



Issue Number 5

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Summer 2002

Southern California Observers

My Boston Trip

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Have you seen Mira?

Mira's 11-month period means that its maxima arrive about one month earlier in successive calendar years. Its next few brightenings will be more difficult to monitor, especially for skywatchers in the Northern Hemisphere, because these peaks will arrive closer to the time of the star's late April conjunction with the Sun. Don't miss Mira's performance this July and August, or you'll have to wait until 2007 to watch the star rise toward greatest luster in a fully dark sky. In the next few weeks this famous long-period variable should brighten tremendously, becoming an orange 2nd- or 2rd-magnitude beacon in the constellation Cetus, the Whale.

During the planning of the Astrocon 2000 conference, I had the opportunity to develop a very good relationship with the folks at Sky & Telescope magazine, this included editor Rick Fienberg, Steven J. O'Meara, J. Kelly Beatty, and their marketing department of Sean Ryan and Kerri Williams. These friendships have continued since the success of the conference.

This past month, I had to make a visit to Boston for an Aerospace Quality Conference to present a paper, and I thought I would give Sean and Kerri a call to see if we could get together while I was there. We setup a lunch meeting for one day during my stay.

While driving to S&T, I got lost... an easy thing to do, but I had my cell phone with me and called Sean at the office. Driving into a residential area, I was told to look for a Yellow house, with a lot of cars parked out front. I spotted the house, with a little Sky & Telescope sign above the front door. Sean and Kerri greeted me at the door, and Sean gave me a tour of the facility. It was interesting to think that S&T is a high tech magazine, and they are housed in an old house.

Walking through the place, Sean pointed the various offices of Rick and Kelly; neither was around at the time. Sean also brought me to Kerri's office in the "garage" and his office in the "kitchen". It was like a maze walking through the place, but I had a chance to see the inner workings of the magazine. It also gave me a feeling that the people working there were like a family in this big yellow house.

We then walked outside and crossed the street to another house; this is the editor's building. The editor building was again a maze, with long skinny hallways. There I met Gary Seronik, one of the newer editors at the magazine. I had met Gary at RTMC this year as well.

One of the coolest things I saw was the "cover room"; there they review the covers of S&T AND Astronomy magazine for the past 12 months to make sure that they don't re-print M31 on the cover too frequently, and also review what the 'competition' is doing as well.

This visit to the headquarters of S&T proved to me once again, that Sky & Telescope magazine not only is a quality publication, but the people working at the magazine are the best, and the friendliest out there. To take time away from their day to show me around the inner workings of the magazine was truly the highlight of my trip to Boston. (And lunch wasn't bad either....)

Highlighted Web Page

Discover a Comet with your Computer!

Warning: This website can trigger an obsessive search for comets.

In offices, dens and dorm rooms around the world, a geeky band of hunters are desperately scouring the site for comets. A German student likened his interest to addiction. A father of three in Britain, who has found 132 comets, is reluctant to admit just how much time he spends on his quest.

The unknown comets are turning up in the background of photos of the sun taken from the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory, or SOHO, a satellite in orbit around the sun. Dozens of amateur astronomers from around the world scour the images for the wispy tail of a comet, racing to be the first human to ever lay eyes on a particular glowing ball of ice hurtling toward the sun.

Now you can join the ranks of comet discoverers and never go outside! (That doesn't sound like much fun....

Using images on the SOHO website, you can search for sun grazer comets that are visible to the SOHO system. Visit the SOHO website for more information.

<http://sungrazer.nascom.nasa.gov/>



Astrophotography Question:

How does one become a millionaire as an astrophotographer?

Answer: Start with two million dollars.....

Summer Star Parties

The warm Summer nights are here. We will be having half of our Star parties at Mt. Pinos and the other in Santa Paula

June 8, Santa Paula

June 15- Mt. Pinos

July 6- Santa Paula

July 13- Mt. Pinos

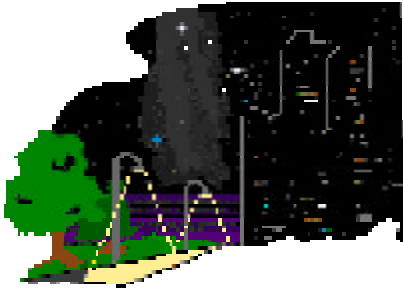
August 3 - Santa Paula

August 10- Mt. Pinos

Everyone is invited to the Star Parties and car pooling is suggested! Bring a friend or co-worker and teach them to love the night sky as much as you do!



Light Pollution in our part of California, What can we do?



Light pollution in Southern California is getting more widespread and much brighter. Gas stations and strip malls are having lighting wars to try to attract the most customers. The Stars are winking out behind the skyglow, not to be seen again except during the clearest, dry evenings. Motorist are forced to shield their eyes from the bright, disabling glare from unshielded streetlights when they come to an intersection at night to be able to see. Streetlights are supposed to make it safer to be out at night, not make it more dangerous and difficult to see pedestrians and other cars.

What can we as citizens and amateur astronomers do to roll back this scourge of the 20th and 21st Centuries? First and most importantly of all, is to not let apathy creep into your actions and thinking.

As amateur astronomers, we have a deep appreciation for the majesty and wonders of the night sky that is being lost behind the skyglow. As ordinary citizens, we should be very disturbed that the people in charge of installing lighting apparently do not have an even foggy understanding of the mechanics of human vision. Glare is never a good thing. If you have to shield your eyes at night to see properly, there is really something wrong. Businesses install horrible, blinding lighting under the umbrella and excuse that it is "Security Lighting". What we need to do is educate ourselves about lighting that being done improperly around us, let the offending city officials and business owners know what they are doing wrong and how they should fix the situation.

Sign up with the International Dark-Sky Association or at the very least, visit their website and soak up all the good information that you can. The address is: <http://www.darksky.org> Sign up with a handful of Yahoo egroups dealing with light pollution to see what others across the United States and other countries are doing to help fight light pollution.

Locally we members of Southern California Observers should make a list of some of the areas worst offenders, get contact information for them. If a business is a national chain, get contact information for their home offices. Most people who contribute to light pollution are unaware of the problem. Let's give them an education!

Remember, You too can take a bite out of Light Pollution!
Clear, DARK Skies,

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