

# 12 - 78 THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

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## PRESS LOSES INTEREST AS VENUS PROBE DATA BEGINS TO FLOW IN

As usual, after the first thrilling announcements about the Venus probe accomplishment, the wire services effectively dried up, leaving interested amateur astronomers in a vacuum until their monthly magazines catch up to the story. A few intriguing details did sift through before editors' attentions were turned to the plight of Cleveland and other earthshaking affairs:

Venus was described as a planet that has been so hot for so long that its surface is literally on fire.

Instruments aboard the two Pioneer space probes that descended to the surface on the night side of the planet began picking up a glow at an altitude of 7.5 miles. The glow got brighter and brighter as the two probes fell toward the surface.

"I think we were seeing the red glow of the surface rocks, which got brighter as the probes neared the surface," said Dr. Donald Hunten of the University of Arizona.

"I think we were looking at the fires of hell," said Dr. Thomas Donahue of the University of Michigan.

The atmosphere over Venus is no more hospitable than the surface, according to the measurements made by Pioneer's probes--there were four altogether-- and the single Pioneer

spacecraft still in orbit around the planet.

Even the upper atmosphere is so dense that it absorbs half the light reaching Venus from the sun. This enormous concentration of heat in the upper atmosphere triggers winds that reach more than 200 mph and carry the heat from the equator to the poles in less than four days.

Balloons released on Earth's equator take six weeks to reach polar regions.

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### DECEMBER MEETING NOTICE

See Ron Veys' report to you (page 2) for some highlights of new plans to put some pizzazz into the PAC--which will be discussed in more detail at the December meeting. It's the day after Christmas, Tuesday, December 26, at 7:30 p.m. at Hyde Observatory. Note: there are still some RASC Handbooks available for sale, so bring your Christmas money and buy one!

Hyde Observatory Steering Committee will meet, as usual, an hour before the club meeting, at 6:30 p.m.

THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT

As you should know by now, the club held its annual elections at the November meeting, and I was awarded the honor of being chosen as President for the coming year. Along with this honor comes a number of duties, one of which is writing a President's report for our newsletter. I'd like to keep these reports as personal and informative as possible and still try to be brief. So let's get going.

There are two things that have bothered me about our club the last few months. One is the declining attendance at club monthly meetings. It seems the same twenty members or so come to every meeting but there's no sign of the other fifty or so members on our roster. If you don't come to the meetings, you can't really be involved in what the club is doing. Your only contact with the club then is through the newsletter, and since it is printed before the meeting, anything decided on at the meeting won't show up in the newsletter until the next month. You'll always be a month behind in news, plus you'll miss all the activities planned for the upcoming month at the meeting. I know sometimes things come up that make you miss the meeting, but since it's always the last Tuesday of the month, maybe you could plan around that. I also know that if the meetings are long or boring, you won't want to come. I have plans for that!

The second thing that bothers me is the lack of young membership in the club. (I mean Junior High and High School students.) We do have these young members, but we see very little of them. This age group has a lot of energy and interest, but not the experience of some of us. I'd like to get these young members back to the meetings and get more young people interested in the club by offering more basic Astronomy at our meetings, and giving them more things to get involved in. Everyone should feel welcome in this club, no matter what their level of education or experience in Astronomy. We're all here to share our mutual hobby.

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THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club, and is free to club members. Yearly subscription without club membership is \$4.00. Regular membership (includes one-year subscription to SKy & Telescope, club newsletter, and four quarterly issues of the Astronomical League newsletter), is \$12.00. Family membership (includes all regular privileges, plus one additional vote in club elections) is \$14.00. Newsletter Editor, Lee Thomas (489-3855). Address all correspondence to PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB, INC., P.O. Box 80553, Lincoln, Nebraska 68501.

With these things in mind, here are the changes I've undertaken. First, transportation shouldn't be a problem for any member. Young members who don't drive or others who don't have a car available, please give me or Walt Baumann or Budd Duvall or any officer or member a call. We'll be glad to give you a ride or find one for you. Second, I plan to start meetings on time -- right at 7:30!! I plan to keep the business meeting as short as possible so that the programs should start by 8:00 or so and the meeting should be over by 8:45 or 9:00. Everyone is then free to leave or to stay around for refreshments and discussion. Third, we plan to have two programs at each meeting. One will be general, basic Astronomy and one more advanced or specialized. Something for everyone. Fourth, I am starting an "information exchange". At each meeting I will have a number of handouts on anything of interest to members. I'm asking members to give me copies of articles, problems, info on telescopes, etc.-- anything that interests them and that they think will be of interest to other members in the club. I'll Xerox them and make them available at the meetings. Anything goes here... we want something for everyone. This month's handouts include a user's report on telescope eyepieces, an article on the Search For Extraterrestrial Intelligence, tips on solar eclipse photography, and a discount price list from Horizon Telescope Discounters Co.

Finally, we're planning on offering a telescope making class (any type, any size, however simple or advanced the person wants to make it.) It will be open to the public, and probably begin in early February. More on this at the meeting.

That's about it for now. You know, we all have to put a little effort into making this club something we're proud to belong to...an association we can all get something out of. I'm willing to try if you are.

Have a Merry Christmas and I'll see you at the meeting.

-- Ron Veys

P.S. Don't forget the occultation of Venus by the moon at about 6:00 a.m. the morning of December 26!

#### VENUS PROBES, Continued from Page 1

The same Venus winds carry heat just as rapidly from the day to the night side, making the atmosphere on the dark side of the planet only 20 degrees cooler than it is on the sunlit side.

Long suspected but now confirmed,

the surface of Venus is as hot as it is--850 degrees Fahrenheit--not because it's closer to the sun, but because its atmosphere results in a "runaway greenhouse effect" that lets heat in, but allows almost none to escape.

## CLUB ELECTION RESULTS OFFICIAL

New officers were elected at the November meeting of the Prairie Astronomy Club. The officers, who comprise the club's Board of Directors, took their offices at the November meeting. They will occupy these positions until November 30, 1979.

Officers are:

President -- Ron Veys

Vice President--Walt Baumann

Treasurer -- Lee Thomas

Secretary -- Budd Duvall

Program Chairman -- Rick Johnson

## HOW TO TELL IF OBSERVATORY IS OPEN

In the past, even if the snow was piling up 3 feet deep and the wind was approaching hurricane velocity,

Hyde Observatory has been open. A small band of hearty volunteers appeared to shovel their way in, play cards or trade insults with each other (since the public, in its undeniable wisdom, did not show up on such nights), then depart into the gloom at roughly the hour of closing.

No more. It will, hereafter, be the responsibility of the supervisor in charge of that particular night to notify the following radio stations of the observatory's closing: KFOR, KFMO, KLIN and KLMS. Volunteers then should be able to tune to those stations to determine if it is worth their while to pack up their blizzard kits and head out.

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