
Desert Sky Observer

Volume 22 Issue 5

May 2002



NEWSLETTER OF THE ANTELOPE VALLEY ASTRONOMY CLUB, INC
P.O. BOX 4595, LANCASTER, CALIFORNIA 93539-4595

*The Antelope Valley Astronomy Club is a California non-profit Corporation
Visit the Antelope Valley Astronomy Club website At www.avac.av.org
The A.V.A.C. is a Sustaining Member of The Astronomical League*



Up-Coming Events

May 2: Space Day, Palmdale Boys and Girls Club

May 4: Last Quarter Moon

May 10: Monthly Club Meeting*

May 11: Air & Space Exploratorium at the AV Mall

May 12: New Moon

May 18: Star Party, Crystaliare Country Club

May 19: First Quarter Moon

May 24- May 27: RTMC in Big Bear (Riverside Telescope Makers Conference)

May 26: Full Moon

Anytime: *Observe.*

* Monthly meetings held at the S.A.G.E. Planetarium at the Cactus School in Palmdale on the second Friday of each month. The meeting location is at the northeast corner of Avenue R and 20th Street East. Meeting starts at 7 p.m. Please note that food and drink are not allowed in the planetarium. Monthly A.V.A.C. meetings are open to the public.

President's Report

Terry Pedroza

The Poppy Festival is now behind us and another busy summer is upon us. I would like to thank all the wonderful volunteers who helped at the Poppy Festival. You did a great job. We had many compliments on our booth and on our people. If you missed it, you missed something really great!

Space Day is next on May 2nd, immediately followed by the Air & Space Exploratorium. The rest of the year looks to be very busy for the Antelope Valley Astronomy Club. We are at a point where we may have to start turning down requests for our clubs involvement in events!

I would like to congratulate Ralph Gonzalez and his family for winning The AVAC opportunity drawing at the Poppy Festival. They won a Celestron Nexstar 60 GT computerized telescope. We will be presenting them with their new 'scope at the May meeting. Come to find out, Ralph developed the controller for the Nexstar series of telescopes. What a small World it is!

Mary Payton from Antelope Valley College has asked if we could do a Star Party for her astronomy class. She hopes to do so soon, so that they may see the planetary alignment that is going on right now. I thought that if it works for everyone we might try to do it on the 5th of May. I would like to try to get four or five volunteers to bring scopes to use for this star party. This might be a good time to show your friends the alignment also. I will keep you posted.

We now have our new camera! It is a Stellacam EX. We used it a small amount at the Poppy Festival, but did not have the necessary time to learn the working of the unit. We will be using this asset a lot I can tell you! I am very excited about this camera. I hope that everyone will get a chance to see how well it works.

Last but not least, don't forget about the RMTC this month. If anyone who is going would like to get together for a potluck dinner, please see me at the meeting.

Vice President's Report

Matt Leone

The Poppy Festival went really well, except at about 3p.m. Galileo received a gentle dose of heat stroke. It was great to get a lot of help, so I say to all: "Thank you."

Getting back to observing, it was great to see Tom K. with a step in his viewing. If you didn't hear, his 18" telescope came in. Wow, wow, wow! I know this sounds like a broken CD, but my mirror has been sent out again to be enhanced. It should be back for our next star party with a 97-reflector power.

Don't forget Space Day on May 2nd and the Air & Space Show on May 11th. The next viewing at Crystallaire Golf Club is on May 18th. If anyone wants to play a few holes, just let me know. Also, the RTMC Show is on May 25-27 in Big Bear. There are great prices on new and used equipment, filters, lenses, tripods, etc. So clear skies and good viewing. And remember June 8th is our trip to Mt. Pinos.

Dir. of Community Development

Debora Pedroza

Hello Club Members. April and May are two "star-hopping months" filled with community activities. Our second annual Youth Exploring Astronomy Essay Contest is currently in the final stages of selecting our six winners. These winners will be announced on the center stage at the Antelope Valley Mall on Saturday, May 11th at 2p.m. during the Air and Space Exploratorium. Please come out and cheer for these incredible kids! I would like to extend a very warm thank you to our essay contest judges: THANK YOU to Mayor Frank Roberts, Mayor Jim Ledford, AV Press Columnist Bill Warford, JPL lab technician Chuck Lahmeyer, Tom Koonce, Errol and Janice VanHorne and Jeremy Amarant. You all truly make a difference.

The Poppy Festival was a huge success! We gave out countless amounts of Club brochures, met the Board's goal of \$500 on the opportunity drawing, and most of all, met and interacted with many nice people. It never fails to amaze me to see how excited children and adults get just looking at sunspots. We were able to also offer some lunar viewing as an added bonus. I would like to thank Chuck Lahmeyer for providing additional entertainment with his "juggling" talent. The children loved throwing the three little planets (balls) for Chuck to juggle.

We had a wonderful turnout of Club member volunteers for both days. It is so wonderful to work with individuals who are enthusiastic, caring and hard working. Many insisted on staying to help load up Terry's truck at the end of the day no matter how cold the wind chill was. Terry and I would like to thank the following club members for their incredible support: Steve Trotta, Doug Drake, LuAnn Shoomliansky, Mike Presswood, Jim Rothenflue, Michael Leone, Jerry and Sam Prestel, Tom Koonce, Chuck Lahmeyer, Rich Harper and Jeremy Amarant & Qi. We would like to recognize a few club members who put in many hours working both days and staying to help load and unload. We could not have done it without you: Bob

and Pat McCord, Mary Andrus and Al Shoomliansky. Special Kudos to Vice President Matt Leone who let the club use his water heater 'scope for both days and for wearing that fabulous Galileo costume that was a bit warm at times.

And finally, thank you to Wes Thomas for just showing up on Sunday before closing time to help pack and load everything AND a little birdie told me that he tipped our drawing so we could make our goal of \$500. Thank You! Well folks, your eyes are probably getting tired of reading my long-winded article but just two more quick things: Do not forget, May 2nd is Space Day at the Palmdale Boys and Girls Club at 6:30PM AND I need help for the Air and Space Exploratorium on Saturday, May 11th at the AV Mall. That is it for now!

P.S. Don't miss Katrina Mumaw's incredible testimony at our next Club meeting. Take care. See you there!

Astronomical League Coordinator

Tom Koonce

Spring is finally here! We had a great evening of viewing out at Saddleback Butte State Park on April 13th in shirtsleeve weather. We also had a lot of Girl Scouts and leaders who stopped by at our scopes and were thrilled to get a chance to see the visible planets and several Messier Objects. It was also a great evening for Terry Pedroza and myself, as we were able to complete our Messier lists!! He and I nearly had the same objects to get - most of them being faint galaxies in the Virgo Cluster. Terry finished up with his C-8 at least 45 minutes before I did with my new 18" proving once again that observing skill is more important than horsepower. (OK - aperture sure doesn't hurt!) This brings the total number of Messier Pins (all 110 objects) in our club to ****5**** and Messier Certificates (at least 70 objects) to ****9**** !! This is great. All of these objects can be seen with a 2" or larger telescope, many only with a pair of binoculars, and are a perfect way of learning the night sky.

Our club, in association with the Astronomical League, offers many other observing programs including an introductory program called the "Universe Sampler." A Lunar Observers program and a Planetary Observers program are two more of over a dozen separate certificates that you can earn. No one in our club has any other certificate other than a Messier Certificate... You could be the first person in our club to get one of these certificates! You'd have a blast working on it and they are a great way of learning the particular area of amateur astronomy. I'd be glad to offer you guidance and assistance in your pursuit. For a full listing of the Astronomical League's programs, ask me or check out their website at: www.astroleague.org

The AVAC began offering a series of introductory amateur astronomy classes the hour before the regular club meeting starts. The first class, "Introduction to the Night Sky - Part I," is mandatory for all new members who want to check out one of the club's telescopes. It lets the new member know how to operate a Dobsonian telescope, how to take proper care of it and how the night sky works. Each of the classes would benefit from your experience and comments. They are in development and online at: http://www.astro-tom.com/avac/intro_to_the_night_sky.htm

Please feel free to e-mail me with any comments. See you soon at the club meeting on Friday, May 10, or at the next Dark Sky Star Party May 18th at Crystalaire Country Club!

Poppy Festival Photos



Galileo himself showed up at the Poppy Festival. Here he poses alongside Club VP Matt Leone's water heater.



Calm in the midst of the storm: Mary Andrus and Rich Harper breathe while they can during the Poppy Festival.



Bob McCord treats two Poppy Festival revelers to a view of the sun.

Sunset at Saddleback



At sunset, Club members prepare for a night at Saddleback.

A Rare Dance of Planets

By Alan M. MacRobert

A grand and beautiful lineup of all the bright naked-eye planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn — is continuing in the western sky at dusk. Throughout April and May these five worlds will form and reform new patterns as they move against the background stars. There is no single date of a "great planetary alignment," though all five of them (plus the Moon) will be clustered within 33° of sky on the evening of May 14th.

Such gatherings of the naked-eye planets are relatively rare, occurring roughly every 20 years when slow-moving Jupiter and Saturn appear close together from Earth's perspective. A similar grouping occurred in May 2000, though it was hidden in the Sun's glare. The last compact and widely visible five-planet array was in February 1940, and astronomers calculate that another good one won't take place until September 8, 2040. So skygazers of all levels should take the time to enjoy this one while it lasts.

(reprinted from Sky & Telescope Online)

Astronomy Links on the Web

<http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/archivepix.html>

(Astronomy Picture of the Day)

<http://pages.prodigy.net/sstrott/>

(Steve Trotta's website)

<http://www.astro-tom.com>

(Tom Koonce's website)

<http://www.projectsandhobbies.com/howtolearnastronomy.htm>

(Getting started in Astronomy...)

<http://www.physics.sfasu.edu/astro/jupiter.html>

(keep up with our Solar System's biggest planet)

http://encke.jpl.nasa.gov/whats_visible.html (visible comets)

<http://www.avac.av.org/>

(Hey, that's us! So go there!)

Did you know? **?**

The Hubble Space Telescope eyed M4 when determining that our universe is slightly younger than previously thought.

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National Convention of the Astronomical League
 July 31 - August 3, 2002 University of Utah
 ALCon 2002 P.O. Box 9574, Salt Lake City, UT 84109-9574

The ALCon 2002 mission is to provide a first-class astronomical convention that will allow knowledgeable amateurs and professional astronomers to gather together, learn from each other and exchange ideas.

Lectures, field trips, workshops, and vendor displays are used to educate, enlighten, and enhance the ALCon experience for all attendees.

The convention's theme, "The Crossroads of Astronomy", has three aspects:

1. Astronomical discoveries of the past that have shaped our current understanding of the cosmos.
2. Exciting research of today that enhances or disagrees with past knowledge.
3. Examination of where the science and hobbies of astronomy are headed in the 21st century.

For more information, click on: <http://www.alcon2002.org>
 or call Josephine Grahn at (801) 277-1479, e-mail mbsi@xmission.com.

* * For Sale * *

Meade Series 4000 Super Plossl 40 mm 2" eyepiece. Super Wide Angle 67° field of view; Paid retail of \$324.70, asking \$200.00; New in original box. **Call Al Shoomliansky, 945-8900.**

'Sirius' brand 17mm, fully coated super plossl, 1 1/4" eyepiece, Sold as is, but hardly ever used, gorgeous optics. Good eye relief, tack sharp. If you're looking to expand your eyepiece collection, you won't be disappointed with this excellent addition. \$20 with dust case. Selling to fund a bigger scope. **Call Tom Koonce, 943-8200.**

For Sale: Orion 8 inch Dob with telrad and two eyepieces. This 'scope is better than new. See or call Terry or Deb. 949-6875

Got something you want to see in the *Desert Sky Observer*? Whether it's a website, a type of story (i.e. stories about the Mars *Odyssey* mission), or astronomy jokes, then send an e-mail to Brian Peterson at cybrpete@sbcglobal.net and he'll be happy to consider your request.

A.V.A.C. Membership Information

Membership in the Antelope Valley Astronomy Club is open to any individual. The Club has three categories of membership.

- Family membership at \$30.00 per year.
- Individual membership at \$25.00 per year.
- Junior membership at \$15.00 per year.

Membership entitles you to...

- Desert Sky Observer—monthly newsletter.
- The Reflector—the quarterly publication of the Astronomical League.
- The A.V.A.C. Membership Manual.
- To borrow club telescopes, binoculars, camera, books, videos and other items.

The Desert Sky Observer is available as a separate publication to individuals at a cost of \$10.00 per year. Subscription to the Desert Sky Observer does not entitle the subscriber to membership in the Antelope Valley Astronomy Club and its associated privileges.

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Our Sponsors

Al's Vacuum and Sewing: 904 West Lancaster Blvd. (661) 948-1521. Stop by and say "hey" to Matthew and Suzanne.

Darkrooms Plus: 20th St. W. near Pep Boys in Lancaster. (661) 945-1444. They offer all club members a 10% discount on all purchases. Stop by and say "hey" to Dean or Hank.

King Photo: 749 W. Lancaster Blvd. (661) 948-8441. As a telescope dealer, they always support the AVAC. Stop by and say "hey" to Stokely or Paul.

QNET: 1529 E. Palmdale Blvd., Suite 200. (661) 538-2028. As an Internet provider, they are kind enough to provide us with a free website.

Vista Golf: 43517 N. 13th Street West, Lancaster. (661) 945-7003.

Thanks for your generous support!

June Calendar:

June 8: Dark Sky Party, Mt. Pinos (Forest Adventure Pass required);

June 14: Club Meeting at Sage Planetarium;

June 15: Dark Sky Party, Poppy Reserve;

July Calendar:

July 12: Club Meeting at Sage Planetarium;

July 13: Star Party, Saddleback Butte State Park;

July 20: Club Picnic and Star Party with YEA Essay contest winners;

July 30: YEA Essay contest winners trip to JPL;

Don't forget to take one more look at the first page of the DSO for our busy May schedule. Make plans to attend at least one of the events. And remember, with your help, we can have an impact in our community for the advancement of astronomy and the sciences.