

In This Issue:

**Anti-Photons Discovered
by CERN**

**Extraordinary Case of
Gravitational Lensing**

A Historic Re-Enactment

**Australia Telescope to
Make Attempt at World
Land Speed Record**

The Moona Lisa

Ancient Astro Imaging

**Amateur Astronomers
Achieve Faster-than-Light
Flight**

April's Horrorscopes

**Evidence For Global
Warming Hoax**

Wiruna Doings

Gamma-Ray Burster Filter

**University Initiative on
Carbon Dioxide Reduction**

**Mars Exploration Rover
Rescue Mission**

Society Diary

Disclaimer

The international team operating the Large Hadron Collider – the giant particle accelerator at CERN - have been powering it up to start their never-ending mission to study the interactions of sub-atomic particles, and create "mini black holes" into which matter can disappear quicker than dodgy money into a Swiss Bank.

Readers of *Alternate Universe*, being intelligent, sophisticated, educated types, have long been aware of the concept of anti-matter, anti-matter galaxies and the inference that particles of ordinary matter coming into contact with particles of anti-matter would result in mutual annihilation.



Composite X-Ray / Gamma-Ray Image of a Galaxy Composed Entirely of Anti-Photons

Now it seems that the technicians at CERN, while engaged in the particle accelerator version of computer games, have discovered the associate of anti-matter in the form of anti-photons.

While the complete results have not yet been published, *Alternate Universe* being as usual at the cutting edge of science and discovery, can tell you that compelling evidence has been uncovered that there may be as many as 95 anti-photon galaxies for every 100 ordinary photon galaxies, in consequence of which, mutual annihilation of photons will likely mean that we are able to see only 5% of the galaxies of which the Universe is actually composed.

These damned anti-photons have been colliding with common or garden-variety photons and wiping each other out so that we Earthlings cannot see all the great stuff that is out there.

In fact some well-regarded astro-imagers are convinced that stray anti-photons getting through to Earth and into their cameras have fouled up their otherwise perfect images. After all, what other reason could there be for stray noise, under-exposed images, spots etc.

This may offer the complete answer to the mystery of the missing mass of the Universe, the stuff that makes itself felt by gravitational effects but which we so far have not been able to see.

(Continued From Page 1...)

Of course, some "normal" galaxies which we can see may have had their appearance altered by masses of anti-photons, so that some giant spirals may have been so stripped of light as to appear as dwarf galaxies. Maybe the SMC is in reality much bigger than our own galaxy.

The big question, of course, is what are these "invisible" anti-photon galaxies actually up to? The fact that the expansion of our Universe appears to be accelerating, could very well be the result of our galaxies being attracted by the gravitational forces exerted by these newly-discovered anti-photon galaxies.

It is possible that these anti-photon galaxies could be speeding towards us as fast as our "normal" galaxies appear to be receding from each other.

If so, big US insurance companies may soon offer galaxy collision insurance, and the US taxpayer may well bail them out if a collision involving our galaxy and one of them seems inevitable and the companies have overlooked (unlikely, probably there as microdots) putting the usual small print at the bottom of each policy.

EXTRAORDINARY CASE OF GRAVITATIONAL LENSING

By a happy accident, a request from a noted US amateur astronomer directed from a star party in Texas to amateurs in Australia resulted in the most extreme case of gravitational lensing yet seen, being detected during October 2009.

Vince Wagbell, who has for many years been numbered amongst the top ten astro imagers at the Apache Wells Observing Lodge (AWOL) had dedicated much of his time to securing the perfect image of Alcor & Mizar.

The October 2009 attempt was scheduled to take place at the Eldorado Star Party, but the anticipation of this event had been overshadowed by dark forebodings stoked by a semi-science program aired earlier that year on cable TV - outside the ratings season, of course and at 3am.

The program concerned certain prophecies, both of Nostradamus and the Ancient Maya. Standing alone, a prophecy of Nostradamus is pretty useless to man or beast, as before the event nobody of sound mind has a clue what the hell the old goat was talking about, while afterwards any of half a dozen different happenings which turn you on can cheerfully be attributed to his queer quatrains.

However, the ancient Maya were roped into the program to give old Nostradamus a bit of street credibility, and deciphering of wall paintings in the newly discovered tomb of King Rabidrabit the First at Tequilacan were brought into the argument.

Depending on which scholarly translation you opted for, the Maya predicted either a collision between Alcor and Mizar during October 2009 which resulted in mutual destruction, or a plague of Prairie Dogs throughout the Yucatan Peninsula to last for a thousand years unless all were promptly rounded up and herded to the town of Crowell, Texas.

So Nostradamus had the casting vote and as he had appeared to have raved on about weird stuff in the sky, Alcor & Mizar seemed doomed.

The catch for Vince was that the first few days at Eldorado were at the drought breaking end of the spectrum and Ursa Major could not be observed, and it was a measure of his concern that a request by him was made by cell phone to amateurs who were at that time observing at Wiruna in Australia, to check whether Alcor and Mizar were still there or had gone supernova.

Now, even for Aussies using a 30" telescope, observing Alcor and Mizar from latitude 33° South was a big ask but they gave it a try and were rewarded by a brilliant discovery as they were both seen, a trifle low on their Northern horizon, located between M31 and M32.

Spectral analysis confirmed the identity of both stars and thermo-luminescence measurements indicated that the light had left those stars a little over four million years earlier, demonstrating that a most extreme case of gravitational lensing had occurred.

It seems that some of the light from these stars travelling away from our planet had executed a smart slingshot type U-turn around the far side of M31 and sling-shotted back on a very narrow trajectory towards Earth to touch down in a cone extending from slightly south of Wiruna to a few miles north of Siding Spring Observatory, near Coonabarabran, where the sighting was confirmed using the Speckle Dopplerometer.

Thus, the Australians were able to reassure Vince that even if Alcor and Mizar had in fact got the chop as per the prophecy, he could come and image their earlier selves from Australia at any convenient time during the next four million years.

When this issue of *Alternate Universe* went to press, Alcor and Mizar were still there, but even if the prophecy merely has the date a trifle wrong, Vince can rest easy.

Vince was, however, keen to get an image of the gravitationally lensed image of Alcor and Mizar as seen from Oz so he could compare it with his own images from AWOL to see what differences are evident after a few million years or so.

However, he was not able to sign up for the 2010 OzSky / Deepest South Texas Star Safari at Coonabarabran in March as his continuing counsel and guidance was so sorely needed during

2010 by the astro imaging team at AWOL, and asked others to help out.

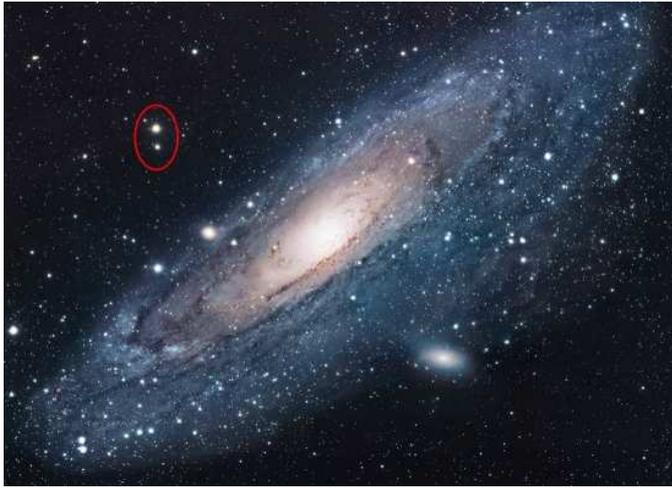


Image of M31 taken from Wiruna, NSW Australia, showing Alcor & Mizar gravitationally lensed by M31

David Moony would have obliged but, inspired by Michelangelo's work on the Sistine Chapel, will be busy for the next year or so on his great hand-sketched mural of the LMC, SMC and Eta Carina on the ceiling of the amenities block at AWOL from the preliminary sketches that he had made during his visit to Australia in 2009.

Similarly, Jeff Button, Senior Lecturer in Simian Astronautics at Texas Techno University was unable to get released from his lecturing duties during 2010, while Caryn Cardbordt, who is going to Oz in 2010, will be busy with biological experiments.

Caryn will be attempting to cross-breed Texas prairie dogs with Australian wombats, so as to breed the biggest, hog-sized prairie dogs in Texas, suitable for ranching, barbecues, fast food, and so on - She felt that Chicken-Fried Prairie Dog had a nice sound to it, but felt that the native species would not have enough meat to make a decent sized meal.

Vince's hopes partly rest with Fay Patrick, who is also going to Oz and is multi skilled in most astronomical disciplines and would dearly love to take a great astronomical image one day.

Assistance may also be offered by returnee Johannes Boozeman if he can get John Hamburger's C11 to stay on target for more than 10 seconds at a time.

A HISTORIC RE-ENACTMENT

A re-enactment of an historic feat of astral navigation was conducted during 2009 and proved to be an outstanding cultural success.

The event concerned a Viking voyage across the North Sea to the coast of Scotland in September 1066 by the great warrior, Norz Myth and his crew in support of King Harard Hardradda's invasion of Saxon England.

King Harard was a rival to Duke William of Normandy who also had claim to the throne of England, but King Harard got in first and landed near York, successfully defeating the local forces.

To commemorate this event, Sydney identity Spike Myth, a direct descendent of Norz Myth decided to duplicate the historic event.

So far as could be gleaned from the Norse sagas, Norz Myth and his crew had favourable winds, which swiftly brought them to the coast of Scotland, where they made a landing and subsequently looted and pillaged the first whisky distillery established on the East Coast.

Unfortunately, by the time they sobered up they found they had unfortunately missed the Battle of Stamford Bridge which took place on September 25 when King Harold and the Army of England had marched north to confront the invader.

However, Norz admitted later that this may not have been entirely a bad thing considering that the Viking army was totally defeated, with 90 percent killed.

Travelling to Norway to stage the voyage again was a big ask, so Spike decided to scale down the adventure somewhat, by sailing from the Fish Markets (which smell like Norway) in Sydney Harbour to Scotland Island in the southern Pittwater arm of Broken Bay.

The Viking long ship was represented by an old Bondi Beach surfboat rented for the weekend, while Spike assembled a suitable crew.

On the steering oar was Mickey Chatter playing the role of famed Viking navigator Enkompas, while Seacook Herringutz, noted for his 45 ways of cooking salted cod in a wooden bucket was represented by master chef Don Whitelight.

Heroic warrior Lerker the Berserker was handsomely reborn in Col McMickle.

As salted cod was not being stocked at the fish markets, a bucket of mullet was substituted instead, and as there was no whisky distillery on Scotland Island, two dozen bottles of Star Port were taken along to be consumed on the landing.

The party set sail on a sunny September morning and after circumnavigating Fort Dennison three times, though colliding with Sydney Opera House only once, Mickey soon got the hang of this whole steering business and started the serious business of navigation.

While Captain Spike stood nobly in the bows, resplendent in horned helmet and chainmail nightshirt, while wielding his trusty sword, "Excollimate", Mickey dangled a piece of lodestone on a string and searched valiantly for Polaris.

However, being broad daylight and at latitude 33° South, this latter task was too big a problem.

Mickey fell back to Plan B, which was to use a Tourist map of Sydney's Northern Beaches and Broken Bay, keep the beaches on his left side, turn left at Broken Bay and hoist the mainsail (the jib from a flying ant class 12 foot yacht).

Landfall on Scotland Island was made late afternoon.

However, the replay of the looting of the distillery went on until late evening, and 24 bottles and a day later the crew was in full sympathy with the sufferings of their illustrious forbears, rented a towboat to haul the surfboat back to Bondi Beach and caught a cab from Palm Beach back to Sydney.

The scientific aspect of the exercise was considerable.

It was determined that astral navigation was best done at night, while Polaris should be rejected in favour of Sigma Octans, if anyone could find it.

Also discovered, was the fact that mullet stewed in salt water is rather hard to keep in your stomach when bouncing up and down in a small boat in the South Pacific Ocean.

AUSTRALIA TELESCOPE TO MAKE ATTEMPT AT WORLD LAND SPEED RECORD

Staff at the Australia Telescope have long hoped to break the world land speed record for radio telescopes, currently 9.22 km per hour and held by one of the University of Bürgerwelt's twin 40-metre speckle dopplerometers which run on the redundant railway track running between Baron Beavis von Buttköpf's Schlöss Rattshärz and the disused Chundermax salt mine.

The Australia Telescope currently has one fixed and four moveable dishes which run along four kilometres of railway track at Culgoora, south of Narrabri, Australia and the big question was which dish the record attempt should be made with.



The Chief Operations Race Team installing high-performance spoilers on Dish #5

To determine this the staff has formed themselves into four teams, each to be able to customise and fine tune their own individual dish and have been working along a variety of lines - turbo charging, fuel injection, boost from detachable jet pods etc.

As the dishes all share the same track, they are obviously not able to race each other in the conventional sense. Instead, there will be semi drag race heats held, with each dish running along and being timed on a measured kilometre in the central part of the track.

The first of three heats will be held at Culgoora on 1st April 2010 at 10:00am, provided that the wind is less than 10 km per hour.



Dish #4 undergoing speed trials whilst testing the recently installed high-performance spoilers

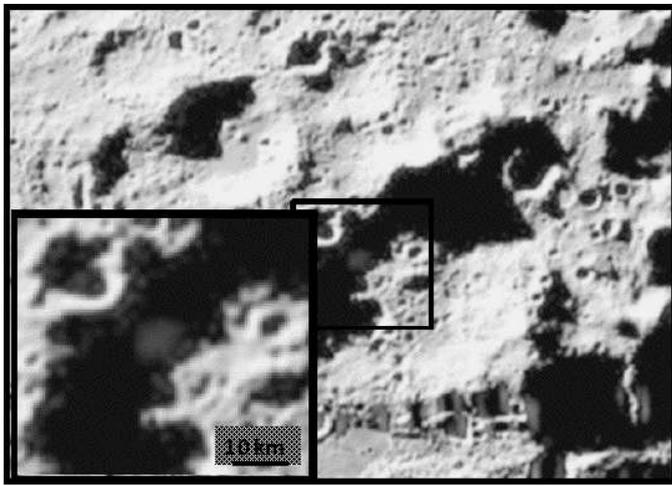
The results and the outcome of the world record speed attempt by the winning dish will be reported in the next issue of Alternate Universe.

THE MOONA LISA

Fans of extra terrestrial engineering were disappointed in recent years when the famous Face on Mars turned out to be an artefact of random shadows and totally vanished under different illumination.

However, hopes have been revived by photos of an experimental impact on the Moon which showed nearby what looks like a very fair carving of the famous Mona Lisa.

There are hopes that NASA will despatch a fly-by mission to take close-up photos of this object in the hope of clearly revealing its nature as the implications could be enormous.



NASA image showing what appears to be a rock-carving of the famous Mona Lisa

Could that great Florentine genius Leonardo da Vinci actually have been an alien? Could his alleged illegitimate birth actually have been a cover up for his extra terrestrial origins and was his father in on some deal with his true forbears?

Certainly his output of work and inventions was certainly on a different level to that of his contemporaries and this would be consistent with some hereditary factors or extra-terrestrial programming.

Dr Rube Goldberg of the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute has been asked to look into this mystery when he can find the time.

Dr Goldberg is undoubtedly America's foremost authority on extra terrestrials and stands out amongst his peers as the only one of them who has never been obliged to spend time in either a straight jacket or a padded cell – handy, as most of the latter are being kept in reserve anyhow by the US Treasury Department for certain former high flying financiers who have come under public notice.

So far, Dr Goldberg has only had time to canvas some preliminary thoughts.

A famous inventor himself, he noted that modern engineers have totally failed to make most of Leonardo da Vinci's inventions actually work even after having carefully built them in accordance with the master's plans.

His battle tank would only work if used on a large billiard table; his giant crossbow took no account of stresses on large timbers and kept breaking, while his underwater breathing apparatus cannot work a metre below the surface of the water.

For these reasons, Dr Goldberg speculated that maybe Leonardo's dodgy design work was the reason that UFO's kept crashing near Roswell, and that perhaps Leonardo was marooned on Earth as punishment for stuffing up so much, after of course being suitably biologically re engineered himself as a humanoid infant. If so, the implications could be awesome.

Is our planet being used as some penal colony/dumping ground by extra-terrestrials upon which to unload their misfits? Could some of the great megalomaniacs of history be former violent criminals from outer space?

Certainly the financial melt down on Wall Street could perhaps be caused by thinking not entirely in tune with logic or planet Earth.

The art and entertainment world has for centuries been full of fruitcakes whose minds seem to a greater or lesser extent have been off-planet way too often, and maybe it has lately been Wall Street's turn to take its share.

Having recently returned from Egypt in connection with research into the origins of optics and astro imaging, Dr Goldberg feels he must now also factor the potential extra-terrestrial element into those investigations.

ANCIENT ASTRO IMAGING

Readers of the 2008 issue of *Alternate Universe* will have noted the cover story, which raised the intriguing possibility that astro-imaging may actually have been invented by the Ancients, and foreshadowing a voyage of investigation by Dr Rube Goldberg of the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute in conjunction with a team of experts from the University of Bürgerwelddt.

This venture has been very successful and the outcome is most exciting.

Dr Goldberg had managed to gather a truly great team from the University, which included Art Historian, Professor Rim Brandt, Senior Lecturer in Optics Dr Apo Lenzmeister and Professor of Middle-Eastern Archaeology, Dr Schliemann Heinrich.

The group was honoured by the presence of the University Chancellor, Baron Beavis von Buttköpf, who kindly made available his private yacht, the good ship Aphrodite, for the enterprise, and the voyage commenced early in July from it's home port at Monte Carlo and went more or less directly to Alexandria, with only brief stops at Naples, Taranto, and Cypress to replenish the much diminished stocks of the wine cellar at Schloss Rattshärz.

A number of lines of investigation were discussed en-route and input by Professor Brandt caused some excitement.

The Professor referred to recent research concerning Renaissance artist Caravaggio, who was noted for some paintings showing Italian cities which, when X-Rayed, showed no signs of the expected preliminary sketching.

Like other artists of the period, Caravaggio was known to utilise the *camera obscura*, and the

anticipation had been that he would execute outline sketches on the canvas onto which the image was projected.

The failure to find such sketching prompted another line of investigation. Chemical analysis of corners of turned-over, unpainted parts of three Caravaggio canvases revealed traces of mercury salts.

Mercury salts can be light sensitive, and the belief has grown that the faint images produced by these may have been quickly painted over by the artist before they faded and thus allowed him to produce paintings with good detail and perspective.

Additional evidence to support this theory comes from the fact that mercury poisoning can stimulate violent rages, a trait Caravaggio was noted for and which resulted in his severe, and rumoured fatal assault on at least one other artist.

For example, China's first Emperor, as homicidal a megalomaniac as ever, slaughtered ten thousand loyal subjects before breakfast and was known to have imbibed many alleged elixirs of life positively stiff with mercury and these certainly enhanced the natural talents of a lad born with plenty of his own.

Discussion also took place on the article in the 2007 issue of *Alternate Universe* on ancient Egyptian optics, which had made Alexandria the starting point for the investigation.

As well as the discovery of corrective eyeglasses being utilised by well heeled Egyptians, further information had emerged concerning speculation that the Great Pyramid was nothing more than a VERY sturdy mount for a long f /ratio Galilean refractor as evidenced by fragments of glass at the top of the 8" square so-called ventilation shafts.

The theory was that the dead King could thus observe the Pole Star, Thuban, from the comfort of his sarcophagus, through the $f/524$ telescope.

It seems that a recent discovery by Dr Abu Zymbal has now put this theory beyond doubt. The discovery was made during excavations for the foundations of the Gizah branch of Khufu Fried Camel which uncovered the long missing lid of the Sarcophagus in the King's Chamber of the Great Pyramid.

Although the labour of extracting this heavy granite object through the narrow shafts inside the pyramid must have been immense, drill-holes at various points on the object, one of which contained half a gold rivet, suggested that it was either gold or silver plated and the tomb robbers had needed good light to remove this plating before discarding, or possibly burying, the lid.

However, what they rejected and left behind was significant. At the head end of the lid was set a small rock crystal lens 32mm in diameter, and

angled in such a way that when the lid was in place one could look through the lens directly up the "ventilation shaft".

The lens turned out to be a doublet, making a reasonable approximation of a modern Ramsden eyepiece, which could mean that the deceased King could observe from the comfort of his royal coffin.

When some surprise was expressed at this, Dr Lenzmeister pointed out that lenses were certainly known in the ancient world and referred to the rock crystal convex lens excavated by Sir Austen Layard at Nimrud and now in the British Museum.

Also, he said, a number of concave lenses were excavated from the Temple of Artemis - possibly used to compensate for short sighted vision - Pliny mentioned Nero used to watch the gladiatorial contests through a green lens, and in the "House of the Engraver" at Pompeii a lens to assist vision in close in work was uncovered.

There was even a passage in Aristophanes' play, "The Clouds", where a character talks to Socrates about the transparent stone at the druggists "which was used to kindle fires".

On arrival in Alexandria, the party headed straight to the Cairo Museum to confer with Dr Zymbal and to examine Montet's famous mystery Canopic jar.

As reported, they found that it made a very reasonable low powered hand held telescope, giving clear, though narrow-field views of trees and buildings near the museum.

Doctor Goldberg asked to see the Canopic Chest also found by Montet, and which, from his report, had actually not contained the Canopic jars.

When Dr Zymbal produced this, a ripple of excitement spread through the room, for among the decorative features on the lid of the 50cm x 50cm x 50cm box was a rock crystal cabochon almost 40mm in diameter, right in the centre.



The Canopic Chest showing the 40mm Rock-Crystal Cabochon Lens in its lid.

Dr Zymbal explained that opticians had established that this was a lens - a doublet of 500mm focal length.

Though the chest did not contain Canopic Jars, Dr Zymbal opened it to reveal a dozen 40cm squares of linen, which had been assumed to constitute a cache of mummy wrappings.

However, the Baron's sharp eye noted something significant about the top linen square.

It was marked, with what the Archaeologists had assumed were stains, either from age or embalming fluids or both.

However, Baron Beavis von Buttköpf, who was a noted astro imager, immediately identified a faint, faded image of M42 covering about two degrees square.

The constellation of Orion was, of course, sacred to the Egyptians.

Examination of the other squares revealed an image of the Pleiades and part of Taurus, but unfortunately the other nine were either blank or totally faded with time.

Chemical analysis was promptly arranged by Dr Zymbal, and the lab report confirmed the presence of mercury salts in the linen.

Now, in Egyptian mythology, gold was the flesh of the Gods, silver the bones of the Gods, while mercury, or quicksilver was the blood of the Gods.

The best guess was that embalmers had experimented with mercury salts for embalming bodies and perhaps by accident had discovered its light sensitive property.

Whether combining a lens fitted in a box to make a camera was the result of a deliberate experiment or happened by accident may never be known unless some ancient text is uncovered.

However, the party was unanimous in it's finding that astro imaging was invented by the Egyptians around 3,000 years ago and therefore has a long and distinguished pedigree, even if the science was lost during the dark ages.

Dr Goldberg and the party intend to return to Egypt during summer in 2010 - outside the peak tourist season, to further investigate other possible ancient technology.

On return to the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute, Dr Goldberg subjected the remaining pieces of linen to a variety of computer enhancement techniques and on one has found a clear, if faint, image of the recently discovered "Canis Ravidus" nebula.

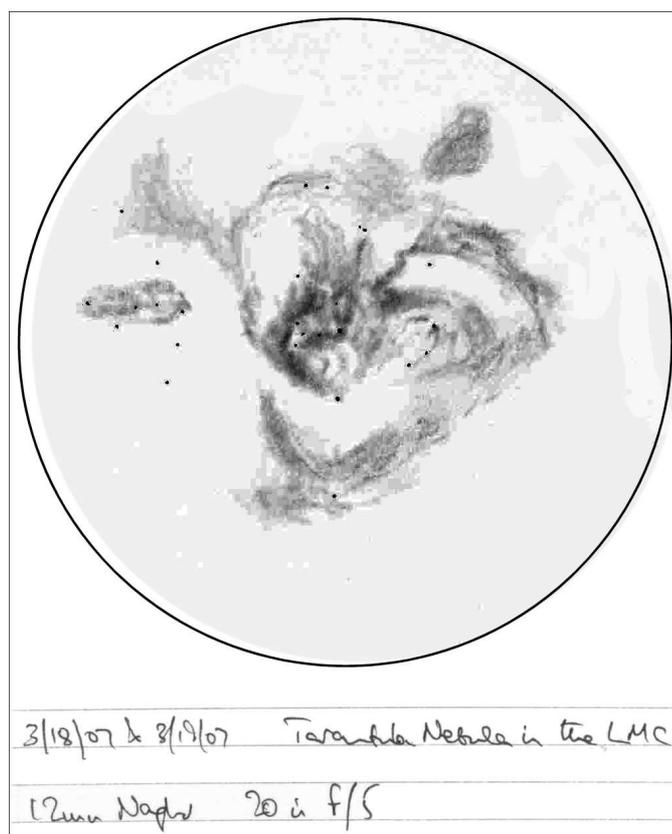
Though this begs the question of how the ancients achieved this without the use of an H-Delta filter,

it also suggests the possibility that mercury salts, either alone or in combination with other Egyptian embalming fluids, could of themselves get the results normally requiring the use of that filter.

It may also be that images such as the Canis Ravidus nebula may have given rise to the relevant constellation being named Canis Major in the first place.

As a further complication, Dr Goldberg said that one of his students had found a drawing on the internet of a nebula that had some remarkable similarity to the Canis Ravidus nebula.

This drawing, by Rabbi Essene, was apparently of the Tarantula nebula and poses a number of questions.



**Rabbi Essene's Sketch of the Tarantula Nebula
(or possibly the Canis Ravidus Nebula)**

If it was done in Kansas City, could the constellation of Doradus be actually seen from that city, even from the top of a seven story building?

Alternately, could the Rabbi have confused Doradus with Canis Majoris and actually drawn the Canis Ravidus nebula?

The other possibility is that the hydrogen delta filter, if used to facilitate the drawing, may have some curious property either of making nebulous objects look like a rabid dog, or else revealing some encrypted alien message encoded in certain wavelengths of emission nebulae and shown in some hieroglyph form - perhaps like some deer on the road warning sign on a wormhole interstate.

Doctor Goldberg says that this strange event invites further rigorous research

**AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS ACHIEVE
FASTER-THAN-LIGHT FLIGHT**

Readers of *Alternate Universe* were excited by the news, reported in the cover story of *Alternate Universe* Volume 10 of April 2008, in which amateur astronomers had launched the first amateur orbiting remote imaging telescope, a 20" $f/5$ crafted by America's foremost telescope maker.



The Amateur Space Telescope Remote Observatory (ASTRO) launched by the ASTRO Consortium recently

The telescope was put into orbit with the kind assistance of JPL which had some surplus capacity on a Space Shuttle mission sent to service the Hubble Space Telescope.

This effort inspired the amateur group to work towards making their own launch one day, so a group of amateurs teamed up with a dozen PhD students from the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute, to design and assemble the most economic launch vehicle.

Inspired by Jules Verne's novel concerning travel to the Moon, they decided to try a variation of his idea of launching a vehicle from a cannon.

However, it was recognised that, even if the projectile slowly built up orbiting velocity, the cannon would have to be exceedingly long and the air inside the barrel would not be able to move out of the way fast enough.

At the same time, the engineers in the group considered that building a cannon with a barrel around 500 metres long could be beyond their resources so another means was looked for.

Modest funding had been secured by locating half a dozen slot machines in a parking lot near the Las Vegas airport.

Eventually, a brilliant breakthrough was made.

The group was donated a dry oil well which had been dug in the desert 70 miles outside Vegas by the late Howard Hughes to test a new drilling rig design.

At 910 metres in depth and 400mm diameter and fully lined, the well made a suitable buried gun barrel.

The bottom 100 metres was filled with 80 tons of ammonium nitrate topped off with a few tons of diesel oil and the 395mm diameter three metre long projectile was carefully lowered onto a spacer resting on top of the explosive mixture.

The projectile was fitted with a video camera capable of recording for three hours and which was mounted under a protective shield which had been designed to eject thirty minutes after launch by which time the atmosphere would have been left behind, while a succession of increasingly larger parachutes was installed to facilitate a soft re-entry.

The key design feature was to evacuate the air from the well just prior to launch, while a shaped charge at the top was fitted so as to clear an initial passage through the air for the first 1,300 metres just above the ground.

So as not to alarm any residents or visitors to Las Vegas, launch was postponed until 4th July 2009, on the basis that those sober enough to notice would put any noise down to 4th July fireworks.

The launch team assembled a prudent 10km away from ground zero, having learned safety procedures from watching several episodes of "Myth Busters".

The launch was successful and the vehicle was tracked for twelve minutes using a modified radar speed gun borrowed from the Highway Patrol, after which it seemed to vanish.

However, 27 minutes later it was picked up making re-entry, and monitoring through a modified C-11 Schmidt-Cassegrain showed the re-entry parachutes deploying flawlessly, with the instrument package safely landing a mere 8km away from the launch site.

However, examination of the camera recording created a sensation as it was clear that, in a mere 27 minutes, the probe had passed around the far side of Saturn at incredible velocity, imaged the back-lit planet, and returned to Earth at almost seven times the speed of light.



Back-lit Image of Saturn as imaged by the probe

The group's patron, Professor Rube Goldberg of the Polytechnic Institute's faculty of Astronautical Dipsomania was consulted, and has two possible explanations for this anomaly.

The Professor has been researching and has amassed credible evidence that the City of Las Vegas is being used as an entry point for alien visitation to planet Earth.

Dr Goldberg conceives that there may be some sort of "Wormhole Interstate Highway" terminating at the city and that the team's probe had accidentally entered one of the entry points.

If so, he is hoping it is not a toll road as otherwise the Polytechnic Institute could be presented with a rather large bill.

On the other hand, Professor Goldberg concedes the possibility that astronomers have it all wrong about distance.

Light, and the velocity of light, has always been used by astronomers as a convenient measuring stick.

For example, the Sun is eight light-minutes away and Alpha Centauri a little over four light years away.

However, although Einstein may be right about the velocity of light being fixed, it may be that light travels in accordance with rules of it's own, so although light travels two million light years from M31 to Earth, it may be that on an actual distance scale, M31 is the equivalent of only 100,000 light years away but that light follows some weird, dog-legged path to get here.

Dr Goldberg thinks there is a possibility that if the correct point of aim is achieved, a space-bound vehicle may take a short-cut and travel along a direct path not taken by photons which may have some slow lane which is all their own.

Wormholes, he thinks, may merely be pathways following the TRUE distance scale while light meanders all over the place in some kinky fashion - a bit like driving from LA to New York via Rio instead of direct along the Interstates.

Dr Goldberg says that this opens up a whole new line of research for the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute.

JPL is watching with interest and contemplating the potential savings in fuel bills.

APRIL'S HORRORSCOPES

By Dr. Con Huckstar

♈ ARIES

Unless a stray meteor from the Lyrid shower flashes through, nothing much disturbs Aries this month. Of course NGC 1156 may go supernova on

April 13 according to reports from the usual informed CIA sources, but I would not count on it.

Arians will stumble through the month in their usual veg/valium mode and when questioned will make about as much sense as politicians pretending to answer a tricky question, so those born under the sign are advised to feign injury and get their jaws wired closed.

♉ TAURUS

The Moon occults the Pleiades on the 17th so if like most Taureans you have seven female admirers, don't invite them all to the same party no matter how clever you think you are at working a room, as girls will talk.

If you are one of those seven female admirers, get real and get a spare boyfriend from any other star sign even if you have convinced yourself you are THE one. You will need that spare boyfriend if the rest of the girls form a lynching party.

♊ GEMINI

Another dull month. The only simulation of life during the month is freeze-dried Russian space dog Laika having a brief rendezvous with an extinct American space chimp near Castor on April 22.

This means that Geminis looking for a soul-mate will find their prospective partner as frigid as a New Hampshire winter, so invite them for a hike through Death Valley in July, which should defrost things a little.

♋ CANCER

Mars spends the whole month in Cancer and from 15 - 20 April is within a degree of The Beehive, with the Moon moving in on Mars and M44 on April 22.

This is a trying combination for those under this sign who happen to be in the military. Take evasive action: Transfer to the Confederate Air Force or Army Intelligence if there is in reality such a thing, or become a pacifist, or a Chicken Hawk, or all three.

On May Day you can allow your normal homicidal streak to take over again but until then lay low.

♌ LEO

M65 nearly occults M60 on April 10, while three micro-meteors are expected to pass through M105 on April 16.

What this mess means would confuse lesser astrologers, but hell, confusion is my middle name!

Leos can expect weird, unexpected stuff to happen all around them this month. Any ticket they buy in the state lottery will come close to winning something, while the occasional Leo (but not those from Lubbock) may find that the used car they just bought is almost as good as the salesman claimed it was. Strange days indeed.

♄ VIRGO

Not only is Saturn parked in Virgo, but Minor Planets 9 Metis, 270 Anahita, and 192 Nausikaa jostle for space. Comet 81P/Wild 2 is also in your sign. Bask in glory, and ignore the envy of less-endowed signs. The ringed planet is ringed by lesser bodies.

Expect polygamous offers of engagement rings and wedding rings. Stay away from Pamplona and bull rings. If suffering a mid-life crisis, consider re-training as a cathedral bell-ringer, and join the Ringo Starr fan club.

♎ LIBRA

Libra is the dead boring sign of the month. Even the Moon tries to avoid staggering through, while telescopic meteors shun it. This does not worry most well balanced Librans who like life to be bland and boring. However, if you are a rebellious Libran who craves excitement, live a little. Stay up until midnight and watch the Discovery channel one night. Try Senna Pod tea.

Book in for the Texas Star Party and dine each night of the week in a different restaurant in Fort Davis. Look through a telescope in the Valley of the Dobs and pretend to actually see some of the fainter fuzzies. Go for it!

♏ SCORPIUS

Lucky you have the flashiest sign in the Zodiac, as not a lot is happening this month. Comet 10P/Tempel 2 is briefly in your sign but gives you the flick for the delights of Capricorn and Aquarius, although Antares and M4 are in conjunction for the whole of the month.

If you are in town for a lost weekend, flaunt your shining star at a cluster of admirers. If you're all out of admirers, try for a backpacker on a similar mission. If the backpacker is dog-ugly, make that a backpacker and a six pack of beer!

♐ OPHIUCHUS

Lucky devils. At least WE give you oppressed sods a forecast. Nothing new this month but you are better endowed with globulars than just about any star sign. You will be surrounded by clusters of interested persons. Your facebook network will be agog with your doings or imagined doings, so lie like a trooper to brighten up their dull little lives.

Invent romances with the rich and fatuous; wrestling adventures with stingrays or Grizzly bears, eating two of those free 72 ounce steaks at the steakhouse near Amarillo. Grab your 15 minutes of fame.

♑ SAGITTARIUS

Pluto nearly collides with the Swan Nebula this month, while Ceres is 7° south of Mu Sgr. Take care when the God of Hades is hanging about your sign - in your case, at the rate he moves you will be taking care for quite a while. A clear warning to us astrologers.

Avoid eating chicken with your morning cereal this month or salmonella may strike hard and fast. And don't put that chicken on ice until May, as Pluto will still be with you then. And in June etc.

♑ CAPRICORN

Apart from Comet 10P/Tempel 2 flashing through as fast as it decently can, not much else happens. Don't let this situation get your goat though. Take a tip from that comet and get moving and get healthy.

Form a jogging team, and run from Abilene to Roswell. Paint yourself green just before jogging into Roswell so you don't attract any undue attention.

♒ AQUARIUS

Though Aquarians have never had a star bright enough to see in a big city, this month you have Jupiter, King of the Olympians, and Neptune, God of the Sea and Earthquakes in your sign.

Jupiter should shower your endeavours with good luck, but if you live in San Francisco, don't get offside with Neptune or he may give the San Andreas Fault a shake or two. Flatter the Water God - Shower daily, splash on the deodorant - if that does not help, go for the insecticide. Survive.

♓ PISCES

Uranus is in your sign, and stays, and stays. In the absence of change, get moving yourself. Visit Arches, Canyonlands, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Monument Valley and the Grand Canyon in the same day. If you are a slow driver, rent a Cessna.

If you can't spring for a Cessna, try Google Earth and practice heavy breathing to simulate activity.

EVIDENCE FOR GLOBAL WARMING HOAX

Publication in recent months of emails extracted from Academia by hackers caused a minor sensation when they revealed that at least to some extent there seemed to have been selective publication of data and suppression of dissenting views to bolster the case that global warming is essentially a man made phenomenon.

The logical development of this theme is that what man has done man can undo - a familiar religious notion of sin followed by redemption which fits in nicely with the quasi-religious nature of the global warming movement.

However, in recent weeks some further public-spirited hacking has added a new dimension to the exercise.

Readers will be familiar with the world wide genome project in which DNA has been sampled from millions of volunteers in every country in an effort to better understand human origins and to trace the spread of humanity across the globe.

It seems however, that a totally unexpected discovery has been made and suppressed, no doubt with the best of intentions.

That discovery is that Neanderthals are NOT extinct as has been long supposed by the anthropological fraternity.



A typical Neanderthal disguised as an academic

This fact will come as less of a surprise to anyone who follows professional football of any code or sees army generals of any country drivelling away on TV, but the evidence is in that around 1% of what passes for the human race is nearly pure Neanderthal.

That one percent is rather strategically placed and may well be even more prominent in the global warming movement than in Wall Street, and their efforts and motivations have been the subject of careful analysis at the Las Vegas Polytechnic Institute.

Researchers there are convinced that Neanderthals want to reclaim their premier position amongst humanoid races by ushering in a new ice age, a climate which their genetic structure makes them more suited to thrive in than modern humans.

As pointed out in earlier issues of *Alternate Universe* the Earth's mean temperature over the last 20 centuries has corresponded closely with the solar cycle as measured by sunspot activity, so that during the Maunder Minimum the planet endured the "Little Ice Age", while in the last 50

years of the 20th century the Sun was more active than at any time in the past two thousand years.

The guys from Las Vegas figure that by curbing carbon emissions, the well placed Neanderthals plan to tip the planet back into an ice age, and considering that ice ages have been more common than interglacial periods these past few million years, they may well succeed.

It is reliably rumoured that Neanderthals are influential in Academia, amongst the global warming religion, talk-back radio and TV gurus, and have made heavy investments in nuclear-power, wind-farms and solar-cell manufacturing.

They may even have tampered with thermometers and could be the guys responsible for publishing uncritical stories about remote islands being inundated by rising seas when Venice, Bangladesh, the Netherlands and Sydney Harbour have been unaffected.

How do we pick out the Neanderthals amongst us? Well, needing to shave four times a day and dragging their knuckles along the ground is a dead giveaway, while giving way to urges to pick fleas out of each other's hair when they think they are unobserved is a strong indicator.

As for the sporting jocks, politicians, and TV and radio gurus, any of them exhibiting steroid rages without having the need to ingest steroids should arouse your suspicions.

The suppression of these revelations elsewhere than in *Alternate Universe* is a matter of grave concern, so further findings will be published as they come to hand.

WIRUNA DOINGS

Plans are being formulated to substantially upgrade the comfort and usability of the ASNSW's premier observing site, Wiruna.

Long noted as something of a southern hemisphere Siberia in winter months, a committee was formed to investigate ways and means of fighting back against the cold.

After some months of deliberation, the Wiruna Astronomy, Comforts, Knowledge, and Observing Committee (WACKO) finally unveiled a master plan.

This plan calls for partial refurbishing of the long dormant steam tractor which has been rusting for over 80 years in its own grove of trees near the north boundary, at least to the extent of the firebox becoming operational and producing a continuing supply of hot air.

Fuel can now be extracted on site, as a test pit for a biodegradable garbage trench had located a small seam of low-sulphur coal only a metre under

ground and which extends from the Running Stream deposits to just south of the Eat-In Kitchen.

Carbon Dioxide from burning this coal will be piped to a carbon sink under the Wiruna Dam. The production of hot air means that piping this to tents and the bunkhouse will give all the advantages of central heating to these otherwise basic sleeping quarters, while a flexible hose will be extended to the centre of the observing field to allow observers to quickly un-dew their optics and cameras.

To provide for those of a delicate constitution, toilet seats in the amenities block can in future be heated, thus eliminating risk of frostbite to the nether regions.



The Recently Restored Steam Engine at Wiruna, providing heating to observers on the Lower Observing Field

In the meantime, the Astro imagers have been active. Monte Willsin has turned his face against upmarket optics by disposing of his Takahashi Fluorite and his CCD camera and replacing them with a rather fast large aperture scope built around a two metre diameter searchlight mirror attached to the equatorial mount of the radio telescope near the house, with a Thornton Pickard half-plate camera attached at it's focal plane.

The fact that such a mirror is a trifle short of Takahashi optical standards can be addressed by using a bootleg version of "Turbo Photoshop" to eliminate image aberrations.

Images will be taken using the three colour separation process, and it is expected that the large aperture and big light gathering capacity of a two metre mirror will compensate for lack of CCD capability.

Astro-imaging guru Mike Bourbon-Jones hopes to obtain further photos with this new telescope when it gets teamed with his new improved combined Hydrogen Delta / Hydrogen Gamma filter.

Is there a crab in the Crab nebula? Can the outer structures of the South Galactic Pole be finally revealed? Does the Tarantula have fangs? Is there a small dog in Canis Minor?

To this end, Mike Sunsurfski is preparing a list of challenge objects, and in a rare mood of optimism was confident that he would at long last actually image one of the legendary, almost mythical, Murrell Objects.

He figures that the normal winter temperatures at Wiruna mean that every camera becomes a cold camera and that thus this return from CCD to film technology can be made to work.

GAMMA-RAY BURSTER FILTER

Exciting news has been revealed for those neurotic amateurs who have been afraid to become deep-sky observers and have stuck to the Moon, planets and bright clusters.

A deep gamma-ray burster mentality has gripped these folk, who have feared that while looking at some far away galaxy, a gamma-ray burster may erupt and give them a blind spot on the retina.

Developed by Dr Tom Heisenberg, principal research scientist in Computer Epidemiology at Texas Tech, he perfected the filter after years of research which had established that cemented segments of the appropriate kind of discs alternated with Country & Western CDs could allow through the eyepiece those wavelengths of light you actually wanted to observe while excluding harmful gamma-rays.



Dr Heisenberg's Prototype Gamma-Ray Filter

Dr Heisenberg said he had been wastefully using such old discs as coasters for coffee mugs and more volatile beverages for years before stumbling upon the right combination.

He admitted that he had not yet been able to test the filter on an actual gamma-ray burster as they are simply impossible to predict.

However, considering his prototype had successfully filtered out the light output from the floodlight system illuminating the night-time football matches at Lubbock, he claimed that no mere gamma-ray stood a chance.

However, being conservative and ethical he will refrain from marketing the filters until he has finally tested one on the real thing.

UNIVERSITY INITIATIVE ON CARBON DIOXIDE REDUCTION

Chancellor of the University of Bürgerwelt, Baron Beavis Von Büttkopf, has unveiled a proposal to reduce carbon dioxide on Earth by exporting it to a planet that needs it more than we do.

The Baron had attended the Touchy Feely Gabfest at Copenhagen on a watching brief for the University and had reported that it had the expected result of generating platitudes from industrialised countries along with sanctimonious recriminations from smaller nations.

However, he said, the eventual outcome could generate a windfall for Bürgerwelt.

Politicians like to be seen to be doing something, no matter how ineffectual, to allay public panic which had been increasing over recent years from a combination of media beat-ups and sermons by doomsayers from academia.

In fact the feral greens, with which Europe is richly endowed, had been positively foaming at the mouth all through the recent brutal winter which they saw as a clear harbinger of imminent global catastrophe.

In consequence, the Baron said that he was confident that the University could easily screw a few hundred million Euros out of the European Union, which would regard the smokescreen thus generated to be cheap at the price.

The Baron's plan, which has been referred to the University Science Committee, is for the design and construction of a large scale factory to extract carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and convert it into dry ice.

This dry ice can then be stored awaiting disposal, which he said would be achieved by building a giant ion cannon into the peak of Mount Getlade, just north of Schlöss Rattshärz and then firing off a series of dry ice comets at Mars each time it approaches opposition.

The resultant accretion of carbon dioxide could then, in greenhouse fashion, raise the overall

temperature of Mars and gradually terraform the planet.

When temperatures rose sufficiently, plant life could be introduced so that oxygen would be generated and the planet eventually made fit for human settlement.

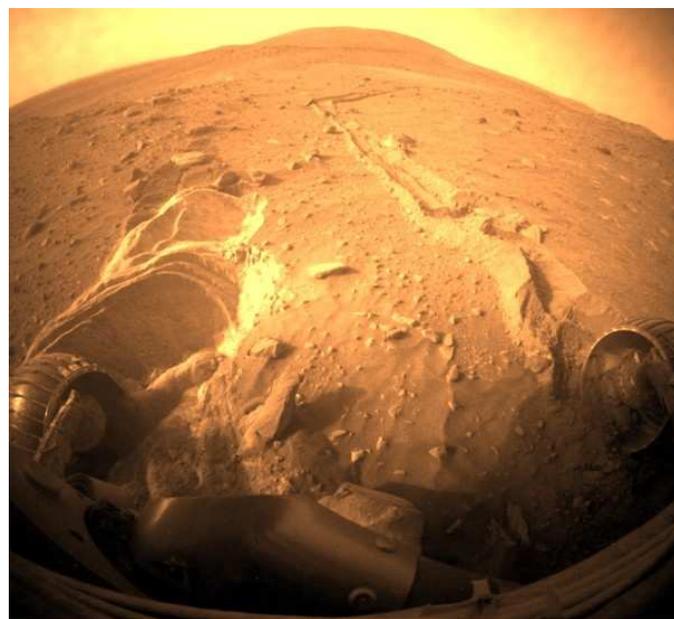
This latter plan would have to be kept low key so as to not attract the attention of the feral greens, most of whom would not accept any solution to the woes of planet Earth that did not commence with the mass suicide of humanity and the world being left to the animals, insects, and bacteria. The feral greens are still debating the position of viruses.

Whether this scheme could be made to work was, the Baron conceded, problematical. However, it was no more problematical than the science of global warming and was definitely worth a try.

MARS EXPLORATION ROVER RESCUE MISSION

Fans of NASA's JPL have been grieving over recent months because of the Mars Exploration Rover "Spirit" being literally stopped in its tracks, thus curtailing its investigations of the Martian scene.

It seems the Rover got itself bogged in some soft sulphur-rich sandy crud and all attempts by JPL scientists to free it have been to no avail.



The View from the Mars Exploration Rover "Spirit" showing its attempts to get unstuck from the quicksand

The problem was traced to a simple design flaw, stemming from the fact that the Rover's builders were city dwellers and lacked the experience and expertise of more outdoor oriented types.

Thus, the Mars Rover was fitted with the equivalent of highway tyres instead of scaled-down Desert Duellers or Cooper S/T type All Terrain tyres and as such made heavy going of the outback style conditions in which Mars abounds and the inevitable happened.

The best was made of a bad situation.

Measurements of Marsquakes - or lack thereof have - been made, analysis of the rotation and orbital elements of Mars and some pretty pictures have since been taken of dusty Martian sunsets.

More advanced usage has followed. The famed Voyager spacecraft is now so far from planet Earth that its signals are incredibly faint, so "Spirit" has recently been acting as a miniature repeater station to receive, amplify and re-transmit Voyager's faint signals to NASA scientists on Earth, enhancing NASA's ability to monitor the exciting happenings out there beyond Pluto.

In addition, when the rotation of Mars brought the Rover into line of sight of our planet, some big bucks have been made in broadcasting College football matches to a world-wide audience with the equivalent of satellite TV.

However, at last a rescue mission for "Spirit" has been mounted following a sub-contract being let to the Davis Mountains 4 Wheel Drive Club based on Limpia Crossing, in West Texas, which has had expert input from the US Astronomer Royal, Sir Rob Vanderson, an accredited expert in getting 4 Wheel Drive vehicles jammed very fast at unlikely angles.

In the best off-roader's traditions, a small 4 Wheel Drive tow truck has been designed, to be fitted with scaled down Desert Dueller tyres, low range Four Wheel Drive gearing, and a long snatch strap attached to a powerful winch.

This truck, which is being manufactured by Nissan, will be launched by an Indian/Chinese Space Consortium on a multi-stage rocket from a specially constructed launch pad at the summit of K2, the funicular railway to the summit being due for completion by May Day 2010.

Mt Everest, being slightly higher, was the preferred launch site, but dedicated mountaineers complained that this would take the joy out of climbing the peak.

Apparently clawing your way to the summit leaving a trail of dead bodies behind you would hardly seem worthwhile if you turned up to find picnic parties imbibing well chilled wines at the summit's railway cafe.

The well proven design of parachute-braking followed by airbag cushioning has been adopted, and it is anticipated that after achieving a rendezvous on the Red Planet, Rover will be roving again by August 2010 to continue its extended mission.

SOCIETY DIARY

3 April 2010	Last Quarter Moon	Astro Pet Show: Bring along a favourite pet corresponding to a constellation or Astronomical Object - for example, a pet Scorpion, Tarantula, Bear, Whale etc... Prizes will be awarded to the most attractive and creative entries.
9-10 April 2010	New Moon Weekend	Wiruna: Observe the New Moon at apogee with the newly available binocular Telrads.
17 April 2010	First Quarter Moon	Opera House steps - observe the Moon occult the Pleiades.
28 April 2010	Full Moon	Sidewalk Astronomy in King's Cross. Bring hair clippers and muzzles (just in case) for any observers who start howling at the moon.

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