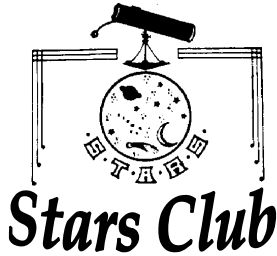


The Springfield

News from the STARS

“Sharing the Wonders of the Night Sky”

SINCE 1934



January, 2007

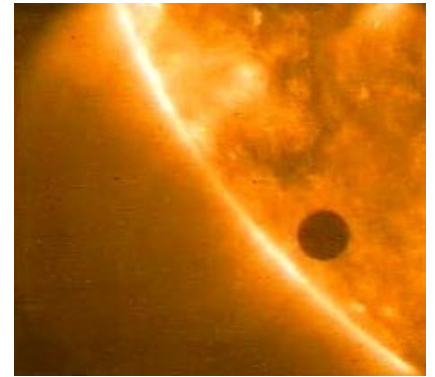


“On the Horizon”

As amateur astronomers, we spend a considerable amount of time out under the sky. No matter what or how we observe, most of that time is spent viewing objects that are familiar to us – stars, planets, clusters, nebulae and galaxies, to name a just few. Most observing sessions end with the satisfaction of having enjoyed the beauty of the sky for a short time, such as is common when out under a dark sky far from city lights. However, we may occasionally learn something new about one of the night’s targets, or perhaps even observe a new feature in a familiar object, one that we hadn’t noticed before. On these nights, we can experience a true sense of *discovery*, much like that experienced by astronomers of the past who helped shape our present understanding of the Universe. Observing experiences such as these are remarkable.

But some observing sessions leave us with an even more lasting impression. Such nights are *truly special* and *unique*. They are experiences that one remembers for a lifetime. Sometimes, they involve some special astronomical event, such as the appearance of a bright comet. Ten years ago this spring, as Comet Hale-Bopp made its spectacular appearance in our skies, many of us instantly gained a wealth of memorable observing experiences. Or, perhaps some other event, such as the recent transit of Venus, or the 2001 Leonid meteor display provided a memorable experience. Of course, memorable observing experiences don’t necessarily have to be tied to a special astronomical event. Any night out under the stars, in the company of friends, can make for a memorable occasion. So, what’s your most memorable observing experience? Think about it, then come to the May club meeting, where we’ll all have a chance to share our most cherished astronomical memories.

Cherished Astronomical Memories



NASA/LMSAL



NASA/JPL

- *Mike Kozicki*, Editor

Farewell, Pluto (For Now, At Least)

After much debate, the IAU officially adopted a definition for the term “major planet” last August 24th that left Pluto as nothing more than a “dwarf planet.” But this story is probably far from over, as the issue will likely be revisited at the next IAU General Assembly, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2009. Stay tuned.

Total Lunar Eclipse!

Mark your calendar for the evening of Saturday, March 3rd. That night, the Moon will rise as it becomes totally eclipsed, an event similar to the April 3, 1996 eclipse and our first total lunar eclipse since the Boston Red Sox won the World Series on October 27, 2004. Totality begins at 5:44p.m, just eight minutes after moonrise and two minutes after sunset. The Moon will remain within the umbra of the Earth’s shadow until 6:57p.m, marking the end of totality. The partial stages of the eclipse will conclude at 8:11p.m. At press time, the Stars Club is looking into the possibility of holding a public event for this eclipse at a site with an unobstructed view of the eastern horizon. If such an event is scheduled, details will be announced at the February club meeting and at <http://www.reflector.org>, the club’s website.

Upcoming Astronomy Association Events

Dates have been announced for three annual Astronomy Association Events. Arunah Hill's Winter Star Party will be held on Friday & Saturday nights, January 12 & 13. This year's Messier Marathon will also be held at Arunah Hill, on the nights of Friday & Saturday, March 16 & 17. And, the 15th annual Astronomy Association Dinner will take place on Friday evening, April 13, at the American Legion Hall on Rt. 9 in Hadley. For more information about these and other Astronomy Association events, visit Arunah Hill's website at <http://www.arunah.org> or <http://www.amherstastronomy.org>, the 5A's new website.

Stars Club Elections

The annual Stars Club elections were held at the November 2006 club meeting. Congratulations to the 2006 club officers and directors, who were elected to their positions for another term in 2007. See the Calendar of Events for a complete list of this year's Executive Committee. If you'd like to run for a position or nominate someone for one for 2008, please see one of the current club officers or directors.

NOTICES

Executive Committee Meeting - The next Stars Club Executive Committee meeting will be held in late spring. If you have ideas for events or speakers, notices for the newsletter, or anything else you would like to bring to the club's attention, please contact one of the club officers or directors prior to April 30.

Membership Dues - Club dues for 2007 remain at \$20. If you have not yet paid your 2007 dues, please send a check for \$20, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101 as soon as possible. Your dues offset costs of running the club, mostly the museum room rental fee and mailings. PLEASE help to support your club!

Sky & Telescope - One of the benefits of membership in the Stars Club is a reduced-rate subscription to Sky & Telescope magazine for just \$32.95 per year. If you are already a club member and wish to renew your subscription, return the renewal card you'll receive in the mail and a check for the proper amount, payable to the Springfield Stars Club, to **Rich Sanderson** at P.O. Box 2793, Springfield, MA 01101.

Telescopes Needed - The success of "Stars Over Springfield" depends upon the efforts of club members, especially those who can set up a small telescope outside the Tolman Auditorium for visitors to look through. If you have a small telescope, please consider volunteering at an upcoming event.

Club Meetings - Do you have an idea for a topic you'd like to see discussed at an upcoming meeting? Or, perhaps you'd like to give a talk of your own. If so, contact one of the club officers or directors.

THE OBSERVING LOG

Pleiades Occultation! As darkness falls on the evening of Friday, February 23, the nearly first quarter Moon will brush by the northern edge of M45, with several individual stars being occulted. Although not as spectacular as the Pleiades occultation that occurred on April 1st last year, which was largely clouded out here in southern New England, this event will be the most favorable of the year for us, occurring during early evening with only 46% of the Moon illuminated by sunlight.

Last Call for Saturn! The ringed planet, which we've been hearing so much about recently thanks to the Cassini mission currently studying it, will reach opposition in Leo on February 10, not far from the bright star Regulus. This is the last year to see Saturn near its best and brightest - if you miss it, you'll have to wait another two decades to see it like this again! During 2007 the inclination of the planet's rings continues to decrease, heading for edge-on late next year. Meanwhile, Saturn's celestial declination is also rapidly decreasing, as it's now just three years away from crossing the celestial equator, heading south.

Full Moon Dates: January 3, February 2, March 3, April 2, May 2, May 31, June 30

New Moon Dates: January 18, February 17, March 18, April 17, May 16, June 14

Vernal Equinox (Start of Spring) - March 20, 2007 at 8:07p.m. EDT.

Summer Solstice - June 21, 2007 at 2:06p.m. EDT.