

FIRST LIGHT



Journal of the South Bay Astronomical Society - September 2003
on line at www.geocities.com/sbas_elcamino

Monthly General Meeting: Friday, September 5, 7:30 PM

Guest Speaker: Dr. Don Burnett (JPL)

"The Genesis Program"

MARS MANIA

Aug. 23 @Ridgecrest School - Between 100 to 200 people converged on Ridgecrest for our monthly in town star party. Of course it helped that Mars is at its historically closest approach to Earth and the media have hyped it to the hilt. The Daily Breeze carried a feature article about Mars including an interview with our president Greg Benecke. The P.V. News also carried a notice of the SBAS event and the P.V. Library has had a Mars exhibit up for the past month along with our own display in the main lobby. As the saying goes, "It pays to advertise". We had everything from binoculars to Jim Madison's 17 inch Dob. and everything in between available for viewing.

Mars didn't come up over the tree line till about 10 PM. In the meantime, we were able to show the crowd other interesting items. In the club's Nexstar we showed off the beautiful binary Alberio, compared it with the red giant Antares, then went on to M4, M22 and M13. When Mars finally cleared the trees it was just a shimmering orange disk without much detail. However, by midnight the air had cleared and Mars was a beautiful sight! The Southern polar cap was easily visible and we could make out faint detail surrounding it. Unfortunately, most of the crowd had left by then, but there were a few late arrivals who caught the best show. The sky continued to improve and it was a great night for everyone! Don't miss the August 30th deep sky session - it should be spectacular!

- Joe Fierstein

We had the largest turnout since I became an SBAS member. I have to call it a Star Party because we had a large crowd of people and somewhere on the order of 15 scopes. I would estimate that throughout the evening there were about 200 members of the public passing through. This was largely due to a mention of the SBAS and the Ridgecrest Star Party in a frontpage article in The Daily Breeze on Saturday morning. The Daily Breeze had interviewed me earlier in the week, so I knew there would be an article, but I did not expect frontpage coverage.

We did have a brief scare with the marine layer starting to blow through, but it quickly went away, leaving a very clear night. It was possible to see the Milky Way passing through Sagittarius and past the Zenith before it got lost in the LA skyglow. The sky was not very steady as we began looking at Mars, but that did not dampen the enthusiasm of the crowd. The lines were 10-15 people deep at every scope for a couple of hours. A number of people expressed interest in the club and quite a few old First Light newsletters and membership applications were handed out. As the night wore on and the crowds thinned and Mars got higher, the view steadied considerably. Detail was apparent in small scopes and very nice in the larger scopes. There were a few members of the public that came well after midnight. Eventually, it was down to the usual 3 or 4 diehards and it was close to 3:00 A.M. by the time we started packing up. It was a very successful night!

- Greg Benecke

Lomita Math/Science Magnet School Star Party

SBAS members will support a star party for the Lomita Math / Science Magnet School on Saturday, **September 6th**. We should probably plan on people with scopes arriving before 7:00 P.M. to set up. Sunset is at about 7:11 P.M. and the start time of 8:00 P.M. will be scheduled for the crowd. Mars rises about an hour before sunset, so hopefully it will be high enough, early for folks to get a good view. They expect around 100 students and parents.

Location: Lomita Magnet School, 2211 W. 247th Street, Lomita, 90717. The school is located near the intersection of Lomita Blvd. & Narbonne Ave. You can use MapQuest to get a map at: <http://www.mapquest.com> the Web's leading provider of free Maps and Driving Directions.

- **Greg Benecke**

"Astronomy for City Dwellers" Class

Class starts **September 9th** and runs for six consecutive Tuesday nights, from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. We explore the sky - observing stars, constellations, the Moon and Mars, obviously the featured object for this class schedule. We will use an 11inch reflector and a 6inch refractor telescope and do some photography too. The class is offered through the Palos Verdes Adult Education program. For additional information and registration, please call 310-541-7626, ext 708.

- **Mike Mayerchak**

Webcam Imaging

I started a website 2 months ago that documents successful webcam settings when taking pictures of the planet Mars. Some of the questions it answers are:

- How many frames should be stacked from an astrophotography AVI?
- How many minutes long can my webcam capture AVI before rotational blurring occurs?
- How do dust donuts affect image quality?
- What percentage gamma should I use for my webcam?

You can use this website to learn what works and what doesn't when taking pictures of Mars. Don't waste time experimenting, but spend it more productively taking pictures and AVIs using settings that work.

At the moment there are more than 50 sets of images of Mars taken during June, July and August 2003. Even though you do not do webcam astrophotography, you might still get value from this website, just by admiring the beauty of Mars. My pictures really started to get impressive and beautiful when I started using a 3x Barlow lens on 15 July 2003.

I am using an unmodified Logitech Quickcam Pro 4000. Most other standard webcams with CCD chips will work as well. All the techniques I use will be useful when taking webcam images of Jupiter and Saturn as well. The website is <http://www.webcam-astrophotography.com/>

- **Alwyn Botha**

SBAS Membership Benefits

“Welcome” to our newest SBAS member: Philip Schueller and Barny Krinsky.

Contact John Collins for magazine subscriptions at club rates: “Sky & Telescope” \$29.95 and “Astronomy” \$29.00! Make your check payable to SBAS and mail the payment and your subscription / renewal form directly to SBAS, c/o Microcosm, Inc. at 401 Coral Circle, El Segundo, CA 90245-4622.

Part of your SBAS membership dues goes toward membership in the Astronomical League. All paid members should be receiving the “Reflector”, the league's newsletter, four times a year. As a member organization, we can participate in a number of award programs they offer. These are based on completing various observing challenges. Check out the Astronomical League website at www.astroleague.org

NexStar 8 Available to SBAS Members

All members in good standing (with at least six months of continuous membership) can borrow the club's Nexstar8 for up to 7 days. The fee of \$5 for a weekend, or \$10 for an entire week, is nonrefundable and will be added to the club's Accessories Fund “Wish List” for future purchases. A fully refundable deposit of \$200 cash or check is required. Loss or damage is the responsibility of the borrower. A copy of the complete South Bay Astronomical Society Nexstar 8 Borrowing Rules and Agreement is available upon request. The **Accessories Fund “Wish List”** – Member contributions of any amount or donations will be appreciated, as will any suggestions for new purchases!

SBAS Library Established

Bill Eisele has donated the first book to our club's library and will be acting as our custodian. “The Hundred Greatest Stars” by James B. Kaler, published in 2002 by Copernicus Books is available for members to borrow. All members are invited to bring in books, which they would like to donate, to the monthly general meetings. We will publish all new additions to the library. Please contact Bill if you wish to check out a book!



SBAS Members Advertisements

For Sale:

- ❖ New 10 x 25 Coronado Binoculars with built in White Light Filters for viewing the Sun. Retail Price \$100, Your Price \$75. Call Joe Fierstein at (310) 377-9834.
- ❖ Orion 2X Deluxe Barlow Lens for 2-inch-diameter eyepieces, never used. Retail price \$90, selling it for \$45. Email Steve Morris at: [morrissl@lahc.edu](mailto:morrisl@lahc.edu), or talk to me during one of the monthly meetings.

Mt. Wilson Observatory Trip on Schedule!

We are still on track for Mt. Wilson Observatory trip on Thursday, **September 25th**. If you need to cancel, please let Greg Benecke know as soon as possible as we still have people on the waiting list. Sunset will be at about 6:45 P.M., so people should plan on being there by **6:00 P.M.** since Mt. Wilson staff will let us in the entrance gate about a half hour before sunset. Since we will have to drive during rush hour, folks should allow plenty of time for the drive. I do not have any kind of a feel for how bad the traffic gets.

Directions: Take the 110 North to the 5 North to the 2 North to the 210 East. Take the Angeles Crest Highway (Highway 2) exit and turn left. Continue up Angeles Crest Highway about 14 miles to Mt Wilson Road. You can only go right. Take Mt. Wilson Road about 5 miles to loop at the end. The gate to the Observatory grounds is at the far end of the loop. Park there and wait for the gate to be opened. If you arrive after the main group has entered, use the pay phone (cell phones do not work due to the interference from the radio towers) to call 793-3065. A docent will come to the gate to let you in. It may take a while so be patient. Do not arm your car alarm as the interference from the radio towers can prevent you from turning it off. Please make an effort to carpool since parking at the observatory is limited.

Wear shoes appropriate for going up stairs and negotiating the stepladders for viewing. It will be cold overnight so bring plenty of warm clothing, preferably layered so you can adjust your warmth easily. You may bring a sleeping bag, blankets, air mattress and/or a folding chair. There are very few chairs there, so you should bring your own. Hot water is available for you to make hot coffee, tea, or chocolate that you bring along with snacks to keep your energy levels high through the night. **Red** light only is allowed in the dome, so bring a red flashlight. Smoking is only permitted immediately outside of the dome entrance, but this is subject to further restrictions by the Forest Service. Be very careful as dead leaves and pine needles abound and are extremely flammable. No intoxicants are allowed. Do not bring personal scopes to the observatory. You may leave in the middle of the night, but you must be escorted to the gate by Mt. Wilson staff.

- **Greg Benecke**

Dark Sky Observing at Garner Valley

SBAS will be at **Mile Marker 66**, a primitive site in Garner Valley outside of Hemet, on Saturday, **September 27th**. A Federal Wilderness Permit is needed, a one-day pass is \$5 or with an annual permit cost of \$25, a 2nd permit can be purchased for an additional \$5 (2 people can split cost for \$15 each). Permits can be purchased at REI, Big 5 or other large sporting goods stores.

Directions: Take 91 Fwy. East to Arlington/Van Buren exit (about 50 miles from Redondo Beach), exit turn left and go about 100 feet then turn right on Van Buren and go about 15 miles to the 215 Fwy. Turn right to go South on the 215 to the 2nd exit, Ramona Expressway, exit and turn left going about 25 miles on the Ramona Expressway till it deadends at Highway 74. Turn left on Hwy. 74 and go approximately another 20 miles to Mountain Center, stay to the right on 74 going about 4 or 5 miles. Go past Hemet Lake (on the right) a mile or two to Mile Marker 66 and take the dirt road to the left over the cattle guard. Sign posted: Wilderness Permit Required. Go about a quarter mile and you're there! Call me on any questions at (310) 376-6387.

- **Craig Gates**

Schedule of Coming Events

5 September Friday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly General Meeting: Our speaker will be Dr. Don Burnett, JPL's principle investigator for the Genesis Program.
6 September Saturday Evening	Lomita Math / Science Magnet School "Star Party" Refer to page 4 for location and directions to the school.
8 September Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly Planning Meeting Refer to page 3 for location.
18 (JPL) 19 (PCC) September 7:00 P.M.	Von Karman Auditorium Lecture Series – FREE "Galileo's Odyssey – The Worlds of Jupiter" presentation by: Dr. Rosaly Lopes, JPL research scientist. A guide to the Galileo spacecraft's journey around Jupiter and its moons, just days before the spacecraft plunges into Jupiter. For more information call: (818) 354-0112.
20 September Saturday Evening	In-Town Dark Sky Observing at Ridgecrest School – Weather Permitting: If the weather conditions are marginal, contact Greg Benecke to confirm that he will be opening the gate! Take Hawthorne Blvd. south across Pacific Coast Hwy.; continue up the hill past Silver Spur and turn left at Highridge. Go one mile and turn left on Whitley Collins, up one block and turn left on Northbay Rd., the new parking lot is at the end on the left. Enter parking lot and turn left, the gate is at the east end (it should be open about 15 minutes before sunset) and a paved road leading into the playground where we have traditionally set up. If at all possible, drop your equipment off and park your car in the new parking lot (less than 200 feet away). If you are absolutely certain that your vehicle does <u>not</u> drip anything you can park with your equipment. Drive with care to avoid steel pillars supporting basketball nets...
25 September Thursday Evening	Mt. Wilson Observatory Trip See page 5 for instructions or contact Greg Benecke on any questions you may have!
27 September Saturday Evening	Out-of-Town Dark Sky Observing – New Moon September 26th Contact Craig Gates if you have any questions about the trip – details on page 5.
3 October Friday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly General Meeting: Speaker, Dr. Vince Loyd, will discuss "Who Determined the Distance of the Earth from the Sun?".
6 October Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly Planning Meeting Location will be announced in the October newsletter.
18 October Saturday Evening	In-Town Dark Sky Observing at Ridgecrest School – Weather Permitting. Refer to September 20th entry for directions to the site & instructions on weather conditions.
25 October Saturday Evening	Out-of-Town Dark Sky Observing – New Moon Contact Greg Benecke to arrange site location.

South Bay Astronomical Society

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*General Meeting at El Camino College Planetarium:
Friday, September 5th at 7:30 P.M.*

Guest Speaker: Dr. Don Burnett (JPL)

“The Genesis Program”

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South Bay Astronomical Society
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