

MARCH 72

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THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

My appologies for the newsletter this month, but I have moved twice within the past month. I will certainly try to include more of substance next month. Any contributions will, of course, be welcome, and should be submitted to the editor:

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Utmost appologies are offered to all — this month's President's Report has become hopelessly lost. It involved, however, the club visiting the University's new 30-inch reflector near Mead. Certainly we will discuss this at the meeting, and anyone not able to attend the meeting but wishing to go on the trip to Mead on April 8 is asked to call me at anytime after the meeting when I will be happy to fill them in on all pertinent data.

On the Moon with Apollo 16: Guide to Descartes
by Gene Simmons

This book written by a former chief scientist at the Manned Space Center offers a handy guide to the approaching event beginning April 19. It is available for one dollar from the Superintendent of documents, U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington D.C. 20402.

Meeting Announcement

Our next meeting will be Tuesday, March 28, at 7:30 in the Olin Hall of science on the campus of Nebraska Wesleyan. The program this month will be a talk on the new observatory facilities of the University of Nebraska at Mead, Nebraska, presented by Dr. Leung of the physics department at the University. Of course any other business a member wishes to have discussed may be brought up, plus we will have refreshments.

On the evening of April 8, the club is invited to come to Mead and see the observatory. In addition, if individual members will bring their own telescopes, assuming the night will be clear, our club will hold its first private star party of 1972 at Mead on that evening. Come to the meeting for more information on this.

At our last meeting, several members talked on various telescopes they have owned. A wide variety of instruments were discussed and the relative merits of each presented in the hope of aiding junior members in future purchases.

Observing in April

During the next few months several planets and occasionally the moon all get together in the western skies after sunset to provide an interesting conjunction. The most prominent object is the planet Venus, shining at magnitude -4, and slowly rising higher and higher in the sky as the days get longer and hotter. In early April Venus will be less than two degrees away from the Pleiades, and on April 16, a thin crescent moon will be extremely close to Venus. In the telescope Venus is about 50 per cent illuminated and slowly waning.

The planet Mars is also in the vicinity; it too is slowly rising from the horizon. Venus is slowly overtaking the red planet and in early April they will be some two degrees apart. Mars is a very apparent red, but quite faint and very small compared to what it looked like last summer at this time.

The next planet is Saturn, slowly moving parallel to Venus and Mars. Saturn is the third component in the planetary jam-up occurring in April. All three will form a straight line some five degrees apart at their closest approach. (The red star Aldebaran will also be involved, surrounded by the Hyades Cluster.)

This conjunction of planets was further compounded in mid-March by the appearance of Mercury close to the horizon. However, by April Mercury will have reached inferior conjunction and not be visible.

Photographing this event, especially in color, will make beautiful slides of the moon, planets, and the dying glow

of the sun. If pictures are taken on several different nights they will also record the planets' movement among the stars. On fast black and white film such as Tri-X take some shots after sunset; try about 10 seconds at f/4. You'll pick up quite a few stars and if a moon is present, the earth-shine will be recorded.

(Use a telephoto lens if possible, for the moon is awfully small without some magnification.) For fast color film try something like 20 seconds at f/2.8.

This type of observing does not require a lot of time or energy--just step outside at sunset and enjoy the view.

Brian Rugg

Next month's newsletter will contain the second part of Topics in Celestial Mechanics, originally planned for this issue. In addition a new article will be started on extra-galactic astronomy. Any contributions for the next newsletter should be submitted to me within a week of our April meeting.