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THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

Volume 19, Number 6 May 29, 1979

PRESIDENT'S REPORT:

I guess the biggest news this month is that the observatory now has an excellent new sound system, thanks mainly to the efforts of Lee Thomas, our club's resident audio expert. We've installed a Sony stereo amp in the projector room and suspended two Yamaha speakers from the ceiling in the two front corners of the lecture room. Even though that room is still very alive acoustically, the result is much better than the old system of the single small speaker in the back of the room. I'm preparing a small surprise to demonstrate the abilities of the new sound system at our meeting Tuesday night.

With all this nice spring weather we've been having lately, I hope you have been able to get out and do some observing. We were all disappointed by the cloudy weather that ruined our plans for a Star Party in Hickman on Friday, May 18. We'll try to set up another date at this month's meeting, o.k.?

By the way, many of our newer members may not realize that one of our most long-time and best- liked members, Earl Moser, lives on a small farm just outside of Hickman and that he has extended a running invitation to all members to come out and use his property for an observing site.

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... MAY MEETING NOTICE ... MAY MEETING NOTICE ... MAY MEETING NOTICE...

The Prairie Astronomy Club will have its regular monthly meeting at Hyde Observatory Tuesday night, May 29, at 7:30 p.m. (The Hyde Observatory Committee will meet as usual at 6:30 p.m., one hour before the club meeting.)

Postponed from last month is the beginners program, "HOW TO SET UP YOUR TELESCOPE AND FIND YOUR WAY AROUND THE SKY", presented by Rick Johnson.

Advanced amateurs will be interested in photography contest winner Steve Hyatt's latest efforts, some superb photographs of deep sky objects, which will constitute part of the program. And Ron Veys plans a demonstration of the new sound system at the observatory, so keep your earmuffs handy!

See you Tuesday night at 7:30 p.m.!

Information Exchange Articles:

*ERRORS IN THE SKALNATE-PLESO ATLAS
*THE SUN'S "BEAT"--A PULSING SUN?
*AN INNER RING AROUND SATURN
*CYCLONES ON MARS
*SOMETHING WIERD IN THE MILKY WAY
*VOYAGER NEWS AND VENUS UPDATE

PRESIDENT'S REPORT (Continued from Page 1)

It's only 15 minutes from Lincoln, has nice dark skies, the club has its 12½-inch telescope in a small shed there--it's a natural place for members to get together and share their common interest (and their telescopes). Hardly a clear weekend night goes by that there aren't at least two or three members out there enjoying the seeing. Earl assures me that everyone is welcome any night at all, just come on out. If you don't know how to get there, just follow the map below.

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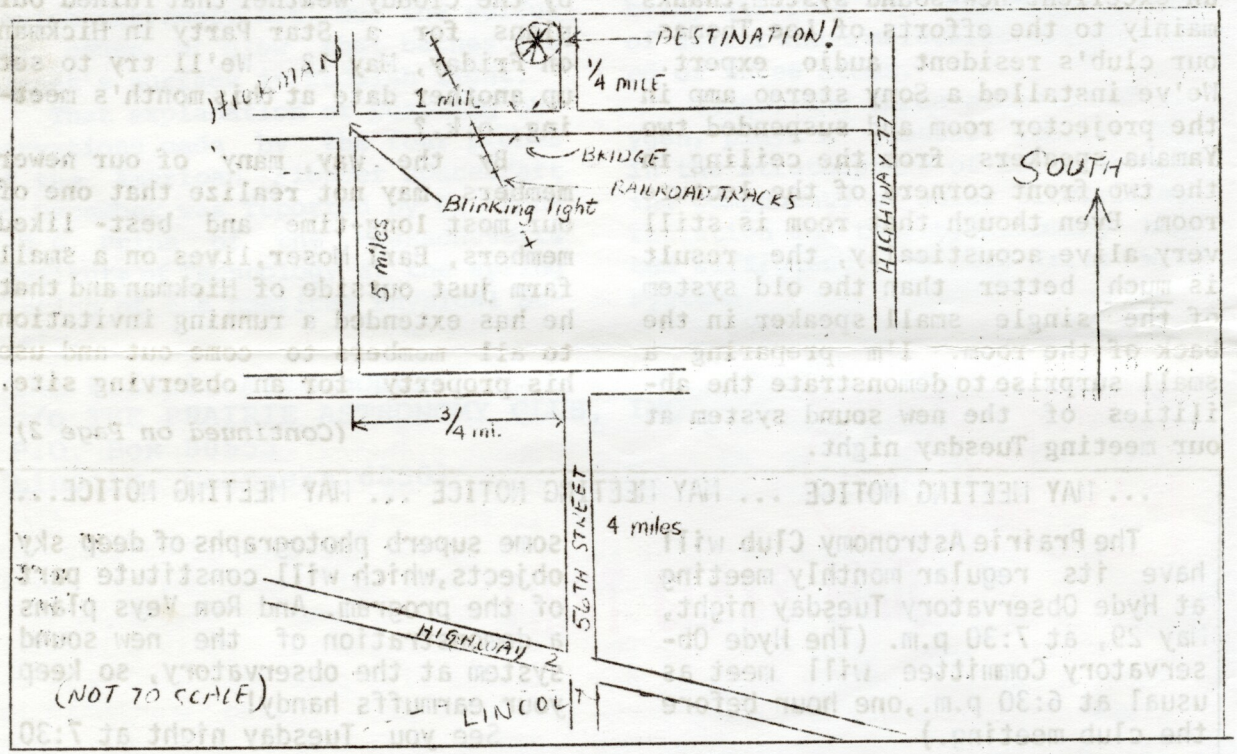

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THE PRESIDENT'S REPORT (Continued from Page 2)

Please notice the survey form in this newsletter. We're seriously trying to run our club the way you want it run and to supply something of interest to everyone. However, we have to know your interests and experience to do it properly. So please take the time to fill out the form and mail it in or bring it to the meeting. We need that information from you!!!

We have some very important and interesting topics to discuss at this month's meeting, plus a few surprises, so please try to be there. See you then.

-- Ron Veys

OBSERVING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT...

This month's sky is dominated by fainter and more difficult objects. In Ursa Major, look for M97, a large planetary nebula known as the Owl Nebula. Located about 1½ degrees south and 1½ degrees east of Beta (Merak), it is barely visible in a 4-inch telescope, although I have heard of it being seen in a 3-inch refractor. It shows up as a faint circular patch with a dark spot somewhat off center.

Less than a degree northwest is M106, a faint edge-on spiral galaxy visible in a six-inch reflector.

Moving into Leo, look for NGC 2903, a spiral galaxy about 1½ degrees straight south of Lambda Leonis. It shows some hints of detail in my eight inch reflector, although it is visible in somewhat smaller telescopes.

A bit easier pair of galaxies to observe are M65 and M66, located midway between Theta and Iota Leonis. Both should be visible in a one degree field and some detail is visible in larger telescopes. About one degree north of this pair is a third galaxy, NGC 3628, which is visible in a six- or eight- inch telescope. It shows a dark lane down the length of the galaxy.

Those with large instruments should sweep the area south of Iota Leonis at low power, for there are about eight galaxies, including three Messier objects, M95, M96, and M105 in that area.

If you are sick of galaxies now, just wait until next month! But for the moment, take a good look at the star Iota Cancri. It is a beautiful orange-blue pair separated by 31 seconds of arc. Moving southward into Hydra, look 1-3/4 degrees south and slightly west of Mu Hydrae for NGC 3242, a relatively large planetary nebula that shows a bluish tint in large instruments. The nebula has an 11th magnitude central star and is estimated to be under 2000 light - years distant.

--David Knisely

VENUS ATMOSPHERE IS LADEN WITH SULFUR SAYS NEW THEORY

Although the burning atmosphere beneath the clouds of Venus is clear, it appears to be in a ferment of chemical reactions in which sulfur predominates.

Not only do the reactions absorb solar energy, helping to make the region extremely hot, but the sulfur may cause a glow that bathes the planet's surface in reddish light.

That explanation of puzzling observations made by the four probes of the American Pioneer spacecraft in December was reported by Dr. Ronald G. Prinn of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at the spring meeting of the American Physical Society.

Data from a University of Arizona experiment showed that the intensity of sunlight diminished as the probe plunged through the Venusian atmosphere from 20 miles aloft to 6 miles.

Dr. Prinn believes the light was being absorbed by thiozone, a form of sulfur whose molecules are composed of three atoms.

Ozone, the three-atom form of oxygen, plays a somewhat similar role in the stratosphere of Earth, absorbing components of solar ultraviolet radiation and thereby becoming heated sufficiently to help drive wind systems.

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