



The Prairie Astronomer

VOL 24 NUMBER 2

2. 83

MAR 24
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NASA cutbacks--

On December 15th the National Aeronautics and Space Administration announced the cancellation of yet another one of its plans to put a planetary probe into space.

The reason for this cutback was budgetary. NASA had sought an appropriation of 5.6 billion dollars for the fiscal year, a substantial increase over last year. But by December it had become evident that increased defense spending would probably force a decrease rather than an increase in funds for NASA.

It had planned to send a five ton probe to mars but now that has been pushed back several years.

In order to obtain the maximum return from the funds that will be available, NASA has scheduled some scaled down versions of several complex space probes. Some will be pushed back others will be scaled down and yet others will, yes even be cancelled.

All these plans must be viewed against a background of budgetary problems. Last August, during hearings before the U. S. Senate committee on aeronautical and space sciences, the total cost for a manned shot to mars, which is still be thought about would run between 60 to 100 billion dollars. This figure need not be thought of as excessive if spread over the next 20 years says Senator Clinton P. Anderson of New Mexico. But he also stated we are faced with a number of economical conditions now, unemployment, inflation, etc. that we had not considered when we made such brash goals for the space program.

I think the general public has a great misconception of the space program, its uses, benefits and because of this it will be hard to justify the great expenditures needed to keep it going, he stated. I only hope the future will prove brighter.

Hope you enjoyed this little article. It really isn't that much different than you've been reading in the various columns and editorials of Sky and Tele and Astronomy magazines lately---except this was an article published in Sky and Tele in the year 1966. See, just like soap operas, the characters may change but the plot remains the same.

GUEST SPEAKER AT PLANETARIUM

Mueller Planetarium kicked off its 25 year celebration March 3rd with a guest speaker from NASA. Dr. Steven Hawley an astro physicist who will fly up on STS 12 gave a very interesting talk and film presentation.

It was refreshing to hear it from the horses mouth and not from the overly wired news media. An overview of what the shuttle program has accomplished in the past as well as an in depth view of missions to come were well received.

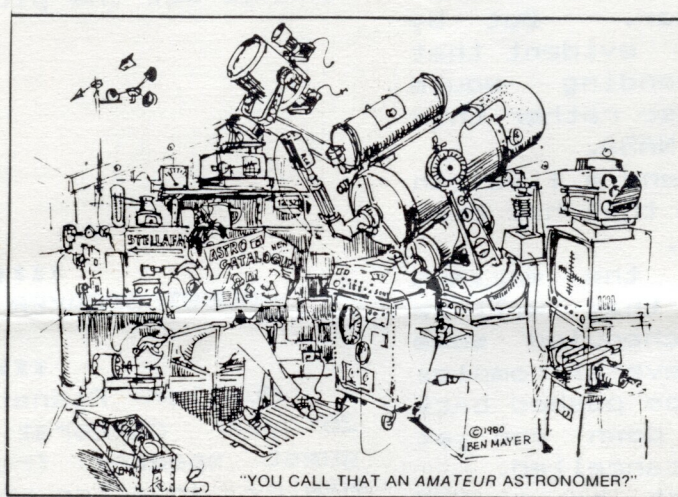
Also some film of the last mission was shown. It gave us some close up views of the two privately owned satellites that were launched. Scenes that were not shown on T.V. Muellers celebration continues through the month so plan to attend. Congratulations to Jack Dunn and his staff for the effort.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE...

The National Society for the Advancement of Female Astronomers welcomes to their ranks Farrell Marie, daughter of Russ and Pat Genzmer. Born Feb 3. She is already showing traits of an astronomer such as staying up for extended periods through the ni(yawn)te.

I'm sorry for the delay in the newsletter this month but I've had some tough health problems that kept me on my back for about the last 10 days of Feb., coupled with the new borne made for a difficult month. Thanks also to Bev Hetzel your Vice President who took over for me at the Feb meeting.

The information and news notes from the feb. meeting will follow in the March newsletter.



The Prairie Astronomer is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club.

- Membership structure.
1. Newsletter subscriber only, \$6.00. Over 21 years of age no voting privileges (newsletter only).
 2. Junior member (New) \$6.00. 21 years of age and less. Receive newsletter and club voting privileges. No Sky and Tele subscription through club at this rate.
 3. Regular member \$19.00. Receives newsletter, voting privileges, Sky and Telescope subscription with dues through club. No age restriction.
 4. Family members \$21.00. Same as regular member, but receives 2 votes in elections.
- Numbers 2,3, and 4 above also can receive as an elective, Astronomy Magazine through the club at \$12.00 per year. Address membership renewals to: Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc., P.O. Box 80553, Lincoln Ne. 68501. address all articles for inclusion in the newsletter to Russ Genzmer 5301 South 30th. Lincoln Ne. 68516. All articles must be received 10 days before the meeting date.

Observing Chairman's Report.

***** NEWSWORTHY NOTES *****

The Amateur Astronomers Handbook third edition by James Muirden. This book covers everything the amateur needs to know for telescope mountings, maintenance, observatories, atmosphere, observing planets, stars and comets.

This book is 472 pages long with plenty of tables and easy reading even for the beginner. The book retails for \$16.95 but group discounts are available at 40% discount on quantities of 5 or more. If interested we can discuss it at the march meeting.

New membership structure.

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This structure allows younger members to be full voting members and get a choice of magazines to subscribe to through the club. It also allow regular members who subscribe to Astronomy "on the side" to receive it at a better discount.

This case is now closed--.

GUEST SPEAKER AT NEXT MEETING

Be sure and plan now to attend our March meeting. We will have LT. COL. Michael P. Schwitters from SAC in Omaha as a speaker. His talk will be around Astronomy in the Air Force. More information to follow in the March newsletter.

Start March observing with the bright spiral galaxy NGC 2403, located a degree west of sixth magnitude 51 Camelopardalis. It can be seen as a small fuzzy spot in a pair of binoculars and larger scopes show the bright elliptical nucleus and mottled outer haze with a dark spot to one side of the nucleus.

In Cancer be sure to take a look at the faint but rich open cluster M67 about two degrees west of alpha Cancri. It contains several hundred stars ranging from 10th to 16th magnitude in the space of about 15 minutes of arc. Also in Cancer is the 11th magnitude spiral galaxy NGC 2775 located 3 1/2 degrees south and a half degree east of chi Cancri. It is elongated and has a slightly brighter center but otherwise show little detail.

In Leo is the fairly bright galaxy NGC 2903, located about a degree and a half south of lambda Leonis. It appears as an elliptical patch of light with a brighter center and somewhat mottled outer edge. It should be easy in a six inch.

With the many bright springtime galaxies coming up I think that now is the time to mention the Astronomical League's two deep sky observing programs, the Messier Club and the Hershel Club. Each club is set up to aid those interested in locating and observing many deep sky wonders beyond the few show objects known to casual observers. The league publishes Observe manuals for both the Messier catalog and the Hershel, each selling for \$2.50 plus 50 cents handling via the Astronomical League Book Service. These manuals list the objects, providing brief descriptions and instructions for locating the objects as well as logging pages for recording observations toward the respective awards available. The Messier Club award consists of an attractive certificate awarded for sighting 70 of the objects in the somewhat modified list of 110 Messier objects with an endorsement of the certificate for seeing all of them. The Hershel Club

award is similar except now the list is that compiled by Sir William Hershel and the number of objects is now 400 of the best objects in the list. These targets, unlike the fairly easy Messier objects, are usually more difficult to see and pose a real challenge to even the experienced observer. Our club has a Messier observing group that meets at the star parties, so if you're interested come out and see the real fun of stargazing. You should be able to get all the help you need in starting your own observing program.

David Knisely

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