.S. Club meeting, so bring your ideas.

On another note, please join us for SkyWatch at MOSI on April 8 at sundown. Don't worry if you don't have a telescope. MOSI has a few extra telescopes. If you just want to help us by talking to people, that works too. Just check in with Tanja or Dick. Out of the last four months, we were only rained out in February. Every other SkyWatch has been a go, even though there was cloud cover. In March with about 90-95% cloud-cover, we still had about 150 people wait patiently for a fleeting glimpse of Saturn or the Moon.

NEWSLETTER OF THE MUSEUM ASTRONOMY RESOURCE SOCIETY ASTRONOMY CLUB

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