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## P.G.A.S. Newsletter #14      1988 Sept 21

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Hi, everyone!! Well, by now you have probably heard our bad news. Bad though it is, there are some positive aspects .... (See below.)

### **RECENT EVENTS AT TMO**

Sometime between July 23 and July 28, thieves broke into the observatory by sawing one of the steel rings protruding from the building which were used to secure the steel bar across the door. Once the ring was cut, the bar was pried back and entrance gained. Taken was the 8" convex secondary mirror (the 24" primary mirror is safe), the generator, the small (2.5") finder scope (the large one is safe), the 50 mm eyepiece (the one we didn't like), my 13" mirror and the two old and nearly useless car batteries. Two plastic containers of gasoline were torched outside on one of the pads. Minor damage was also done to the building.

Brian Potts was the first on the scene (I was away on holidays) and he removed all the other items of value and locked the building using the hasps on the doors. He then filed a report with the police. This is our third break-in, and the most serious.

### **PROSPECTS**

At present, the observatory is closed, and will remain so until we can raise some money. A power line is now essential, for with it will come a telephone line and a security system. I've been told by the people at Prince George Lock and Key that, for around \$1000, they can install a system which will detect the door opening and motion inside. They'll monitor it 24 hours a day, sending the police as necessary. Since it takes 10-15 minutes to drive the gravel road to the highway, they should be able to catch any intruders.

At present, the 24" (concave) mirror is in Victoria where Leo vander Byl, a talented and fussy amateur optician, has agreed to make us a new secondary mirror for a modest sum. (Projected completion date: November.) Since we were somewhat unhappy with the former f/15 setup (the magnification was too great) and were planning to buy a f/10 secondary, this could work out rather well.

The generator we will not need if we have a power line, although it is a pity to lose the money we had invested in it. My 13" mirror is covered by my household insurance (\$200 deductible) and Coulter will waive the waiting period Since I had a deposit on a 10" for several months. The other items are minor.

So you see, while this feels like a kick in the groin, there is hope, and we are not out yet. The main thing is to raise (several kilobucks) and go from there.

At present, your executive is working on several prospects, the best of which appear to be a Science Council/Ministry of Education grant, and hosting a casino night.

At this stage, might I recommend a renewed commitment to the society? Your support in terms of renewed membership and time would be greatly appreciated. Together, I am sure we can pull this out.

### **WHAT'S GOING ON IN THE SKY:**

Well, Mars is the big news now. On Sept 21, at 8 PM (local time), Mars makes a closest approach of 58,814,000 km (0.393 AU). This will result in the third best view this century (23.8 arc sec). On (clear!!) nights of good seeing, we should be able to see the south polar ice cap and other features. (Your editor has already had 4 or 5 sessions observing Mars.) The actual opposition date is Sept 27, at 9 PM (local time) and excellent viewing of Mars should be possible for a couple of weeks before and after. Be sure to stay up till 11 or 12:00, as best views are only had when Mars is high in the sky.

### **NEXT MEETING:**

See the following article by Paul. May I suggest that your 988-89 membership would be appreciated (it helps keep the society running) and that we'll be taking deposits for the 1989 Observer's Handbook now, so that we can get an early order in.

- Bob Nelson, President

### **UPCOMING MEETINGS**

by Paul Ingraham

Those of you who can afford to spare a few minutes of your time around 3:30 AM in the morning will see a spectacular quartet of heavenly bodies. Spanning from the Eastern to the Southern skies are Venus, Jupiter and Mars, with the Moon in the general area. Venus is still the brightest of the planets, but this month Jupiter does not hold second place as it usually does. Mars holds that position for a while; it is at "perihelion opposition", which is to say that it is closer to the Earth than it has been in years--and therefore much brighter and larger. It will be a spectacular sight, with or without a telescope, throughout all of September. There will not be a comparable view of Mars until the next century.

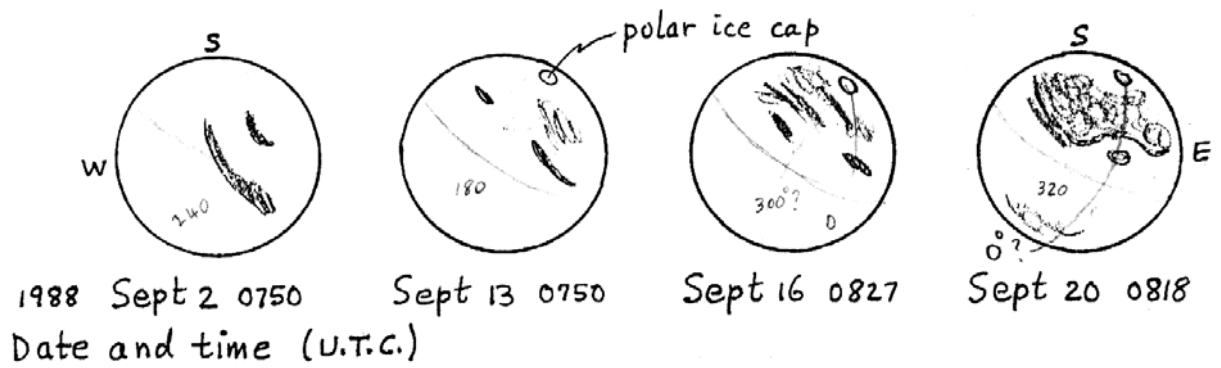
To honour this superior viewing of Mars, our next meeting (September 28 at 7:30 PM, in the Physics Lab (2-223) at CNC) will be dedicated to it. Three brief talks will be given. Paul Ingraham will overview Mars' colourful history, Bob Nelson will discuss the Martian (Viking) landings, and Al Pretty will talk about the practical side of viewing Mars this month.

the October 26 meeting will feature a "Constellation of the Month" presentation by Paul Ingraham, and a talk on photometry by Bob Nelson. The constellation will be unusual for Prince George viewers. When the Ingrahams were in Arizona this summer, they managed to get a fabulous view of what we can barely see up here--the constellation Saggiarius, in one of the thickest portions of the Milky Way.

We look forward to seeing everybody at both meetings.

PS (late addition)

To whet your appetite, here are copies of a few sketches that I have made, over the last week or so, of Mars.



-- Bob Nelson, President