100 Hours of Astronomy

Event 400 Years in the Making

Four hundred years after Galileo first pointed a telescope skyward, TAAS is pleased to be part of 100 Hours of Astronomy. This is a 100-hour, round-the-clock, round-the-globe event that includes live Webcasts from research observatories, public observing, and other activities around the world. TAAS plans to participate in the local community. Longtime TAAS member Jim Palmer is coordinating the event.

TAAS will have teams with a minimum of three observers, each with a telescope observing from various locations around Albuquerque. At all times there will be at least one team observing. Details of the TAAS program are being finalized and will be announced on the TAAS Web site and by email early in March.

Several organizations, including a local television station, will participate.

A highlight of the 100-hour event is Telescope Amnesty Day at the Explora Science Center in Old Town Albuquerque on Saturday, April 4, when people in the community may bring their telescopes to Explora and receive assistance from TAAS members on how to operate the instruments.

April 4 is Telescope Amnesty Day

The centerpiece of the 100 Hours of Observing in Albuquerque will be Telescope Amnesty Day at the Explora Science Center in Old Town Albuquerque on Saturday, April 4. This is the day for the public to bring telescopes to Explora, where TAAS members will assist with their operation.

Similar events recently hosted by other astronomy clubs have found that a large number of problems involve learning how to use the computer systems that most new telescopes now possess. Broken viewfinders, lost eyepieces, and wobbly mounts can also be anticipated.

This is a wonderful opportunity for TAAS to serve the community by sharing our knowledge of astronomy and telescopes with the owners of all sorts of intriguing telescopes. It will be a fun and interesting experience for TAAS. Explora is making available their large community room for the event. Amnesty Day runs from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

TAAS members are needed to assist with this event. Volunteers can contact Jim Palmer at TAAS@taas.org.

Messier Marathon-and-a-Half Returns to GNTO on March 28

by Barry Spletzer

The annual TAAS Messier Marathon at GNTO is a great event. For the last few years, we have added a slight twist to give an alternate, shorter Marathon (the half marathon) that can be completed by midnight. But I am getting ahead of myself. First, for the uninitiated, let me explain what the Messier Marathon is all about.

When folks started getting serious about scanning the sky with telescopes, searching for new comets was a new and novel task. Soon, astronomers found things that looked like comets (fuzzy blobs) but, unlike comets, were in the same place night after night and year after year. To help...
President’s Message

Dee Friesen

Special Convoy to GNTO

For many years some TAAS members have avoided making the drive to our observatory because of the six mile bump-and-grind journey along Twining Lane. Fortunately, a new and much better road now exists to make the drive to GNTO bearable.

The next major event at GNTO is the Spring Equinox picnic on March 21. A special convoy will travel to the observatory for this event to encourage first-time visitors. There will be a designated place at the south end of Albuquerque (to be determined) to meet to carpool to GNTO. The drive down will be in broad daylight, reducing any anxieties of wild animals lurking along the desert highway waiting to take a bite out of our telrads.

When the first-time visitors arrive at GNTO, they will be offered food and drink and briefed on the observatory facilities. They will receive training on the landmark Isengard Telescope and the opportunity to view many terrestrial objects far away from GNTO.

After dark, the visitors will be provided increased opportunities to observe many night-sky objects with a wide assortment of observing apparatus. At a reasonable hour, such as 9:30 p.m., the visitors will carpool back to Albuquerque to the original meeting place.

If you have never visited your observatory, March is the month to make it happen. Details will be posted soon on the Web site and distributed to everyone by e-mail. This is a wonderful opportunity for you to visit your observatory with a minimum amount of effort.

Help and Helping: TAAS Mentor Program Forming

The TAAS membership survey has revealed an interest in a TAAS mentoring program. Many people expressed a wish to receive the personal attention in learning astronomy that a mentor program could provide. An equal number expressed interest in being a mentor. Therefore, TAAS is in the process of establishing a mentor program.

People joining TAAS will be given a questionnaire to identify the type of learning assistance desired. They will then be assigned to a TAAS member who has volunteered to be a mentor. People new to TAAS but experienced in astronomy will also be given the opportunity to participate as mentors.

The program is being developed by the Membership Action Team led by Dee Friesen and begins the first part of April. All TAAS members are encouraged to share any previous experience with such a program with the Membership Action Team.

TAAS members desiring to be mentored or serve as a mentor should contact Dee Friesen at TAAS@taas.org or 856-1593.

Messier: The Man, the List, the Marathon

The March 7 TAAS general meeting will feature TAAS member Barry Spletzer, presenting an evening with Charles Messier. This is in preparation for the annual Messier Marathon at GNTO on March 28. The talk will include a glimpse into the man whose name, after 250 years, is still synonymous with deep-sky astronomy. The origins, development, and eventual completion of the Messier list of 110 deep-sky objects will be discussed in detail along with the history of the Messier Marathon and a few tips for getting the most out of this year’s March 28 Marathon at GNTO.

Barry is a long time TAAS member, avid designer and builder of portable telescopes, and a mathematical astronomer. In his spare time, he works at Sandia Labs as the senior scientist for robotics.

University of New Mexico Campus Observatory Open Friday Nights

The University of New Mexico (UNM) Campus Observatory will be open to the public many Friday evenings during the Spring 2009 Semester. The observatory will be closed on March 20. In addition, it may be closed on May 8, because this will be the last day of classes. The hours of operation are 7-9 p.m. during Standard Time and 8-10 p.m. during Daylight Saving Time. The observatory is on the Albuquerque Campus and is located northwest of the Physics and Astronomy Building and the University Hospital. For information and a map, visit http://panda.unm.edu/observatory/. UNM staff decide whether to close the observatory because of inclement weather. The decision is posted to their Web page by 3 p.m. every Friday. Admission is free, and the observatory is open to the public. Robert Williams, TAAS UNM Observatory Coordinator can be contacted at unm_coord@taas.org.

March Star Party Changes Schools

The March 3 school star party has been moved from La Luz Elementary to Griegos Elementary School. Griegos Elementary is at 4040 San Isidoro NW.

--Bob Hufnagel, education_coord@taas.org

Correction: The date of the intense heat lightning in Big Bend National Park reported by Kevin McKeown in the February “Observer’s Notes” was December 27, 2008. The date was inadvertently omitted from the newsletter text.
GTN News & Views

Peter Eschman

GTN “New Moon” observing on January 24 required a positive attitude, since conditions leading up to the event were less than optimal. A hard core of observers, small in numbers but large in aperture, made the trek and were rewarded with some nice views. Once again, the local prognostication and Clear Sky Chart proved accurate. Of the five observers, there were two 16” scopes, two 18” scopes and one 20” scope. Add ‘em all up and the combined aperture equaled a 39 ½” telescope!

Two other observers joined the scope owners for a total turnout of seven. Will Ferrell served as opener, so Steve Welch’s help was not needed as backup. Dee Friesen reported for duty as the Isengard Host, although there were no clients, so the Isengard was not used. Will reported the evening temperature hung around 50 degrees with no wind, and around 9 p.m. the clouds thinned, the humidity in the upper atmosphere declined, and very good viewing conditions prevailed. Observing highlights included globular cluster NGC1851, the Horsehead Nebula in Orion, the Rosette Nebula (using O3 filters), planetary nebula NGC2438 in M46, and the Trapezium in M42. We closed around midnight, but observing continued for some time after that.

One week later, on January 31, we had a combined observing and training event. Steve Welch opened the facility, so Dale Murray’s help as backup was not needed. Will conducted the training session and served as host of the Isengard Telescope. Carl Frisch had used the road dragger to good effect from south to GNTO. Thanks Carl!

Steve replaced the low batteries in the Ortega Building smoke/CO alarm. I brought down reworked covers for portions of the Isengard Telescope, along with a draft set of instructions clarifying how to cover the telescope.

Steve used his ETX-80 to test various video cameras to determine limiting magnitudes. The GTN asteroid occultation video camera was one of the better performers, so it looks like we’ve got a good camera.

Will’s training session had five participants with several first-time visitors. There were 11 scopes in operation and over 20 people on the field, so it was a good night. Seeing was good in the first part of the evening, and several people saw more than the usual number of Saturn moons. A minor cold front came through around moonset, dropping the temperature and degrading the seeing.

Steve closed up around 2:50 a.m., with a few observers still going. Those who stayed late enjoyed some good views of Comet Lulin. All in all, it was a good GTN night!

Our most recent GTN Committee meeting was on February 19, with Larry Cash, Ray Collins, Pete Eschman, Will Ferrell, Mark Fleenor, Lance Hurt, Mellisa Kirk, Gordon Pague, and Bill Wallace attending. I had met an hour earlier with Larry and Bill to pull together a proposed calendar for GTN and TAAS from June 2009 through May 2010.

After establishing duty assignments for upcoming events, we approved the GTN side of the calendar. Will scheduled a spring cleanup work session for March 15, to do maintenance and spruce things up for the GTN Open House/Equinox Picnic and Training on March 21. Cleanup activities will include painting, weeding, and general site cleanup. Will has a report on proposed cleanup activity elsewhere in this newsletter.

We plan to update the GTN Web site areas that detail the GTN loaner telescopes and have the TAAS loaner scope Web page point to these GTN resources. Our meeting wrapped up with planning for future events and site improvements. We will have GTN key holder refresher sessions on March 21, at 4:00 p.m. to keep everyone up to date on GTN policies and procedures.

Upcoming events include New Moon observing on February 21, an observing session on February 28, and Spring Cleanup session on March 15. Remaining March events include the March 21 Open House, Picnic, and Training event and the Messier Marathon on March 28.

Our GTN Open House, Spring Equinox Picnic, and Training Sessions are on March 21. Daylight Saving Time will be in effect, so plan accordingly for Sunset at 7:20 p.m. The Open House starts at 4:00 p.m., offering the perfect opportunity to visit GTN for the first time or to check on recent site improvements. Dee Friesen will coordinate car-pooling to those who are interested in sharing rides to this event. Please see Dee’s article elsewhere in this newsletter.

Our Spring Equinox Picnic starts at 5:30 p.m. with the usual semi-coordinated mix of potluck dishes and good fortune. The barbecue grill will be available with hot dogs and ham-
GNTO News, continued from page 3

burgers provided. More details will be available via email on the Board of Directors Email list (the BODOEL), and on our TAAS-L listserv. We need a volunteer to help coordinate potluck dishes.

Sunset is at 7:20 p.m. on March 15, so “Introduction to GNTO and the Isengard Telescope” begins at 7:00 p.m. following the potluck. This covers most of the equipment used at GNTO, including our Isengard 16” reflector as well as our 6” and 16” loaner scopes.

Once the skies are dark, Larry Cash and Robert Williams will offer another popular “Eye Candy” sky tour. This is two-part tour, beginning with a laser tour of naked-eye stars, constellations, and asterisms. The second part uses our Isengard 16” telescope to observe an impressive set of objects. If enough people are interested, we may offer an “Introduction to GNTO Astro Computing Resources” later in the evening. This covers computer hardware and astronomy-related software available at GNTO.

Steve Welch plans to have our CCD imaging equipment ready in our 10-foot dome. This is a great chance to learn about the imaging process and take images of your own.

We will have the heated Robert Ortega Building open and our Guest Trailer available for coffee, hot chocolate, and any snacks you might want to share. We’ve got a bunch of great equipment waiting for you at GNTO, so plan your trip to GNTO soon. Why wait?

GNTO committee meetings are open to any TAAS member and provide a great way to get more involved with your observatory. We meet every other month at 6:30 p.m. at JB’s Restaurant on Eubank just north of I-40. Our next committee meeting is April 16. If you have questions about GNTO, please contact me (Peter Eschman, gnto@taas.org, phone 873-1517).

I hope to see you soon at your observatory.

**Welcome to New and Returning TAAS Members**

LAURIE AUSTIN

ROBERT AND MARYLYN BURRIDGE

DALE, RUBY, AND AARON KLEINSMITH

ARTHUR VANDERRETT

**Note from Treasurer**

Clarification of New Member and Renewal Policy

Renewal notices will be mailed out one month before expiration date. Renewals and new members will be dated on the first of next month no matter when during the month they arrive. This will help with the database reports and queries.

There will also be no grace period for renewals. Please make sure that you send in renewal information and your check before the expiration date. Renewal of magazines and new subscriptions will be sent in twice a month. All checks are to be made out to “TAAS”. Thank you for your attention to this important issue. If you have any questions or special needs pertaining to membership and/or magazine subscriptions, contact the Treasurer, Dan Clark at treasurer@taas.org.

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**Monthly Membership Report**

**February 2009**

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<td>Total Members</td>
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**Donations to TAAS**

- GENERAL
- UNITED WAY
- EDUCATION
- GEORGE MULLEN
- DARK SKY
- LINDA HIXON
- RICKY HALLIBURTON

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**Location, Location, Location**

- Chaco Canyon
  - 6185' elevation
  - Latitude: 36° 01' 50"N
  - Longitude: 107° 54' 36"W
  - 36.03° -107.91°
  - 36° 1.83' -107° 54.60'

- Oak Flat
  - 7680' elevation
  - Latitude: 34° 59' 48"N
  - Longitude: 106° 19' 17"W
  - 34.99° -106.32°
  - 34° 59.80' -106° 19.28'

- UNM Campus Observatory
  - 5180' elevation
  - Latitude: 35° 5' 29"N
  - Longitude: 106° 37' 17"W
  - 35.09° -106.62°
  - 35° 5.48' -106° 37.29'

To convert from Degrees, Minutes, Seconds:
Divide seconds by 60, then add minutes, then divide by 60 again.

For security reasons, GNTO location is available by request only, so please contact Pete Eschman for GNTO information.

**Membership Services**

for:
- Membership Inquiries
- Events Information
- Volunteer Opportunities

Contact Membership at membership@taas.org

for:
- Membership Dues
- Magazine Subscriptions
- Address/e-mail changes

Contact Dan Clark at treasurer@taas.org

P.O. Box 50581 Albuquerque, NM

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**Editor’s Note**

Please note that the deadline for the next issue of the Sidereal Times is **Friday, March 20**. Please e-mail text as an attachment, preferably in Microsoft Word or OpenOffice.org Writer. Please do not embed photos in text. Attach photos and illustrations separately. The e-mail address for the newsletter editor is editor@taas.org.
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<td>3 Griegos Elementary School Star Party</td>
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<td>5 Board of Directors Meeting</td>
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<td>GNTO: Spring Cleanup</td>
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<td>20 Spring Equinox, TAAS at Explora, Sidereal Times Deadline</td>
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<td>21 GNTO: Open House, Equinox Picnic, Training, Observing</td>
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<td>28 GNTO: NM Observing, Messier Marathon</td>
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**Awards**

Larry Cash presents an award for over 25 years as a TAAS member to Bruce Levin.

Larry Cash presents the Isengard Award for generosity and service to TAAS to Jay Harden.

Photos by Tom Davies
April 2009

Saturday, March 7

7:00 P.M.
Regener Hall
University of New Mexico
(See map, back page)

Messier: The Man, the List, the Marathon
Barry Spletzer, TAAS Astronomer

Notes

Hotline 254-TAAS (8227).

GNTO = General Nathan Twining Observatory
GNTO Training = GNTO Observing and Training
GNTO NM = New Moon Premium Observing Night

UNM = University of New Mexico Observatory.
Call the TAAS hotline @254-8227, or the UNM hotline @ 277-1446 to confirm, or unm_coordinator@taas.org.

ATM = Amateur Telescope Making. Call Michael Pendley for information @ 296-0549, or atm@taas.org.

P & A = UNM Physics and Astronomy Building, Corner of Lomas and Yale

SIG = Special Interest Group
TBA = to be announced

Blue Italics = Non-TAAS events
avoid mistaking these “nebulae” for comets, in 1758 Charles Messier (pronounced MESS-ee-ay) started to catalog them. As one of the first to do this, he stumbled onto many of the brightest and finest deep-sky objects (and some real losers as well). His catalog contained some items that could never be mistaken for comets (like the Pleiades–M45—and the Beehive–M44) but were still fine deep-sky objects. Eventually (see www.seds.org/messier for the story) astronomers settled on a list of 110 objects for the official Messier catalog. (See photos of the Messier objects by Carl Frisch and John Sefick at http://www.taas.org/php/tree/messier-tree-index.html.)

Every spring, amateur astronomers all over the Northern Hemisphere gather at their favorite dark-sky haunts and peer through telescopes all night long trying to find all the Messier objects in a single night. This time of year is chosen for the unusual fact that there is a sizable region of the sky that is devoid of Messier objects. During late March and early April, the Sun is in that region so, for a few weeks each year, none of the objects is obscured by the Sun’s glare. That means that it is possible to see all 110 objects in a single night. I use the phrase “obscured by the Sun’s glare” loosely here. Some of the objects (M74 and M77) are at best just barely visible after sunset and another (M30) rises so shortly before dawn that only those with the best imaginations can find it.

So that’s a Messier Marathon, but what about the Marathon-and-a-Half? For those, like me, whose dedication might wane with the chilly March night, the “half” is to find exactly one-half of the 110 marathon objects before midnight. You can enjoy the camaraderie of your fellow TAAS Marathoners along with a good night’s sleep in your own bed. It’s the best of both worlds. The half marathon is a great way to be part of this event without spending the whole night at it.

This year, the Marathon is on March 28, which is nearly optimal because of both timing and the new Moon. There is a chance to see all of the 110 objects and an excellent chance to bag 107 of them (as always M74, M77, and M30 are difficult in the twilight). I have constructed my usual one-page guide for the Messier Marathon and a pair of sky charts for before and after midnight. The guide is available on the TAAS Web site, www.taas.org, along with a simplified star chart. The primary uses of the guide are: to give a logical order to find the objects; provide a checklist to keep track of what has been found; and to show at a glance when things rise and set. All you really need is my guide, a pretty basic star chart (maybe even my simple version), and some persistence to complete a successful Marathon and see at least 100 of the objects.

Because there is a lot of stuff crammed into the guide, some beforehand preparation can make your observing time much more productive. So print out your Marathon guide soon. Putting all this information on a single sheet makes things quite crowded. The Web site also has complete instructions and a description of the guide in the Messier SIG area under “Messier Marathon.”

I intend to be at GNTO until midnight this year. As usual, I will be there primarily to offer help to anyone new to the Marathon. I hope to see you there.

Photo: Messier Marathon as seen from the GNTO dome. Photo by Larry Cash.
WANTED

RIDERS TO GNTO

Saturday, March 21, 2009

Car Pool to the Spring Equinox Picnic

contact TAAS@taas.org
TAAS Help Wanted, March

TAAS NEEDS PEOPLE to assist with the following areas. If you are interested, contact Dee Friesen or any other TAAS BOD member. Contact information for all BOD members is on page 11 of this newsletter.

TAAS Mentor Program — Provide learning assistance to a newer member by sharing your astronomy knowledge and experience.

General Meeting Planning — Identify speakers, activities and events for the monthly TAAS meetings.

Education — Participate in the TAAS Educational Outreach Program by attending school star parties.

GNTO Committee — Join the committee and receive training to become a GNTO Key Holder.

Membership — Assist with the conduct of the TAAS membership program. Help track membership, identify reasons for nonrenewal of membership, and promote TAAS membership.

Observing — Identify significant observing events for TAAS members and events to present to the public. Create observing contests and observing lists for members to complete to receive TAAS awards.

TAAS Social Events — Assist with the planning and conduct of TAAS social events.

TAAS Web Site — Assist with the TAAS Web site including e-mail procedures and other electronic communications.

International Year of Astronomy planning — Assist with the planning of TAAS events for the IYA.
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Tom Davies
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417-9754

Bob Havlen
Director
856-3306

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