

FIRST LIGHT



Journal of the South Bay Astronomical Society – December 2006
on line at www.geocities.com/sbas_elcamino

Monthly General Meeting: Friday, December, 1st, 7:30 PM
“Various Short Subjects by Members”

Observing the Transit of Mercury



Arnie & PST - Transit of Mercury
11/08/06



We Had Visitors From
The PV Seniors



Curious Toddler



Photo by Tom Underhill
Peninsula News



Ray Grace Photographs
Mercury's Transit
11/08/06

Ken & Jo Ann Lehmer



On Wednesday, November 8, club members Joe Fierstein, Ron Rennie, Arnie Stodolsky, Ken and Joann Lehmer, Ray Grace and Ken Munson set up their scopes at the western edge of Hesse Park in Rancho Palos Verdes to offer public viewing of the transit of Mercury. Various scopes were used ranging from the Coronado Personal Solar Telescope, operated by Arnie, to Ken Munson's Nexstar 11. Ron Rennie had an interesting setup using binoculars and a mirror. The filters that were used offered interestingly different views of the sun, ranging from bright yellow to stark white to the cherry red of hydrogen-alpha. Ken Lehmer's 8 inch Nexstar provided a very striking view of the huge sunspot contrasted with the tiny dot that was Mercury.

Quite a few visitors came by during the early hours of the transit, particularly at lunch time. It was estimated that nearly a hundred people had come by to check out the view before 1 o'clock came around. Even a couple of reporters came by from local newspapers. Things settled down for a while and then picked up again when school let out. Many parents came by bringing children with them. Many of the children were earning extra credit points at school by coming to observe the transit.

SBAS & The Transit of Mercury
Nov 8 '06 @ Hesse Park in RPV
SBAS brought 7 scopes ranging in size from 40mm to 11 inches to view & photograph the event
Over 100 people & 2 reporters joined the activity

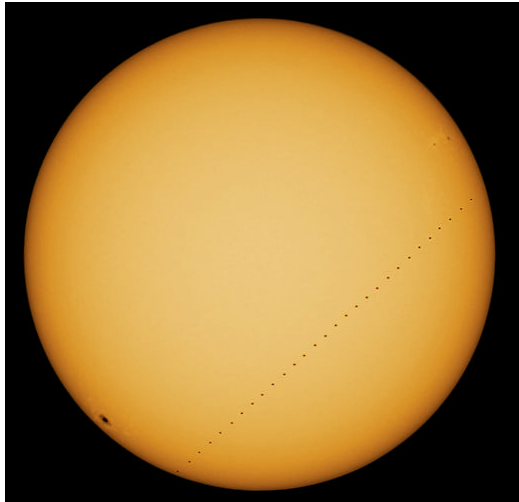


Photo by Bill Hood

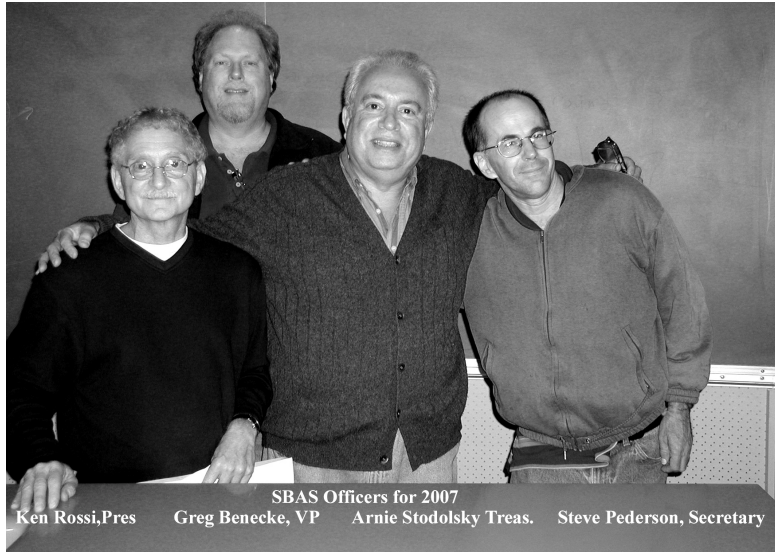
The transit was quite interesting to watch, especially as a very large sunspot had just appeared from around the back side of the sun. Mercury first made its appearance at 11:10 AM. When Mercury first appeared, the difference between it and the huge sunspot was absolutely startling! Two other smaller sunspots were on the other side, about to go around the back side. Initially, it looked as if Mercury might pass right by them but instead it passed well below them. By 4:08 PM, last contact was seen and Mercury was lost again in the glare of the sun.

Southern California happened to be the best place for viewing the transit and RPV was among the very best. The sky was remarkably clear all day long and the gentle sea breeze kept things just cool enough to be comfortable. All in all, a most excellent day.

- Ken Munson

The November 3 Meeting

The meeting began informally at 7:30, with several members standing outside the Planetarium admiring the almost-



SBAS Officers for 2007
Ken Rossi, Pres Greg Benecke, VP Arnie Stodolsky, Treas. Steve Pederson, Secretary

full Moon. The key to the front door arrived at 7:36, and the meeting formally began at 7:43. President Ken Rossi started by welcoming new members, and requesting orders for the RASC's Observer's Handbook. Joe Fierstein mentioned the upcoming transit of Mercury on Wednesday the 8th. Craig Gates reported on a weekend observing session that he and three other SBAS members attended at Borrego Springs. Craig and several other members reported seeing Comet SWAN.

Doug Loop reported setting out his telescope during the evening of Halloween, and getting about one hundred parents and their children to look at the first-quarter Moon. Joe Fierstein noted that he did the same, and had been doing so for several

years. This is a clever way to popularize astronomy, and will be a highlight of the evening for many kids long after the candy is eaten. Steven Morris announced that a Delta IV rocket was scheduled to be launched from Vandenberg Air Force Base early the next morning. He suggested that members go out and look for it, and watch for the iridescent clouds that might follow.

Mona Delitsky, our main speaker last month, returned to distribute her monthly newsletter and a few more T-shirts. She reported that the T-shirt that reads, "Pluto: It's a planet! Get over it!" is her best seller.

After a ten-minute social break, President Rossi called for nominations from the floor for our annual elections. President Rossi, Vice-President Greg Benecke and Treasurer Arnie Stodolsky were all returned by acclamation, and Steve Pederson was elected to the position of Secretary. Arnie reviewed the state of the Club's finances. We have about \$3000 in the bank, and receive \$3000 in annual membership dues. More than 10% of this is spent on mailing First Light, and he urged members to switch to the electronic version of our monthly newsletter to help the club save money. We also spend money on insurance for our meetings and star parties, and on our membership in the Astronomical League and the International Dark-Sky Association.

Vice President Greg Benecke arranges for the monthly speakers, and he asked for volunteers for future talks. He is also the Observing Chairman, and noted that while interest in the Ridgecrest star parties and other local star parties remains high, interest in the dark-sky events seems to be on the wane. President Rossi reported that our membership is over 100, and work on the 12-inch telescope continues. Joe Fierstein presented a 15-minute slide show of the club's outreach efforts, including views of young students looking through various telescopes, and the thank-you letters they have sent us in return.

The meeting ended at 9:18, with many of the 25 members in attendance lingering for conversation.

- Dr. Steven Morris

An Interesting Visitor

During our observing of the Mercury transit, we received an interesting visit from another amateur astronomer. Lisa Lillie, who had heard about our group from a visitor to the small parking lot where she and her husband, Derek, had set up their telescope, came by to check us out and invite us down to see their setup when the transit was over. They had quite the setup, with a 16-inch Meade telescope permanently mounted on a hydraulic system in the back of a



Hummer H3! Derek and Lisa are a retired couple with an avid interest in astronomy and have some very ambitious plans for outreach to the public with their highly portable telescope system. The entire system folds up compactly in the back of the H3 and can be raised on hydraulics to its observing system. Battery power systems built into the chassis of the H3 provide all the power needed to run the scope and associated computer equipment. A stepladder can be used for visual observing but their primary means of observing is via CCD cameras. Their next step is to add an attachment for a 32 inch flat screen TV on the side of the H3 so that they can do public demonstrations to large groups.

- Ken Munson

SBAS Executive Board

President
Vice-President
Secretary
Treasurer & Astronomical League Rep.

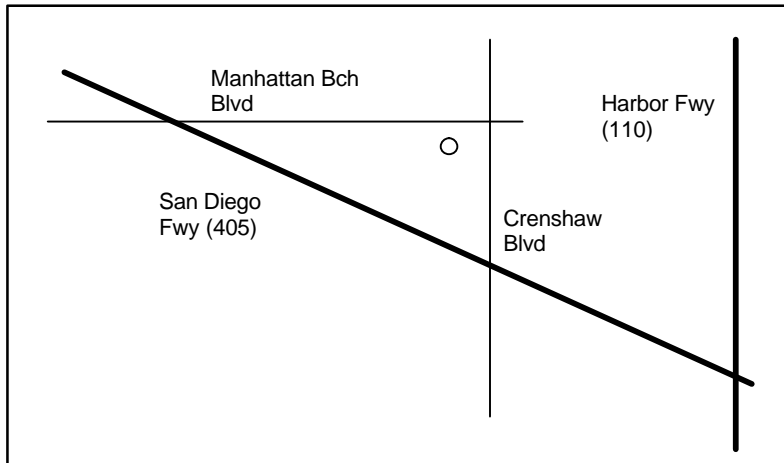
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Outreach Committee	Joe Fierstein	377-9834	Joefiers@verizon.net

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).

The planetarium is the only round, domed building on campus. 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.

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 Meeting

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. The December 4th planning meeting will be held at 7:30 PM at the home of Joe & Miriam Fierstein. Take Hawthorne Blvd. south past Pacific Coast Hwy. up the hill passing Silver Spur Rd. and Highridge until you get to the light at Eddinghill Dr., then turn right and go downhill to the 'T' intersection at Golden Meadow where you turn left up 2 blocks and turn left on Willow Tree Dr. to 3^d house on the right side from the corner - 7022 Willow Tree Dr., Rancho Palos Verdes.

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 Membership Benefits

Contact Arnie Stodolsky for magazine subscriptions at club rates: "Sky & Telescope" \$32.95 and "Astronomy" \$34.00/1 year or \$60.00/2 years! Make your check payable to SBAS and mail the payment and your subscription / renewal form directly to South Bay Astronomical Society, P.O. Box 1937, 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.

The November 4 Delta IV Rocket Launch

The Web site <http://www.spacearchive.info/vafbsked.htm> lists all the upcoming rocket launches from Vandenberg Air Force Base, up the coast from the South Bay. Over the last few weeks, I had noticed that a launch was scheduled for the morning of November 4. I suggested during the November 3 meeting that members might want to get up early to see this, but mentioned that these launches are sometimes delayed by weather or glitches.

I got up bright and early, and went to the Web page <http://spaceflightnow.com/tracking/index.html> Web site. This linked me to <http://www.spaceflightnow.com/delta/d320/status.html>, which gave a minute-by-minute update of the countdown.

The launch occurred right on schedule at 5:53 am, and I went outside to see it. Alas, the early-morning coastal fog was out as well. Even though the sky was clear overhead, I saw only two seconds of the rocket's path across the western sky through a gap in the clouds, traveling north to south at 20 degrees above the horizon.

Six minutes later, a bright blue fragment of condensation trail one degree long became visible through the fog, but faded away one minute later as more fog drifted by. At 6:11 am, the DMSP F17 weather satellite separated from the Boeing-built Delta IV rocket that had launched it into Earth orbit. The Defense Meteorological Satellite Program generates terrestrial and space weather information for use by the military. The F17 satellite, built by Lockheed Martin, replaces a remarkably long-lasting satellite launched in March 1995 with a three-year design life.

Two seconds of flight path and a glowing cloud add up to a marginal observing experience at best, but you never know until you try. The next Vandenberg rocket launch is on Thursday, December 7.

- Dr. Steven Morris

December – Comets & Asteroids

Comets Visible in September:

Comet	Mag	Constellation(s)
SWAN (2006 M4)	11.6 - 14	Aql
Faye	11	Cet

Asteroid Occultations:

Local Date			Durn	Star	Mag	Star	Planet	Alt
Hour	Hr	Min	m/sec	mag	drop	No.	No	Name
						HIP		
11/25/2006	10	51.2	9.4s	7.9	5.7	110701	566	Stereoskopia
12/20/2006	0	48.2	8.6s	7.8	6.9	HIP 51158	2951	Perepadin

Check the JPL Ephemeris Generator page for coordinates of these objects at:
<http://ssd.jpl.nasa.gov/horizons.cgi#top>

Welcome New Members

Jack Sidwell

Dues for the Calendar year: 2007

Membership Expires	Individual/Family Rate	Student Rate
Oct 06	\$35.00	\$29.17
Nov 06	\$32.50	\$27.08
Dec 06	\$30.00	\$25.00
Jan 07	\$27.50	\$22.92
Feb 07	\$25.00	\$20.83
Mar 07	\$22.50	\$18.75
Apr 07	\$20.00	\$16.67
May 07	\$17.50	\$14.58
Jun 07	\$15.00	\$12.50
Jul 07	\$12.50	\$10.42
Aug 07	\$10.00	\$8.33
Sep 07	\$7.50	\$6.25
Oct 07	\$5.00	\$4.17
Nov 07	\$2.50	\$2.08
Dec 07	\$0.00	\$0.00

Check your expiration date on the mailing label of First Light. Renew per the schedule above, Individual/Family or Student rate. Make checks out to South Bay Astronomical Society, Mail checks to SBAS at P.O. Box 1937, Redondo Beach, CA. 90278. Renewals are also accepted at any general Membership meeting. This schedule will synchronize all member payments to a December due date.

With the rising cost of printing and postage, we would like members to consider receiving First Light via email. Please include your current email address.

**- Ray Grace, Membership Committee
310-370-1913**

RASC Observer's Handbook

Orders have been placed for the 2007 Royal Astronomical Society of Canada's Observer's Handbook for 2007. Five copies will be available at the next club meeting for \$17.45. If anyone would like a copy, please bring cash or a check made out to the South Bay Astronomical Society. Also, if desired, you can prepay to ensure you have a copy by mailing a check to SBAS P.O. Box 1937 Redondo Beach, CA 90278.

Schedule of Coming Events

1 December Friday Evening 7:30 PM	Monthly General Meeting Short Presentations by club members Greg Benecke, Ron Rennie and Ken Munson
3 December Sunday Night	Moon Occults the Pleiades As the moon rises shortly sunset, the Pleiades will be hidden behind it. As the evening progress, this spectacular open cluster will gradually be revealed.
4 December Monday Evening 7:30 PM	Monthly Planning Meeting See directions on Page 4.
7 December Thursday Evening 7:00 PM	Von Kármán Auditorium (Thursday) & Vosloh Forum at Pasadena City College (Friday) "The Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter Spacecraft" by Jim Graf. Following orbit insertion in March 2006 and a six-month aerobraking campaign, the Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter (MRO) will have begun an intensive period of science observations lasting two years in a low-altitude, near-circular science orbit.
14 December	Geminid Meteor Shower Peak
16 December Saturday Evening	In Town Dark Sky Observing Session – Weather Permitting: Please contact Greg Benecke to confirm that the gate will be opened! 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. Note: If you a visitor, not bringing a scope, it is requested that you park in the small parking lot on Northbay Rd.
23 December Saturday Evening	Out-of-Town Dark Sky Observing Session Contact Greg Benecke to coordinate a location for the dark-sky trip.
12 January Friday Night 7:30 PM	Monthly General Meeting Speaker: TBA
15 January Monday Night 7:30 PM	Monthly Planning Meeting Location: TBA

South Bay Astronomical Society

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***General Meeting at El Camino College Planetarium:
Friday, December 1st at 7:30 P.M.***

Short Presentations by Club Members

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**South Bay Astronomical Society
P.O. Box 1937
Redondo Beach, CA 90278**