

FIRST LIGHT



Journal of the South Bay Astronomical Society - April 2004
on line at www.geocities.com/sbas_elcamino

Monthly General Meeting: Friday, April 2nd, 7:30 PM

Guest Speaker is a Celestron Representative

“Demo of Celestron’s CGE Series Telescopes”

4th Annual SBAS Messier Marathon Report

Our **4th Annual Messier Marathon** was held on the evening of Saturday, **March 20th**. The sky was perfectly clear and the temperature was in the low 80s as I arrived at the Red Rock-Inyokern Road site. There was quite a gathering of stargazers, some of whom had been there the night before. The contingent from the SBAS included Ken Munson, Craig Gates and his wife, Steve Lindsey, Dan Trimble, Shawn Beveal and his family, Hal Shimizu and his girlfriend, Garth Magee, Al Fader, Bill Eisele, Chris Newton, Tim Moore, and myself. It is very likely that I missed someone in the list. There were about a dozen other astronomers not affiliated with the club. My goal for the night was to star hop through the marathon as much as I possibly could with my Telerad equipped 15 inch Dob and only resort to use of the digital setting circles in case of total desperation.

As soon as the sun set everyone turned their attention to the planets. Mercury was easily spotted naked eye, though the view of it through the scope was just a colorful gyrating blob. Venus fared much better, with fairly steady seeing at its altitude. It was at a nice quarter phase. Mars was next along the ecliptic though now too small to make out any detail. Saturn was high in the sky with pretty good seeing. In my scope I could identify 5 moons while still in twilight. Swinging over to Jupiter revealed Callisto's shadow starting its transit. Considering how low Jupiter was at this point the seeing was exceptional with good detail in the equatorial bands. Jupiter would be revisited several times during the night as Callisto and Io and their shadows transited. Unfortunately, the seeing actually deteriorated as the night wore on. At about 3:00 A.M. the Great Red Spot was centered, but the seeing did not allow it to be clearly identified.

The first challenge of the Messier Marathon is finding M74, a magnitude 9.4 galaxy, in the fairly bright twilight before it sets behind the hills to the West. I had failed this the previous 3 years with my C8 using setting circles. It took me about a half an hour of trying, but I finally pulled it out of the murk, as confirmed by Steve Lindsey, and the digital setting circles were still turned off. I was able to star hop my way through the next 54 objects with no problem, thinking how much easier it was to star hop with a Telerad on a Dob compared to using the finder on a fork mounted SCT, as I tried last year. Unfortunately, I had to resort to the digital setting circles for the two dimmest galaxies listed in the Virgo cluster, M91 and M98. With the 15 incher, there were just so many galaxies that I got lost! I racked up another 28 objects by star hoping until I could not clearly identify M39 and I again resorted to the computer. M39 is a very sparse open cluster in a very rich part of the Milky Way. I think a bigger aperture works against you in finding such an object. I got the next 18 objects with star hopping. By about 4:40 A.M. the sky to the east was getting noticeably brighter and my view to the southeast was partially blocked by a motor home. These conditions delayed my finding the last few objects to the point where I resorted to the computer for the next four. Alas, M55 stayed behind the motor home and M30 stayed below the horizon as the twilight just got too bright to keep up any hope of seeing them. In total, I got 108 of the 110 Messier objects, including NGC 5866 as an alternate for the doubled up M101/M102. Of those 108 objects, 7 were assisted by the computer.

The Messier Marathon is truly a physical undertaking, especially when trying to do it all by star hopping. Due to some diversions through the night to observe Jupiter's moon activity, Saturn and an unsuccessful attempt to see the

Horsehead Nebula using a filter that Ken Munson had, I only sat down three times the entire night for about a cumulative 15 minutes. My body and feet still hurt 2 days later as I write this, but it does give me a sense of accomplishment. Unfortunately, I did not get the numbers from any of the other members except Chris Newton, a new member. He bagged 108 with his homemade 10 inch Dob.

- Greg Benecke

Support Your Local Star Parties

I was contacted yesterday by Bob Eklund of the Mt. Wilson Institute asking if the SBAS can provide support on two star parties for groups that he is involved in. The first is this coming Friday, **March 26**, at the **Christian Science Church** in Westchester. Since the long term weather forecast is for ongoing overcast evenings, he has also given **April 2** as a backup date if March 26 does not pan out. The second star party is on Friday, **April 16**, at the **Orville Wright School**, also in Westchester, I believe. If you are able to support either of these star parties, please contact Bob Eklund, 310-216-5947, email beklund@sprynet.com.

@Lomita Math and Science Magnet School - There will be a single star party on Saturday, **May 8th** (the March 27 and April 24 dates have been canceled). We can expect several hundred people at this star party so we will need as many scopes as possible there. **Location:** Lomita Math & Science Magnet School, 2211 W. 247th Street, Lomita, 90717. The school is located near the intersection of Lomita Blvd. & Narbonne Ave.

Meadows Elementary School Telescope Viewing Night

I exchanged emails with Mrs. Post, the 3rd grade teacher at **Meadows Elementary School** in Manhattan Beach, two blocks north of the intersection of Meadows Ave. and Manhattan Beach Blvd. in Manhattan Beach, who is organizing Telescope Night on **April 1, 2004** at the school beginning at 7:30 PM. She has spoken with Ralph Ford, a science teacher at Manhattan Beach Middle School, who is organizing Telescope Night with her. Prof. Dave Pierce from El Camino College suggested I contact the members of the South Bay Astronomical Society about assistance in making this event special for 80 to 100 3rd graders and their parents. Ralph Ford will be there at 6:30 PM to set up.

The event is very informal with no presentations that night. The teachers prep the kids during the school day. I believe the kids and parents will be handed the evening sky map from www.skymaps.com. The Society could help us make the event special by bringing one or more larger telescopes and making the rounds with the kids and parents to answer questions and spark interest in discovery. The more people with knowledge and interest, the better. Please let me know the interest of Society members in participating. Thank you. Layton Pace, (310) 281-6316 (Work) or email: lp@ECJLAW.COM

Star Party For Charity - American Cancer Society

My name is Glenn Arisumi. I work with Don Quok at Northrop Grumman and have taken the mirror making class at El Camino. I have asked Perry Hacking if he, or someone from Celestron, would be interested in participating in a charity event. They were interested, but could not commit to the event. Perry suggested that I ask the South Bay Astronomical Society. This is a charity event for the American Cancer Society. The event is on **April 23-24, 2004** at CSULB. This is a twenty-four hour relay that takes place at the track. The relay starts at 5PM on April 23. Prior to the start of the relay there will some type of ceremony to remember friends and family that have passed away from cancer (something about candles being set up in and around the track). They are expecting participation to be in the thousands.

A friend of mine asked if I knew of anyone that would be interested in setting up and operating telescopes as a fund raising event. The idea is that people make donations and then they take their turn looking at things. Details have not been worked out. I am trying to find out if anyone would be interested in supporting this event.

Sonia Jones can provide more details, email: Sonia_Jones@ea.epson.com.

My friend's name is Dean Sueda, email: Dean_Sueda@ea.epson.com.

Glenn (310) 812-2280, email glenn.arisumi@ngc.com (out of the office until Tuesday of next week)

Our SBAS Committee

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Monthly General Meetings



We normally meet on the first Friday of each month at 7:30 p.m. in the Planetarium at El Camino College. If the first Friday is on or close to a holiday, we usually defer the meeting until the second Friday of the month.

The Planetarium is on the south side of Manhattan Beach Blvd., one block west of Crenshaw Blvd. (near the center of the map at left). Click on the map to get a display that can be zoomed out for a regional view. The zoom display appears in a separate browser window, which can be closed to return to this page.

The domed roof of the planetarium is visible from the street. There is on-street parking, and we can often use campus parking: check inside to see if you need a FREE parking permit for your car. Park in northeast corner lot, temporarily, due to the construction project.

We enjoy the planetarium facilities through the courtesy of the El Camino College Administration, and have several faculty members of the Astronomy Department as members of our Club. Our meetings always include an informal opening, when new attendees are invited to introduce themselves and let us know about their interests in astronomy. Members share their latest news and observations at this time. The rest of the evening is devoted to guest speakers, who range from amateur astronomers to professional astronomers to representatives from local aerospace companies to college professors. We are fortunate to have all these talented people in our area, willing to come and talk to us.

Monthly Planning Meetings

Committee members (and anyone else with an interest in Society activities) meet each month, usually on the Monday following the general meeting. Meetings are sometimes rescheduled due to travel and other circumstances. Exact date and time of each month's meeting will be announced in the schedule of events in *FIRST LIGHT* each month, and should also be verified with a committee member by any member or visitor wishing to attend. All are welcome!

We will meet on Monday, April 5th at 7:30 PM at the home of Laura Lucas, 2005 Mathews Ave. #A, in Redondo Beach. Take Artesia Blvd., west from Hawthorne Blvd. and turn right on Aviation Way. Turn right at the stop sign onto Mathews Ave. and go down the hill. Park on the street just past Green and Laura's house is on the left side in the back past the gates.

SBAS Membership Benefits

“Welcome” to our newest SBAS members: Michael Peterson, Bill Chater and Ken Liss.

Contact John Collins for magazine subscriptions at club rates: “Sky & Telescope” \$32.95 and “Astronomy” \$29.00! Make your check payable to SBAS and mail the payment and your subscription / renewal form directly to South Bay Astronomical Society, P.O. Box 1999, Redondo Beach, CA 90278.

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!

❖ For Sale -

8 inch Meade LX200 telescope, complete GoTo with 3 eyepieces \$1200.00. Also For Sale: A Dew Shield and Heater for a Celestron C8, complete with controller \$50.00. For information call: Bill Chater (310) 541-2023.

April - Comets & Asteroids

Lots of activity this month! I may try to do some imaging of a couple of the brighter asteroids and I really want to try a comet. Some of the asteroids are way below what I'd normally consider the threshold for amateur astro-photographers but the names were so unique I couldn't resist listing them.

Comets Visible In April:

Name	Magnitude	Constellation
2003 H1	11.7 and fading	Hydra
2003 K4	12	Vul
2002 T7*	5 and growing	Peg-Psc
Howell*	10	Cap
2003 T3*	9	Psc-Peg-Psc-And

Comets at Perihelion:

Date	Identification	Magnitude
April 12	Howell	10
April 23	2003 T7	4
April 29	2003 T3 (Tabur)	9

Near-Earth Asteroid Flybys:

Date	Identification	Magnitude	Distance
April 12	5050 Doctorwatson	17	1.662 AU
April 13	5738 Billpickering	16.7	1.145 AU
April 16	2001 HJ31	16.5	0.006 AU
April 18	7958 Leakey	15.7	0.989 AU
April 18	3159 Ostro	15.2	1.016 AU
April 30	2003 YT1	14	0.073 AU

*Visible in the early morning before sunrise

Check the JPL Ephemeris Generator page for coordinates of the objects at:

<http://ssd.jpl.nasa.gov/cgi-bin/eph>

- Ken Munson

Rocket Launch from Vandenberg AFB

One of the benefits of living in the Los Angeles area is that we can watch rocket launches from Vandenberg Air Force Base, and the next opportunity to do so will occur at 10:09:12 a.m. on Saturday, **April 17**. This morning launch will send the Gravity Probe-B experiment into space on top of a Boeing Delta 2 rocket. This experiment will measure how space and time are warped by the presence of the Earth, and how the Earth's rotation drags space-time around with it, testing the predictions of Albert Einstein's general theory of relativity.

To see this launch, find a north-west to south-west horizon as free of obstructions as possible. The launch may be visible anywhere in the South Bay, but the closer to the coast you are, the better. The spacecraft will be launched into a polar orbit, so the rocket should be visible traveling from a position north of west, heading southwards (to the observer's left). Even more impressive may be the condensation trail, which may last for half an hour or more.

Launches are never certain to occur, and this probe has already been postponed from its scheduled launch dates in 2003 of April 24, July 20, Sept. 18, Nov. 6, Nov. 14 and Dec. 6. If you want to monitor the posted flight schedule, you may do so at Internet sites such as <http://www.spacearchive.info/vafbsked.htm> or <http://spaceflightnow.com/tracking/index.html>

- *Steven Morris*

'Fab Five' Make Rare Appearance in Night Sky

The five so-called naked-eye planets - Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn - will reunite in the night sky, giving spectators a unique chance to see Earth's closest companions in one easy sitting. The gathering will be visible every night for an hour after sunset, beginning around **March 22** and lasting about two weeks. While other opportunities to catch a five-planet rendezvous will take place in the next few years, both at dawn and dusk, this one is not to be missed. "This particular planetary grouping will quite possibly offer the best nighttime views until 2036," says Dr. Myles Standish, an astronomer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif. For early risers, there will be another chance to see all five naked-eye planets together just before sunrise in December of this year and early January 2005. "Every so often the five visible planets will collect on one side of the Sun," says Standish. "Only when conditions are right, will they all be clearly visible at either dusk or dawn." On **May 12-16** look for a mini-reunion with the naked-eye planets, when Comet NEAT, C/2001 Q4, lines up with Venus, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter.

- *JPL News*

Mt. Wilson Observatory Trip Reservations

Only one spot is left open for the **May 15th** Mt. Wilson Observatory night with the 60-inch telescope. We will also accept names for the waiting list since there can be late cancellations just before the scheduled date. If you haven't already paid the \$36 fee, please be sure to do so at the April 2nd General Meeting to lock in your reservation.

- *Laura Lucas*

Ridgecrest School Observing Session Reports

I didn't expect the marine layer to cooperate as I watched it flow over the top of P.V. on my way up to Ridgecrest School on March 13th. There have been enough times where the top of the clouds lowered below school level as the night went on. I was surprised by how many people showed up and stayed to wait it out with high hopes. There were a couple of brief periods when the sky opened up and there were even more sightings of a few bright stars through the fog. The teases were just enough to keep many from packing up and leaving. After about four hours of this, as well as good conversation, we finally all decided it was futile and packed it in. We joked how this would trigger the clouds to part. As I locked the gate after everyone had left, I looked up to see a perfectly clear sky!

- *Greg Benecke*

Montemalaga School Science Night

The Montemalaga School, Palos Verdes 4th Annual Family Science Night was held on Wednesday, **February 25**. The schedule of events included a Traveling Animal Zoo, Owl Pellets, the Galileo Guy, an Electricity Show, Medical Science Demo, a well timed Weather Display, both by students and mother-nature, Rocks and Minerals, a California Wildlife display and the South Bay Astronomers.

The National Weather Service predicted heavy rains starting around noon and throughout the night. True to prediction, it did rain. In place of telescopes, using Starry Night Pro, I made a 15-minute Quicktime movie of the South Bay evening sky. Starting in the west, the movie included Venus, Andromeda, Comet C/2002/T7, the Moon, Mars and the Pleiades. In the southern skies, Saturn, Sirius and the Orion Nebula, then to the east Jupiter and finally towards the north, Polaris and the Big Dipper. 40-50 visitors found their way to Classroom 9, and enjoyed watching the sky and thanked the SBAS for coming out, and not letting the weather affect Science Night.

The Montemalaga PTA has donated \$100.00 to SBAS!

- *Ray Grace*

2004 RTMC Astronomy Expo

The 36th annual RTMC Astronomy Expo will be held Friday through Sunday, **May 28-30**, 2004 (Memorial Day weekend). It will be held at YMCA Camp Oakes, five miles southeast of Big Bear City on State Route 38 at Lake Williams Drive between mileposts 44 and 45. This location is about 50 miles northeast of Riverside in the San Bernardino mountains. For maps and directions <http://www.rtmcastronomyexpo.org>

The theme for 2004 is "Transits and Occultations. The Keynote Speaker will be Dr. Phil Plait of Sonoma State University. His talk is titled "Planet (Hoax)." For more information go to his Bad Astronomy Web site.

Changes for 2004: Merit Awards will be presented on Saturday evening. Award winners will be available for inspection and viewing on Saturday night, and Astronomy Expo attendees will vote to select one for the Astronomer's Choice Award, which will be presented along with the Holmes, Estes, and Tombaugh awards on Sunday evening.

The Friday 9:00 AM arrival time will be strictly enforced this year. Signs, tents, bedding, and other items placed on the campgrounds in an attempt to reserve space before 9:00 AM Friday will be removed and may be recovered at the Lost and Found. Vendors and individuals now may register as sponsors. Silver and higher level sponsors may enter the campgrounds on Thursday, May 27.

Desert Sunset Star Party May 13-16

The 2004 Desert Sunset Star Party will be held at the Caballo Loco Ranch, about 11.5 miles south of Three Points, AZ, on Rt. 286, and then east for 8 miles. This RV ranch is in a secluded area of Arizona with dark skies. The telescopes of Kitt Peak are in clear view to the west. The DSSP begins on Thursday night and runs through Saturday night. We will have a speaker on both Friday and Saturday evenings along with doorprize giveaways. Registration information will be posted on the DSSP website - <http://chartmarker.tripod.com/sunset.htm>

First Light Newsletter on SBAS Website

Send Greg Benecke or myself an email if you haven't already signed up and been contacted to confirm that you prefer to receive a monthly email notification that the newsletter has been posted on the website, in lieu of getting it through the conventional mail!

- *Laura Lucas*

Schedule of Coming Events

2 April Friday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly General Meeting: A Celestron Representative will demo one of their new CGE series equatorial mounted telescopes.
5 April Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly Planning Meeting Refer to page 3 for directions.
10 April 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. <i>Drive with care</i> to avoid steel pillars supporting basketball nets...
17 April Saturday Evening	Out-of-Town Dark Sky Observing – New Moon April 19th Contact Greg Benecke to confirm site location.
7 May Friday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly General Meeting: The speaker for the evening will be announced in the May Newsletter.
8 May Saturday 6:00 P.M.	Lomita Math & Science Magnet School Star Party One single night of observing has been scheduled. See page 3 for directions to the school.
9 May Sunday Morning	Astronomy Day at Palos Verdes Peninsula Center Share our enthusiasm for Astronomy with the local community at this annual SBAS event.
10 May Monday 7:30 P.M.	Monthly Planning Meeting The location of this meeting will be announced in the May Newsletter.
15 May Saturday Evening	In-Town Dark Sky Observing at Ridgecrest School – Weather Permitting. Refer to April 10th entry for directions to the site & instructions on weather conditions.
15 May Saturday Evening	Mt. Wilson Observatory Trip – New Moon May 19th See page 5 for current availability.
22 May Saturday Evening	Out-of-Town Dark Sky Observing – New Moon May 19th Contact Greg Benecke to confirm site location.
28-30 May Fri.-Sun.	36th Annual RTMC Astronomy Expo See page 6 for details.

South Bay Astronomical Society

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*General Meeting at El Camino College Planetarium:
Friday, April 2nd at 7:30 P.M.*

Guest Speaker is a Celestron Representative

“A Demo of Celestron’s CGE Series Telescopes”

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South Bay Astronomical Society
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