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NEWS FLASH: EARTH'S MOON ACTUALLY A CAPTURED COMET!

Chinese archaeologists excavating the tomb of the first emperor in Xian Province recently discovered a cache of several thousand inscribed ox femurs, many of which recorded astronomical phenomena from 300BC or even earlier.

Eclipses, both Solar and Lunar, the Vela Supernova, and numerous guest stars (comets) were carefully recorded. One set of inscriptions referred to even older oral traditions - from the era well before recorded history - or rather legends, concerning the splitting of the human race from its ape cousins. These latter beings, it is recorded, objected to banging stones together to make tools, and new fangled fire, or the wearing of skins to keep warm. In fact, it was only after much soul searching that these first conservationists retained the practise of grooming - searching each other's fur for fleas, ticks etc...

Subsequently, they went on to develop into Gorillas, Chimpanzees etc... The other group went on from stone to bronze, iron and Chinese cooking.

The even older traditions refer to the Moon as arriving as a guest star, with a fiery tail reaching from one horizon to the other, and how this came from afar and began to circle the Earth, causing great Earthquakes.



Luna - Our Moon, or is it really a former Comet?

Observatories:

Wiruna	33° 01'S	149° 46'E
Crago	33° 33'S	150° 37'E
Kaputar	30° 17'S	150° 10'E

Many associated meteors were seen, and for the first time, ocean tides. The tail gradually dispersed but not before material from it pounded the moon, causing big flashes. Chinese dating of this event is tentative at this stage, but a period around 2 million years ago is being suggested.

ASTROLOGER HONOURED

Kelley Chevalier, den mother to the Austin Astronomy Club was recently appointed as Astrology Sub-Editor to the National Inquirer.

Her ability, unique among astrologers, to be able to distinguish Polaris from the landing lights of a Boeing 747, and to be able to actually identify more than two constellations of the Zodiac in the night sky, greatly impressed the newspaper, proud as it was of its reputation for veracity and responsible reporting, and gave her a considerable edge against a competitive field of top-gun astrologers.

One unsuccessful rival, who had with great difficulty, obtained day release from "Happy Acres" to attend the employment interview, complained bitterly, hinting at a fix.

"Texas" he said "was flavour of the month, and now that the Presidency has become hereditary, even Presidents will exclusively come from there."

Undeterred, Kelley issued her New Year forecast for 2003.

During the year, she said "...bombs will explode in Israel and the Middle East.

A great man will die, a new comet will be discovered and there will be a number of air crashes and forest fires.

Even a major Earthquake is likely before 2010.

A congressman will be unfaithful to his wife during the year, while there will be several muggings in New York."

Her rivals were effectively silenced by this brilliance.

As Kelley's forecasts have outperformed those of the CIA and FBI for accuracy, she is confidently expected to be asked to join the Bush Cabinet before the next Presidential elections.

ASTRONOMY DOWN UNDER

Prof. Manuela Vögtswagen, Head of the Department of Astral Physics at the University of Bürgerwelt is currently touring Australia in an enterprising bid to actually observe stars and planets for the first time in her life.

Her faculty building does have a rooftop observatory in its charming setting adjacent to the Rathhäus in the quaint University town of Dummköpf in Rural Saxony.

However, the antique 6½" Mürz refractor has been put into storage, as over the past century, the usual 99% cloud-cover of central Saxony has been augmented by smog from Eastern Europe, acid rain from Scandinavia, and a great outpouring of smoke from the Faculty of Agriculture students studying the properties of certain substances.

In consequence, no star has been observed from Dummköpf since the historic sighting of Sirius for a few minutes during the celebrations of the Kaiser's birthday in 1903.

Prof. Vögtswagen prepared for her trip by negotiating a lease of Emmanuel Snodgrass' turbo-charged ride-on lawn mower, and of Richmond Windsor's latest 6" f/105 Schiefspiegler, complete with a full battery of his wide-field Huygens-Erfe eyepieces.



Prof. Vögtswagen testing the turbo-charged ride-on lawn mower

She had received exciting reports from German amateurs who had actually observed M13 from Namibia and she wished to make

comparative observations of M13, 47 Tucanae and Omega Centauri in order to test a new theory.



Prof. Vögtswagen negotiating a lease of Richmond Windsor's 6" f/105 Schiefspiegler Telescope

These amateurs considered there was evidence that M13 belonged to a new and unique class - the "Open Globular Cluster", and contend that the lack of stars in its central regions stem from a higher than average number of supernova explosions, with the remnant black holes emitting no light, and with the succession of shock waves emanating from the core widening the orbits of adjacent stars, leaving a black void thinly sprinkled with stars.

It is estimated that within 2.2 million light years, M 13 will achieve full open cluster status.

Until then, it will remain in its unique class - the Open Globular Cluster.

US astronomy magazines, who have just published their 7,000th amateur photo of M13 are not amused.

On coming to Australia last November, the Professor was struck temporarily snow-blind by the combined impact of the LMC, SMC, and Southern Milky Way.

She has been wearing her Raybans 24-hours a day since then, in order to affect a recovery by the 2003 South Pacific Star Party at Wiruna, when Scorpio and Carina will combine to severely test her retinae.

DOINGS AT WIRUNA

The Astronomical community at Wiruna was agog with the news recently that ace Astrophotographer Joe Crouchy had discovered colour photography, or rather, that colour photography had discovered Joe Crouchy.

It seems that Joe, long noted for his crisp and high-contrast black and white photos, was examining a particularly sharp print of the Eta Carinae nebula over dinner when he accidentally spilled some tomato sauce on the print.

Hastening to wipe it off, he inadvertently smeared the sauce in just the right places and consistency to give the classic observatory-print magenta tones within the nebulosity.

Seized with inspiration, he deliberately placed a speck of egg yolk on the homunculus and was instantly motivated to actually try his hand on the sky. The rest, as the poet said, is history.

To double the clubs joy, veteran Astrophotographer David Gollums-Butt has returned to his camera. David has taken sabbatical leave for several years to contemplate life and the universe, do sundry good works, and to take pity on starving fish by feeding them in the guise of pretend fishing.

Now he has returned to the Astrophotographers fold, his many fans are eagerly awaiting the results.

ASNSW Web-Master Lachlan MacDonald has doubled the size of the Web Site in anticipation of publishing David's new photos.

Bad news for the South Pacific Star Party is that Dunedoo's most famous son, Emmanuel Snodgrass, apologises for his inability to attend this year as he has leased his ride on turbo-charged ride-on lawnmower to Professor Manuela Vögtswagen who is visiting Australia to carry out serious Astronomical research.

She also wishes to be able to investigate and report back to German amateur astronomers exactly what a dark sky looks like.

It seems that for many years, the only way German amateurs could get the dark sky experience in Germany was to visit one of the disused coal mines in the Ruhr which have been fitted with LEDs of various colours and brightness to simulate constellations.

In fact, there has been such a lack of stars or dark sky at German star parties lately, that many have started to give serious competition to the Munich Beer Festival.

Emmanuel, who needed the money owing to the intense competition of those damn satellites discovering so many comets that he has had no prize money these past five years, will concentrate on solar astronomy for a while.

He has been examining the big new naked eye sunspot seen in March with his new Solar-Telrad fitted with an H-alpha filter and blink-comparator.

His biographer, Mr Greg Burnt, will unfortunately be unable to attend the South Pacific Star Party to tender Mr Snodgrass' apologies in person.

Also attending again will be the famous Bokglob Grössblürter, who last year won the prize for the attendee who had travelled the furthest to the Star Party, as no one else could match the 72.3 parsecs recorded on his trip computer.

There were some problems when argument developed on whether his vehicle should be parked in the car park, or amongst the caravans, compounded by the fact that it had no wheels.

The caravan parking area won, however, on the basis that, being closer to the pit toilets, the sundry minor radiation leaks from the warp drive could serve to sterilise the contents of these pit toilets, and these leaks were well within the tolerances allowed under the Wiruna by-laws.

This year's difficulty arises from Bokglob's request to open a vendor's stall at the SPSP.

His Sydney agent, Mr Spike Myth of the B&D Shop contends that he was given exclusive agency rights within the Inner Solar System for Bokglob's products.

Mr Grössblürter has produced a legal opinion to the effect that the Inner Solar System ends at Venus.



Bokglob Grössblürter's New Ship, Parked Near The SPSP Site

The problem for the committee has been that this opinion is a document written in a complex sequence of binary numbers, which Mr Myth claims is actually a quotation by Callisto Craft Repairs for repair and servicing of Bokglob's shipboard reactor.

The matter continues and will be determined if ever the code gets translated in time for the SPSP.

Many members were surprised at the sudden recent closure of the Ilford Roadhouse.

The good news, however, is that this is so that Mt Stromlo Observatory can be rebuilt on the Roadhouse site, and not at Canberra after all.

The sign in Bon Glen pointing to Mt Stromlo is being re-directed accordingly.

Consideration of rebuilding Mt Stromlo on the original site took into account the prodigious amount of hot air emanating from the nearby Federal Parliament on Capital Hill which has degraded seeing conditions in recent years.

This had become such a problem that many staff members had not realised that the bushfire was approaching, but mistook the blast of hot air for a particularly stormy weekend-session of parliament.

Not only is the sky over Ilford darker than that over Canberra, but Rylstone Shire Council has undertaken to replace Ilford's one and only street light with an energy efficient downward facing lamp, so that the new "Stromford" Observatory will not be affected by light pollution.

Baron Beavis von Büttkopf was so taken by the project that he is negotiating with a Mudgee winery to rent a hectare or two of non-productive land close enough to be able to co-operate with the re-born observatory by constructing a southern hemisphere field station in conjunction with the University of Burgerweldt.

Professor Vögtswagen has visited several wineries on his behalf.

Heartened by the encouraging results achieved by Chief Conservationist Col McMickle in developing his "adopt a snake" program, society curator of spiders Scots Muesli has taken interest in a neglected and persecuted species.

Taking the view that the Wiruna Red Back Spiders had been a much unappreciated and virtually ignored species, Scots decided to turn his humpy, an historic and National Trust classified replica of Henry Lawson's pit toilet on the Gulgong gold diggings into a spider sanctuary.

The structure had lots of dark corners in which the females could spin webs, lay their eggs, and devour male Red-Back Spiders after mating.

Lest he be accused of running foolish risks, Scots has imported from the US several stylish sets of Kevlar underwear to wear under his freezer suit, though he is satisfied that when he has the spiders properly trained and eating out of his hand, there will be no problem.

He had thought of opening part of his sanctuary to White-Tail Spiders, but considered their colour to be too provocative to keen observers who feared the reflection of starlight off white surfaces would violate their night vision.

When properly housetrained, he considers that surplus numbers of Red-Back Spiders could be relocated to the Wiruna pit toilets.

This would have the advantage during South Pacific Star Parties of discouraging patrons from lingering any longer than absolutely necessary and thus reducing those long lines outside.

When this was put to the committee, they decided that a special sitting was required to determine the matter.

PLUTONIUM POWER SUPPLY FOR WIRUNA

Unpaid Russian Space Scientists at the Kamchatka Peninsular are holding their Fifth Annual Hanger Sale and have on offer some exciting items, chief amongst which is a spare back-up plutonium reactor designed to produce electric power for the now defunct Mir Space Station.

Capable of producing a reliable source without harmful greenhouse gas emissions, the prospect of acquiring this facility has produced great excitement amongst many of the committed conservationists in the Astronomical Society of New South Wales who want to be rid of lead acid batteries and solar cells, both produced by highly toxic and energy consuming processes, and on-site generators partly burning diesel and producing considerable hydrocarbons in the process.

Also on offer are several booster rockets and a test rig.

It is continued that if a rocket was inverted on the test rig and the thrust directed skyward, a short burst could clear a considerable amount of cloud and fog and produce a controllable and sustained sucker hole.

This could allow observing on weekends which would otherwise be lost.

Using the column of hot air rising above Parliament House at Canberra as a guide, with one standard Parliamentary debate rated as generating one Fedfart per hour, it is considered that the booster rockets could go close to achieving this standard of perfection.

HOPPING TYRANNOSAURUS-REXES

Recent debate has raged amongst palaeontologists on whether the fearsome Tyrannosaurus Rex was a fast and agile predator or a slow and cumbersome carrion eater.

Recent decoding of Philosorapture discs found in the fossilised UFO discovered in recent years at Coober Pedy has revealed a different picture.

Trained by the Philosoraptures as guard dogs, their records show that these creatures were fast hunters who could hop like kangaroos at an alarming speed and high enough to bring down unwary Pterodactyls. They could cover 50 metres in one bound, leap over tall trees and generally make a damn nuisance of themselves, which is why Stegosaurus had to grow defensive spines on their backs.

That the kangaroo's means of locomotion is similar, is not surprising as the records disclose that kangaroos are actually miniature genetically modified bonsai T-Rexes, a first stage in turning predatory carnivores into intelligent and placid herbivores.



ASNSW Member taking DNA samples from a carnivorous kangaroo, now believed to be a direct descendant of the *Tyrannosaurus Rex*

Unfortunately, the process was disrupted before completion by opposition from militant greens amongst the Philosoraptures, who equated primitive ignorance with virtue and bliss, with its inherent closeness to nature and plant and insect life - in fact, the very condition many militant greens find themselves in.

Accordingly, apart from genetically modifying these bonsai dinosaurs into mammals, kangaroos were left at one intellectual rung above their usual prey, the Australian native grasses.

MARS MISSION LIKELY

In a press release issued from Washington last week, Senator Richard Head, leader of the Bananas Republican faction within the GOP threw his weight (a considerable 160kg) behind the allocation of funds to NASA for preparing a manned mission to Mars.

The senator had been watching a powerful documentary series - "The X-Files" on cable TV and had become alarmed at the low priority given by the FBI to the investigation of serious threats to the peace and security of our planet Earth.

However, he had become truly disturbed when his grandson, Richard Head (IV) came home on vacation from Jubilation T Cornpone Military Academy at Boondocks, Alabama, Seems that during a lecture on "Why General Grant was a Closet Faggot" an inattentive student had opened his science book for the first time and scrawled a moustache on a photo of the face on Mars.

He was stunned at the outcome, as were his classmates after the lecture when he showed them that the face then bore a remarkable resemblance to that of the late and unlamented Soviet dictator Joe Stalin.

The Senator took instant alarm, as he now knew why Mars had been known as the Red Planet all those years, and that Percival Lowell had to be a commie sympathiser for passing off all those military roads on Mars as mere canals.

The only question in the Senator's mind was whether the first spy mission to Mars should carry army personnel or marines.

When he first broached the matter on an informal manner to senior NASA representatives, they were keen to accept funding, but reluctant to commit themselves to being prepared to construct a space probe capable of

transporting a full army or marine division, plus tanks and nukes.

He is considering whether this is indicative of disloyalty, or merely because of budgetary considerations.

He has written to the President pointing out that the Martians, if there are any, could well give weapons of mass destruction, if they have any, to terrorists on Earth, if they know any.

The President is concerned, and has set up a Senate inquiry.

HAWKESBURY DOINGS

Janits Orr, Secretary of the Richmond Windsor Fan Club, and author of the best selling "*Zen And The Art Of Collimation*" commenced a lecture tour last week on the life and achievements of the great man.

Speaking to a capacity crowd in the beer garden of the Commercial Hotel, Dunedoo, Janits described what an inspiration he had been to all members of the Hawkesbury Society and how his innovative telescope and optical designs had set the astronomical world ablaze.

Meade and Celestron were competing, she said, for the rights to his Huygens-Erfle eyepieces with an amazing 180 degrees apparent field, research grade acrylic optics and finely turned mulga wood barrels which had become a talking point amongst amateurs world wide.

Richmond had become such a celebrity that the State government had erected road signs directing tourists to his home.

Over the past year, Richmond has introduced Hawkesbury members to such diverse wonders as the Telrad Barlow and the Newtonian main mirror cell with built in hot water bottle to both warm the mirror to prevent dewing, and to correct defects in figuring by being able to selectively vary the degree of inflation with hot water.

Also well attended have been his daylight meteor spotting sessions in the car park of Richmond McDonalds, with a cheeseburger personally autographed by the great man as a prize for each sighting.

Somewhat puzzling has been the fact that a far higher rate of sightings had been recorded at the same time by observers in the car park of the Pub just over the road.

As the parallax displacement between the two sites is slight, Richmond is as yet at a loss to determine a plausible reason.

STAR PARTY RECIPES

Hamburger With The Lot

Take one sesame seed bun, slice it and insert a steak of roadkill, one goanna ear, one feral cat's eye (thinly sliced), one tablespoon of finely ground spinifex, 10ml of Red-Gum sap, sic Stringy-Bark leaves, one slice of paddy-melon (the animal, or the vegetable), and garnish with cream of termite and a light smear of vegemite. For exhibition purposes, or to frighten US amateurs only. Not to be eaten unless you have been certified clinically insane by at least two qualified medical practitioners and have made the publishers principle beneficiaries in your will.

Hangover Remedy

Mix one dessert spoon of curry powder with one cup of chilli powder, half a cup of Tabasco sauce, one grated onion, a dash of mustard and half a litre of castor oil. Stir well.

While this will not actually CURE your hangover, it is certain to totally take your mind off it for as long as you keep sipping.

APRIL'S HORRORSCOPES

♓ Pisces - Venus moves into your sign until mid month and then forsakes you for Cetus, and then Pisces.

If you start a new romance with this assistance, keep your beloved well clear of large sailors, small sailors, fish fingers, and whales (particularly carnivorous Sperm Whales).

♈ Aries - There may be a meteor radiating from Aries this month with luck. Apart from that Aries slumbers, with you dozing off in sympathy.

If still in the workforce, paint eyeballs on your eyelids and try to avoid falling over when snoozing. Or get elected to Parliament where it does not matter.

♉ Taurus - Saturn spends the month near Zeta Tauri and on the 7th forms a love triangle with the moon and Aldebaran. Heavy stuff for you guys, juggling a ring, a crescent and a bulls eye.

Beware getting jabbed in the eye or ring with sharp objects.

♊ Gemini - Minor planet 511 Davida bounces off NGC 2331 in your sign on the 17th, so if you are a small Italian Jewish lad, drive carefully.

If you have to drive in Italy, take out extra insurance and pray to St Christopher daily, even if it means becoming a Christian for the month.

♋ Cancer - Jupiter, the King of the gods and lightening chucker is in your sign till June and hangs about the Beehive during April.

Pay your electricity account promptly or you may get stung for a surcharge. If you stick a fork in your toaster, turn off the power first.

♌ Leo - Comet C/2001 RX 14 (Linear) moves south through Leo this month. Fortunately most of you Leo's are brave as a Lion and stay cool about this.

However, if you are a nervous Leo, take out comet impact insurance with the Grössblürter Insurance Company (an Admirer of HHH)

♍ Virgo - Minor planet Thalia is in opposition in Virgo this month, while Vesta bounces off NGC 4442 towards NGC 4420.

Your love boat has docked. Small admirers of erratic behaviour are yours for the taking.

♎ Libra - Comet 116 P/Wild 4 changes path from south west to west while in your sign this month.

If you can bend the orbit of a comet, people will be putty in your hands. Win friends and influence people. Get married, or divorced, or both. The world is yours.

♏ Scorpio - SFA happening in Scorpio this month which is quite unfair as minor planet 12 Victoria has forsaken you to spend time in Ophiuchus, which is not even a sign of the Zodiac.

This may explain why neither Melbourne nor the ASV is in the state of New South Wales - or Scorpio.

♐ Sagittarius - Comet 65 P/Gunn is in your sign this month, as is minor planet 8 Fiora. If visiting Baghdad, wear a flower in your hair, Kevlar everywhere else, and take out extra travel insurance. Same also, if visiting LA, New York, or Chicago.

♑ Capricorn - Neptune, and minor planet Ausonia spend the month in your sign. If you meet someone carrying a trident, don't act the goat and be caught bending.

♒ Aquarius - It is still your age. Even if Uranus is still hanging about in your sign, you are still sensitive, artistic etc, and totally unworried by a thoroughly boring major planet not moving on and stuffing up some lesser sign, whose non artistic and insensitive folk just could not cope anyway. Console all those non-Aquarians in your usual gracious manner.

UFO DOINGS

Celebrated UFO sleuth Barry von Münchhausen is leaving his outback research centre near Andamooka to undertake a mission to the US.

Impressed by his acumen, the Wall Street Journal has contracted him to undertake an independent and in depth investigation of the Roswell incident.

Barry will commence his research by interviewing a number of well credentialed witnesses, currently residing at the Betty Ford Clinic, and will then travel on to New Mexico where he will inspect the famous Carlsbad Caverns to check whether these may be being used as a base by the UFO's reported from time to time in the American west.

Roswell itself will, of course, be the site of the principle examination.

He will be taking with him the dynamic duo, Ivor Merino and Dipso Maniak, whose incredible teamwork in operating their fast slewing meteor scope will be put to use in tracking any speedy UFO's that may appear during their stay.

Barry shrewdly issued press releases to such responsible newspapers as the National Inquirer, News of the World, and Daily Telegraph hoping that the aliens will get to hear of this mission and buzz him at Roswell out of sheer curiosity.

He will also visit a number of bars in Alabama, Mississippi, and Georgia, where patrons have consistently reported strange sightings on their way home at night to see if any magnetic anomaly associated with the geographical location of these bars may be implicated.

He also hopes to obtain DNA samples from a number of patrons who woke up after making their sightings feeling rather sensitive and as though they had been deeply probed in an effort to determine exactly what biological material the aliens were seeking.

Realistically, of course, as more than 15 million US citizens report being the victims of alien abductions, he will necessarily be restricted to taking a representative sample of the victims, many of whom would, in any event, bend over backwards to be of assistance.

DECEMBER AT WIRRAMINNA

December 2002 saw many types of people converging on South Australia for the total eclipse of the Sun.

The optimists went to Ceduna by the thousand, drank the pubs dry and waited in confident but unrealised expectation for the heavens to clear. Alas for cloud, wind and forebodings of gloom.

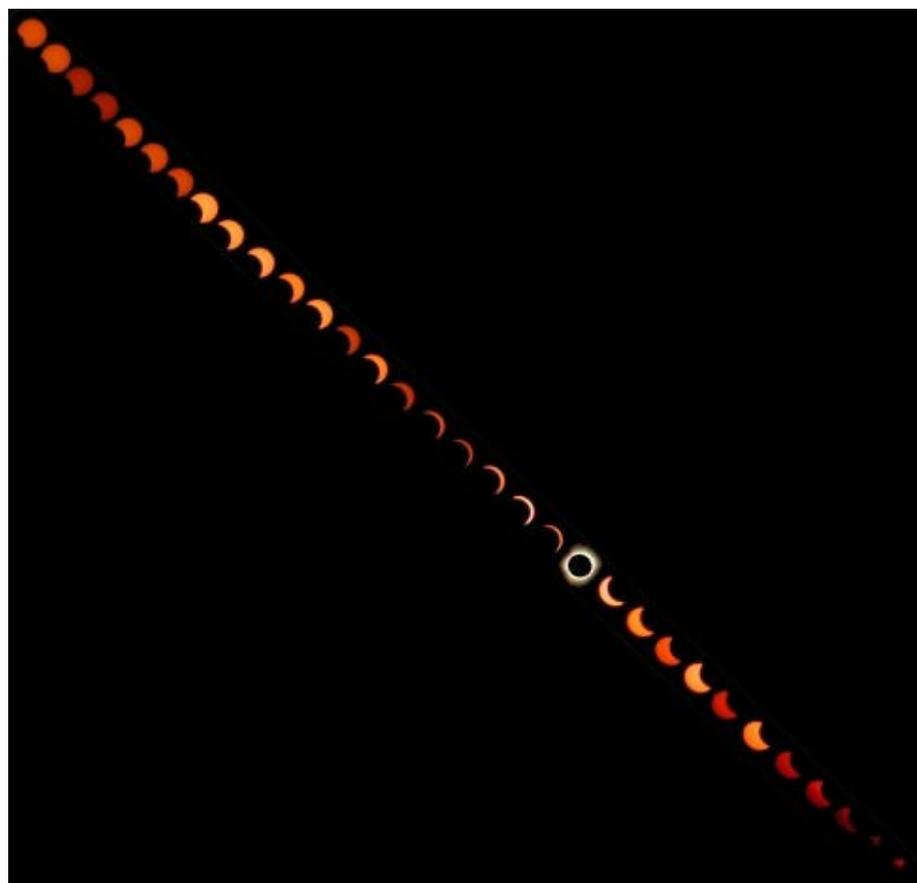
The devout began to pray, and chant mantras, while as the day grew on, the sunworshippers grew anxious. Fortunately, a New Mexico amateur who had observed at Chaco Canyon was familiar with old Anasazi rain dances, and by creative choreography, got a troop of amateurs to dance a rain dance in reverse.

Thus, when a few minutes before totality, a well placed sucker-hole developed, a furious argument broke out between the devout and the Sun Worshippers as to just who among them had effected the miracle, with the result that many missed noticing the event.

Not so ASNSW double star expert Richard Jaywalker who busied himself with photographing close binaries immersed in the solar corona. The pessimists went to Port Augusta, studied the omens, phoned Melvin Wales at Ceduna, and then headed for Wirraminna, north of Woomera.

En route, Gordon Garage and Rob McZero were met with at Spud's Roadhouse. Nearby Leigh Creek had been briefly considered and discarded as a music festival was scheduled nearby, so Leigh Creek was left to the hedonists.

In fact, so many strange people had passed through Port Augusta each night that one automatically kept searching about looking for Buffy and Angel



Full Digital Sequence Of The Eclipse At Wirraminna

Reports from the site suggested that many stayed safe in darkened vans during daylight, emerging briefly for a few seconds at totality when it was safe to be about without spontaneously combusting. Wirraminna was the right place at the right time. No cloud, temperature at 20°C, and a strong wind which blew the bush flies to South America.

All phases of the eclipse were observed, from first contact to the setting of the partially eclipsed sun were seen - except by Andrew Moral of course who spent totality using his 20" Dobsonian to search for Palomar Globulars close to the eclipsed sun. Gary Hill, inventor of the NGC Abacus had to later tell him what he had missed.

Meanwhile, ASNSW Webmaster Lachlan MacDonald was taking a full digital sequence of eclipse photos from an observing pad expertly cleared of low scrub by Professor Manuela Vögtswagen using her turbo-charged ride-on mower which had been polar-aligned for tracking accuracy in mowing.

Sadly, several Desert Death-Adders and one Inland Taipan or Fierce Snake were accidentally minced in the process.

OBSERVATIONS

Comet sleuth Greg Burnt has been unable to attend at Wiruna in recent years but having his own observatory with attached residence in darkest Berowra, has been able to do sterling solar system astronomy, concentrating on Jupiter, Saturn and Mars.

Recently, on a night of exceptional seeing and using a Bokglob Grössblürter 10x Barlow and 1mm Kellner eyepiece on his 10" Dobsonian recorded amazing views of Io after sketching the great red spot one autumn evening.

Two volcanoes were observed in simultaneous eruptions while a sulphur flow from these was seen

extending for nearly 200 km across the moon's surface. Indeed, the eruption of the larger volcano was so violent that Mr Burnt speculates that some material may have completely escaped Io's gravitational field and may yet fall on our planet as meteors.

In the course of observing Io, Mr Burnt also identified several hitherto unsuspected double stars between mag 11 and 13 as components were eclipsed in sequence by the moon's motion.

His mentor, Mr Emmanuel Snodgrass expressed great excitement at the news and has urged Mr Burnt to continue these observations as the finer details on Jupiter's moons are just beyond the reach of his Telrads, which are optimised for cometary and solar work.

Mr Snodgrass theorises that the Great Red Spot is actually Metallic sulphur, expelled from volcanoes on Io and captured by Jupiter's gravitational field, and has asked Greg to attempt spectral analysis of the filaments of gas he believes he can see extending between the two bodies. Mr Burnt has also been asked to check for methane volcanoes on Pluto's moon Charon, but he has not yet had night when the seeing was quite good enough. He will try at SPSP in 2004.

BRITISH TRIUMPH

It is reliably rumoured that for the first time since the demise of William Hershel's pet cat, a British Amateur Star Party actually occurred on a night when the sky was clear and celestial objects to as low as magnitude 3.0 were observable with the naked eye.

This Earth shattering event will certainly spark a special edition of New Scientist, while knighthoods for the entire staff of the weather bureau cannot be ruled out.

We are told that the event was such a sensation that several veteran amateurs had to be shown by

vendors how to insert eyepieces in their telescopes, while all had to be reminded to remove the end caps from their optical tube assemblies - most had assumed the caps were some protective optical coating. Alas, many optics were found to have totally deteriorated with time, fungus, dry rot etc.

Debate is now raging on whether to wait another 142 years for like conditions, or to join similarly afflicted German amateurs in a joint star party in Namibia, or even far off Australia.

However, the shock of actually observing through their telescopes is said to have sent several amateurs temporarily blind, and to have caused them to order heavy duty neutral density filters in case of a repeat performance.

Four will make a decision on whether to continue in the hobby after their release from therapy.

REMOTE AREA STAR PARTY

The Tasmanian Astronomical Society held its Remote Area Star Party (RASP) in the Cradle Mountain National Park early in March 2003, culminating in an observing session on March 12 on the summit of the mountain on one of its rare clear nights.

Club Secretary Tom Carr carried his backpack-model 6" RFT right to the summit.

This model featured a new lightweight mirror handcrafted out of Huon Pine, and explained that its thermally stable surface took a high polish readily and remained distortion free no matter how rapidly the temperature fell.

The trick was, he said, to do the figuring at a room temperature of 30°C, at which the natural oils in the timber fused with the cerium oxide to make a totally new carbon-based compound which took a permanent, diamond like polish. Aluminised and quartz over-coated, it tested out at a genuine 1/42 of a wave.



The Extremely Remote Observing Site Of The Remote Area Star Party (RASP)

Overseas member Lars Jonlix, of Mt Ranier in Washington State, brought his highly portable image stabilised Canon binoculars which had been specially modified for astrometric work and fine-tuned for southern hemisphere work by the Boeing Raccoon works Team.

During the Star Party, he planned to further refine the distance of the LMC by directing one binocular objective onto its brightest component, the Tarantula Nebula (NGC 2070), while the other objective was directed by a clock driven diagonal mirror onto the first quarter moon, reflected off the lightly-rippled surface of Dove Lake.

As the moon's distance was known with great accuracy, extrapolating its reflection from the ripples through a triple-bypass CCD camera had the ripples acting as a 2km wide Ronchi grid, and by comparing the Ronchigram of the Moon's image with a Doppler Angiogram of the LMC in general and the Tarantula in particular through the other objective.

Three estimates were obtained. These averaged out at 178,342.3 light years, plus or minus 4.58 light years. The final results will be published in June in the Science supplement to the Greyhound Recorder.

A contingent of ASNSW members present noted with interest that at the latitude of Cradle Mountain, Canopus was near the zenith, while the LMC, SMC, Coal Sack, and Eta Carinae were easy naked eye objects in spite of the first quarter moon, such was the transparency of the sky.

A total of 14 Tasmanian Tigers made an appearance during the Star Party, but all turned out to be snakes. Fortunately, none of those bitten has died yet.

One of Mr Jonlix's spare boots was last seen being fought over by a pair of Tasmanian Devils, and by popular consensus of the attendees it was agreed that the winner was unlikely to survive its meal.

Next Year's Remote Area Star Party will be held in the centre of the Mt Darwin Meteor Crater, which will be lined with fine mesh chicken wire for the occasion to make a non-steerable one-kilometre diameter radio dish which will form the basis of a radio telescope.

This will be used to search far southern skies for extra terrestrial signals, working on the theory that most searches so far had been conducted in northern latitudes.

Attendees are advised to bring lots of leech and insect repellent, and at

least one snake-bite bandage per limb.

Mr Richmond Windsor hopes to attend, but his appearance depends on the success of his negotiations with the operators of the Spirit of Tasmania car ferries for a price for the transport across the Bass Strait of his 14" f/110 off-axis Newtonian (under construction), mounted with stabilisers, on the chassis of a combine harvester.

Although vehicles up to 5 metres long travel free on the ferries, it is estimated that the telescope may well be longer than 5 metres.

ASNSW webmaster Lachlan MacDonald is upset that work commitments prevented his attendance at this year's RASP, and plans to make next year's even if early retirement is necessary.

ASTEROID DEFENCE STUDY

By Jean Austin-Jane

JPL has announced the results of a study authorised by the Pentagon to determine means of deflecting Near Earth Asteroids from dangerous orbits which could put them on a collision course with our planet.

Hollywood simply nukes them, but thinking scientists and even non-thinking military men have recognised that a nuclear explosion might just turn a speeding bullet into a squadron of shotgun pellets and produce multiple smaller but lethal impacts rather than a single humungous one.

Accordingly, applying a milder but steady cumulative force, which would not break up the asteroid at a point in time when the object was far enough away that even a minor deflection would have significant long term effects on the orbit, was the way to go.

Computer studies suggest that an ion-drive capable of producing a significant long term thrust and fitted to an object of considerable mass would be ergonomically the most efficient.

Computations of ideal mass and optimum shape drew on much allied commercial engineering research, both University and industrial.

Best results are expected to be obtained by using a compact mass of 1970 tonnes of depleted Uranium shaped exactly like a 1989 model Volvo sedan, fitted with an ion-drive and directed at the epicentre of the target asteroid at a velocity of 2.735 metres per second for a period of 17 days and 4 minutes - in reverse, of course, the most awesome dimension of ANY Volvo.

To conduct low cost field tests, JPL has obtained two dozen 1989 Volvos at a great price from Bokglob Grössblürter's Used Vehicles, Earth Division, and plans to conduct representative simulations using suitable sized icebergs as targets and barge-mounted Volvos directed in reverse at said icebergs by 40hp Mercury outboard motors.

To simulate correct mass, each Volvo will be filled with hundreds of defunct car batteries kindly donated by the Astronomical Society of New South Wales.

RE-JIGGING THE CONSTELLATIONS

By Con Huckstar

In my many years of casting horrorscopes for everyone, high and low, from the poor to the rich and fatuous, and Presidents, potentates and Prime Ministers.

Without my wise counsel, these lost souls would be left adrift in a sea of despair and indecision.

Heartrending stories pour in with my fan mail from the emotionally deprived - those poor souls who lack a constellation of their own even though they know they richly deserve one.

The Sun, moon, and planets plough through Ophiuchus, bits of Orion, the Pleiades, and Canis Minor at times of the year that they know damn well coincides with their birthdays and all they get is tacked

on to the nearest traditional old hack constellation that has been around for a few thousand years.

In my view I am the only professional astrologer with a deep appreciation of astronomy, precession, and the fact that the whole bleeding lot have moved one rung since the designations were first assigned.

I have to take this into account in my careful and thoughtful forecasts, unlike my competitors, most of whom have never been out of big cities nor seen stars fainter than second magnitude, nor able to identify a constellation even had they the good luck to ever see one, so I have decided to take unilateral action to rectify the situation.

I also have serious doubts as to the accuracy of many reported birth dates, as for example I know of many politicians who claim to be Leos and noble as a lion but who need a special constellation assigned to them.

Consequently, I have determined that many professions have in cosmic fashion removed themselves from their assigned constellations into entirely new territory and need mobile constellations to cater to their needs.

To all politicians, I assign the star sign of Crotalus (the Rattlesnake), in the act of biting it's tail, made up of all notional objects in the Oort cloud along the whole length of the Zodiac as this constellation suits people who do their best work in the dark away from prying eyes and more accurately reflects their inherent, innate and acquired characteristics.

As few in the acting profession really manage owing to the demands of their profession to stay within the ambit of Virgo they will have their own sign known as the meteor, made up of all meteors and fireballs as befit brilliant careers that can often vanish without trace.

And the oppressed Orionans, Ophiuchans, Canis Minorans and Pleiadeans shall in future have their very own star signs, and as soon as

I get around to it, maybe even as early as next year, have their own lot of forecasts to fret about.

PRODUCT REVIEW

The Dob Tractor

Reviewed by Dipso Maniak

There was once a time when a 10" or 12" Newtonian was regarded as a big telescope.

With new innovations in lightweight mirrors and Dobsonian mounts, amateur telescopes have been steadily getting bigger, with the result that 30" and 36" telescopes are turning up at star parties, observers are scaling high ladders to dizzy heights and clinging to massive instruments that have often taken a small army of talented home handymen, weightlifters, and steeplejacks to assemble.

Once put together, they have generally been considered as immobile as the Rock of Gibraltar which can often be a problem if a better spot at the star party suddenly becomes available, or a fleeting object like Mars at opposition or a bright comet slinks behind a tree or another inconveniently placed Dob. Until now, all you could do is stay put.

Behold the Dob tractor.

Small enough to drive into the back of a modest trailer yet powerful enough to haul a VW with the handbrake on this Dob tractor can haul Dobsonians up to 48" and one ton in weight.

This tractor promises to revolutionise the Dobsonian scene.

No longer will a ninety pound weakling have to lust hopelessly after big aperture while the incredible hulks flaunt their 36's.

The Dob tractor comes complete with outriggers to fit fore and aft on the rocker box as well as lateral stabilisers, and restraining straps to stop the tube dropping off in transit.

The tube should always be placed horizontally, in a kind of park mode, and towed in reverse with a neat, easily fitted "sea anchor" to act as a rudder to prevent lateral movement in high winds.

There are dolly wheels for the ladder and observing platform, but of course the dob should not be towed before site preparation is completed at the new spot.

To that end, the Dob tractor can be fitted with the dozer blade to clear a level pad both for the scope and ladder, while an inbuilt compactor can hammer the soil to produce a firm foundation for both.

Infrared headlights of course with filtered windscreen, and two forward and two reverse gears, and a top speed of 15km per hour.

An all round skirt of half inflated inner tubes takes care of careless amateurs blundering into your path, and puts them down very gently indeed, while the blinking red LEDs make it easily visible even to the non dark adapted eyes.

The 5.2L Turbo Diesel motor develops a modest 50kw of power but lots of Torque for the four wheel drive off road tyres, while the comfortable spring loaded driver's seat is comfortable even when wearing the most bulky cold weather clothing.

The 5L fuel tank is good for 50km, or an average of 200 Star Parties. An auxillary 200L trailer-mounted fuel tank is available for highway use, should you desire to tow your Dobsonian, say, from Austin to Fort Davis. In such a case, we recommend using the slow lane on the Interstates.

Manufactured to the traditional high standards of the Pusan tractor and tank factory, and sold and serviced by all honest used car dealers, this tractor comes in a range of attractive colours, from verdigris to puce and the guarantee in Korean is in beautiful calligraphy.

Be the first in your club to drive one.

**MARS OPPOSITION EAGERLY
AWAITED**

At opposition this year, Mars will be a mere 55,758,006.4845 kilometres from Earth, the closest approach by the Red Planet since 57617BC when it was even closer at 55,718,001.232 km distant and subtended 25.13 arc seconds rather than this year's 25.1 arc seconds.

Interestingly enough, it seems this earlier opposition did not pass unnoticed, as recent research suggests.

Baron Beavis Von Büttkopf, newly elected Chancellor of the University of Burgerwelt has spent long hours in study of runes inscribed on thousands of Bison bones discovered in a cave in Germany's Neander valley.

Excavations for road construction had uncovered the cave's entrance, which had been buried by a landslide in prehistoric times, and archeologists had found the inscribed bones along with ritual huminoid burials, stone and bone weapons and artefacts, and the skeletons of 27 Neanderthals of various ages who had been trapped by the landslide.

The Baron says he has found that the runic inscriptions represent a rudimentary form of old Norse, and are concerned mostly with hunting

and weather trivia, but claims that several concern notice being taken of the brightening of a moveable star of reddish hue.

Baron Beavis concedes that the reference could be to ANY opposition of Mars, but has directed the University's Faculty of Comparative Comparisons to conduct sophisticated dating techniques to ascertain if the big opposition is the one referred to.

Meanwhile, Astronomical Society of NSW planetary observers are eagerly preparing for the event, and as the Crago Observatory has a first class 16" f/7 Newtonian on a site noted for it's great seeing, have brought in extra equipment. An Andrew's 2mm eyepiece is being kindly loaned by Richard Jaywalker and this will be teamed with a 3x Barlow to be used on nights of superlative seeing.

While this will yield a magnification of 3,100x, planet fancier Jaywalker admits that the rather limited field of one minute of arc could call for some very precise tracking and for the planet to be examined in detail rather than as a whole.

On a brighter note, he said that Deimos or Phobos could easily fit in the field of view, and that he planned to draw detailed maps of each object.



The Upcoming Opposition Of Mars

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HOW TO GET TO MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the ATNF Headquarters building, located in the CSIRO Department of Radiophysics complex on the corner of Pembroke Road and Vimiera Roads, Marsfield. If arriving by car, please dim your headlights, turn right through the main gate, then immediately right past the main office entrance, proceeding about 50 metres to a small car park area. Adjacent to this is the "West Door", which is our entrance. It is advisable to park your car in this area, and walk up the stairs to the Meeting Hall, as it can sometimes be a little difficult to hear the speaker if you are sitting outside in your car.

All meetings start at 8pm sharp. The doors will be opened at 7.45, 7.55 and 8.10pm. If you arrive after 8.10pm, knock loudly on the door to attract the attention of the attendant, who works in the adjacent office. As you probably have a habit of always trying to seek attention, you shouldn't have any problems with this step. There may be a short delay before answering, as the security department patrolling the facility must complete a security check on you, using your DNA, which was extracted from your knuckles whilst you were knocking loudly on the DNA-sensitive doors.

Please note that you will be shot twice on site and used as guinea pigs in secret Government experiments if you fail to comply with these strict guidelines. Following these experiments, you will be shot a third time, to ensure that you do not expose the truth, which is out there.

SOCIETY DIARY

March 7th	Meeting	The Effects of Wine and Ethanol on Visual Acuity Speaker: Monte Willsin, Rio de Janeiro
March 14th	Full Moon Weekend	Easter Egg Festival (using Death-Adder Eggs) Shell Painting and Recipes Venue: Bon Glen, Wiruna, Ilford, NSW
March 21st	Last Quarter Moon	Special Observing session for the cheapskates who are dodging SPSP Venue: Crago Observatory, Bowen Mountain, NSW
March 28th - 30th	New Moon	Eleventh Annual South Pacific Star Party Venue: Eastern (lower) Observing Field, Wiruna, Ilford NSW

DISCLAIMER

This is the small print at the end of the publication which warns that this politically incorrect edition of the journal, contains material which may be offensive to some readers. If you are offended by such content, please read it twice and pass this onto someone else who may also be offended in some way. Note: As per usual, no live, healthy animals were killed in the production of this publication, however, some may have been experimented upon, particularly in the creation of certain recipes for use at the Star Party. All photographs are of persons of presumably sound mind, and some claim to be above the age of 21 years. All characters portrayed in this publication are fictional in many ways, particularly within their own minds, and any similarities between characters in this publication and certain members of the ASNSW are entirely coincidental and are not intended to portray true characters in any form whatsoever - After all, who could possibly be as stupid as some of these characters? Readers are reminded that this publication was not intended for any purpose other than mild amusement or for educational use in universities across the world. If you choose not to archive this rare, collector's edition quality bootleg publication, please pass it onto someone who will. Any correspondence regarding this publication should be forwarded to the nearest paper recycling bin or fireplace as soon as possible, as no correspondence will be entered into. Smoking will eventually kill you and it will make you smell worse than you already do. It will also drastically reduce the small number of friends that you think you actually have, so you might as well quit while you still think you have some friends. This publication is not affiliated in any way whatsoever with the Astronomical Society of New South Wales Inc, nor with its members or events.