

Hi, folks!! We have not heard from some of you for quite a while. Are you still alive out there?

RECENT OBSERVING

Well, there hasn't been a lot of activity this month (mostly due to the weather and other things). I DID call out the troops Wednesday night, but only two people came. As it turned out, it wasn't a great night as the Moon (in first quarter) was high in the sky and there was some hazy cloudiness. However, we did look at quite a few objects: Venus (in waning gibbous phase), Jupiter (sinking slowly to the west), the Moon (ooh!), M42, several open clusters, the galactic pair M81 and M82, etc., etc.

Your editor did get out on two other nights this week, but didn't call out the group owing to one reason or another ("iffy" weather, lateness, etc.). (As usual, I spent my time doing my variable stars for the AAVSO. There will be a talk soon on variable stars: what they are, their history, the different types, why they're important, observing techniques, my light curves, etc.) Monday's session displayed the most intense aurora I have seen in years - it was brilliant, fast-moving, vivid, spectacular and had hints of colour now and then. For a while it covered 80% of the sky; astronomy had to wait for a while.

TMO NEWS

Unfortunately, we STILL haven't used the observatory of late. One factor is that the road is probably extremely icy right now. (A determined effort would get us up there, but spring thaw can't be far off...)

Once the milder weather returns, we hope to use the observatory to good purpose again. By the time of our next meeting, I hope to have news of progress on two items: the Moon shutter, and the film sensitizing tank. Hopefully, by April, we should be taking pictures of the Moon and the more prominent astronomical objects. Let's make this a goal, folks - why not add this to YOUR agenda?

Another possibility is to get a large coated mylar sheet to put over the front of the 24" telescope. We could then take pictures of the Sun and sunspots using the 4x5 camera and the Moon shutter. This would fit in well with all the usable time in the summer when solar photography would be easy. (We would have to use very fast shutter speeds though, to minimize the atmospheric turbulence - 1/1000 sec should be fine.)

WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE SKY

There will be two eclipses this month, but they are not particularly accessible to us here in Prince George. The first is a near-total (umbral) lunar eclipse on the morning of 1988 Mar 3. It will not be too exciting because:

- a) only a tiny portion of the Moon will be in the umbral(total) shadow of the Earth, and
- b) it will be visible in Prince George at about 8:15 AM!!

The other eclipse will be a total solar eclipse 1988 Mar 18. However, it will be visible only in Indonesia and the Pacific Ocean. It may well be too late to make your travel plans....

For further information, read all about it in the 1988 Observer's Handbook. Speaking of the Handbooks, there are only 5 left - if you want a copy of this excellent publication, be sure to come to the meeting next Wednesday, or let me know.

Other objects in the sky are:

- Asteroids Vesta and Amphitrite. Finder charts are in the 1988 January edition of Sky and Telescope. I saw the former object this week.

- Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune rise about 5 Am now. May will be a better month as they will then rise around midnight.

- Pluto should be visible now after midnight. When we start using the observatory we should go after it, maybe with a camera.

- With the constellations advancing, Leo is approaching, and that means galaxies. The giant Virgo and Coma clusters will soon easily become visible. However, we shall definitely have to start using the observatory again as we will need dark skies.

NEXT MEETING

Wednesday, March 2 at the College in room 2-223 (the Physics Lab). A short talk on measuring the distances to stars plus a videotape will be shown. See you there!!!!

Bob Nelson, President