



STONEHENGE

The Religious Monument

By Andy Corkill

A fire burns atop the Alter stone in the middle of a very large stone circle, known as Stonehenge. A dead body from a nearby burrough is being cremated. When the body has been thoroughly cremated, there is a procession to the burial mound where the ashes are laid to eternal rest.

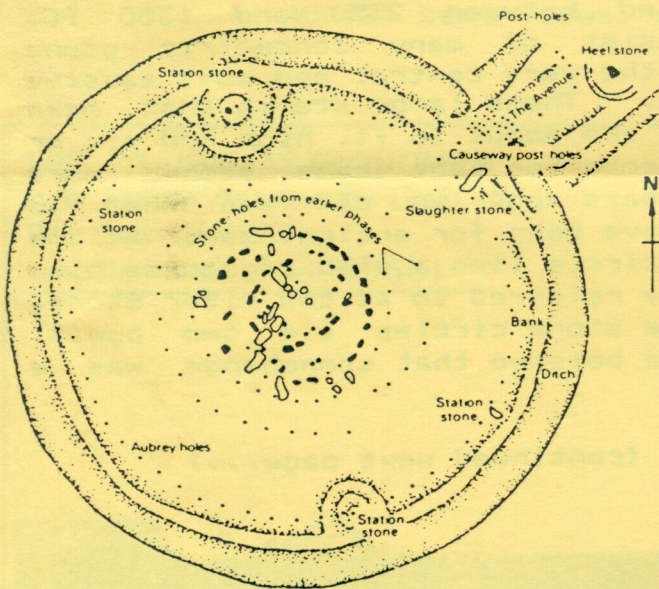
Stonehenge is located on Salisbury plain, Wiltshire, England. It was erected between 2350 and 1350 BC. Stonehenge use to consist of many concentric stone circles, but today only the very central and most massive stones are still standing. These large stones that make up what is still standing are about 16 ft. high and six or seven feet thick. Remembering that these stones were erected thousands of years ago, you can see what an incredible feat it must have been for ancient man. At the very center of the stone circle lies a slab of course blue marble. This is commonly referred to as the Alter Stone. On the outskirts of the stone circles lie two burial mounds, and many people beleive that stonehenge was a religious monument.

(continued next page...)

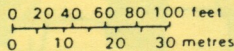


Ancient man was very religious as well as superstitious. He didn't have answers to unexplained events like we have today. And he explained these events through many different gods. Many stone circles were erected as temples for the purpose of worshipping these gods and also as a place of burial for the people who lived in the surrounding area. The burial mounds played a major part in the alignment of the stones. In fact, the stones were aligned with the burial mounds and also with the rising and setting sun. This was to signify the respect for the dead as well as the worship of the sun. Stonehenge itself is aligned in this manner, and since Stonehenge is located in the center of a number of burroughs, the facts seem to point to the conclusion that Stonehenge was in fact a religious monument.

Druidism is a very odd religion, and Stonehenge, as well as all the stone circles, has been connected to it. At one time stone circles were known as Druidical rings. Stonehenge was even regarded as the head temple of druidical worship. On one of the stones in the central ring at Stonehenge there are two daggers carved into the rock. Many people believe that they represented the sacrifices that the druids carried out at Stonehenge. A lot of religious ceremony took place at Stonehenge, and this may have been its purpose.



- Upright stones
- Fallen stones
- Pts. post and stone holes



The cremated body is placed in a burial mound. The people hope that the spirit of the dead person will have eternal peace and rest. Then everyone returns to their burroughs and go about their work. They are relieved, for they know they have a place where they can worship, and they know they have a place where they will eventually be buried.

(This has been the first of a three part series concerning Stonehenge. Obviously this isn't the only explanation of Stonehenge. There is still a lot of information to consider before coming to a conclusion. NEXT MONTH...Stonehenge: The Ancient Observatory)

The Prairie Astronomer is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club and is free to all club members. Membership expiration date is always listed in the right corner of the newsletter mailing label. Address all membership renewals to: PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB, INC., P.O. BOX 80553, LINCOLN, NE 68501.

For further club membership information or suggestions contact one of the following: John Lortz (Pres.) 572-1451(Omaha), Ron Veys (V.Pres) 464-1449, Bev Hetzel (Sec.) 435-7881, Lee Thomas (Tres.) 483-5639, or Andy Corkill (Prgm. Chair.) 488-1096. All articles for the newsletter should be sent to newsletter editor, JOHN LORTZ 3119 MAPLEWOOD BLVD. #41, OMAHA, NE 68134, no later than 10 days before each club meeting date.

THE SCALE OF THE GALAXY

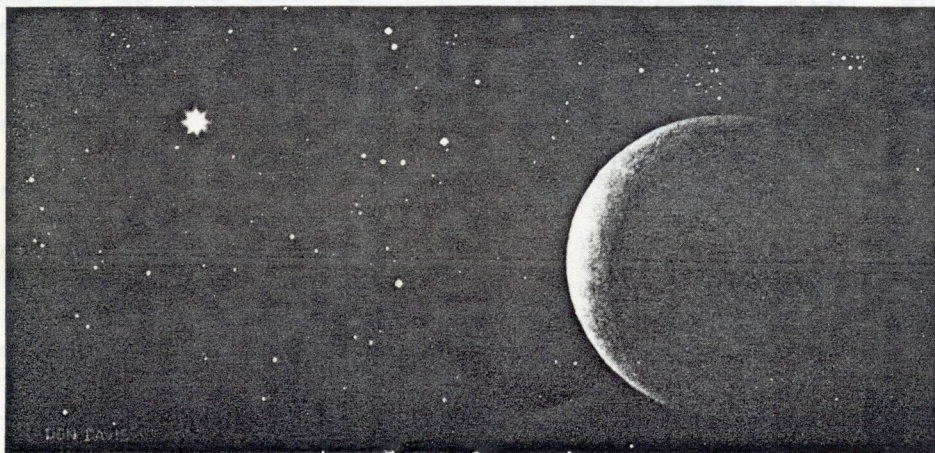
The Milky Way Galaxy is an immense collection of many hundreds of millions of stars, among which is our sun. We live about two-thirds of the way out toward the rim of the Galaxy and so, on a clear evening far from the glare and pollution of cities, we see its crowded center as a band of light across the night sky. Because the Milky Way is so enormous and the stars that make it up so abundant, it is difficult to get a firm grasp of the numbers involved. Here's one way to picture it:

The average distance between star systems in the Milky Way is three light years. The systems may contain a single star, as ours does - or they may be multiple-star systems, like the one of which Van Biesbroeck 8 is a part. Picture in your mind a little green cube three light years on a side. Put the star system at its center. You have now completed Step 1: You have defined the "home turf" of the typical system.

Step 2 is to define the "neighborhood" of the star system. Take 1000 of your little green cubes and assemble them edge-to-edge, like sugar cubes in a box, or like a cosmic Rubik's Cube 10 blocks on a side. This larger cube will contain at least 1000 stars and measures 30 light years along each side. Color it blue for reference.

Now, in step 3, assemble 1000 blue cubes to make a huge red cube 300 light years on a side. How big is the Milky Way Galaxy? Starting from the rim, it takes 100 red cubes to reach to the center. To fill up the Galaxy, more than 100,000 red cubes are needed.

If you're still with me, you will have an appreciation of the stupendous size of our home Galaxy. The sheer size of the place is one probable reason why star-faring civilizations, if they are as common as some believe, have not come calling at our small planet.



1985 MIDSTATES REGIONAL CONVENTION

This years Midstates Regional Convention is being held at Kansas Newman College in Wichita, Kansas on July 12, 13, and 14th. Information on lodging and convention events will be available at the next meeting for anyone interested.

Speakers for the convention will include Dr. Ted Geisert from K-State University, Jose Olivarez, the director of the Wichita Omnisphere, and Dr. David Alexander from Wichita State University. Also, the Wichita Omnisphere will be open to everyone and is showing "The Search For E.T's".

THIS MONTH'S PROGRAM_ _ _ _ _

The program at this months meeting will be given by yours truly, Andy Corkill. The program will be about my recent trip to Great Britain. There is a lot of exciting information to pass along, so don't miss it.

Andy Corkill
Program Chairman

As you all know, Astronomy Day 1985 was held about a month ago. Because the Prairie Astronomer is printed and sent a few days before the meeting, and Astronomy Day was on the Saturday before the meeting, no mention of it was made in last months letter.

Well, as you might have expected, this years event was quite successful, and it was all made possible by the excellent turn out of club members and the support everyone offered all during the day.

As always, we had a nice telescope display offering the public a look at a variety of club members scopes and explanations on how different telescopes work. In the main display area the public was presented with three computer displays, a stereo video tape display, and large variety of astronomy related books to browse through.

Since Halleys Comet will arrive before the year is out, we also set up a comet display showing when and where to look for Comet Halley this winter. We even sold some Halley t-shirts and Comet Halley viewing guides.

All in all it was another fine Astronomy Day. We would like to thank all of you who helped put the event on, especially Bev Hetzel for getting everything organized.

OBSERVING CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

June star parties are on the 14th and 21st. True deep sky lovers will love the spring skies because of the abundance of galaxies visible. A good starting point is the bright spiral M106 located five degrees east and 1/2 degree south of Chi Ursa Majoris. Visible in a 2.4 inch refractor, this galaxy appears as a moderate sized hazy elliptical patch with a bright central region and faint curved fans of light on each end when viewed in an eight inch reflector.

An interesting group of galaxies in southern Canes Venatici is the pair NGC4656 and 4631, both about 5 1/2 degrees south and three degrees west of Alpha. 4631 is a long and fairly bright cigar shaped patch of light that shows some patchy light and dark detail in an eight or ten inch reflector although the galaxy itself can be seen in a four inch with ease. The galaxy has a small elliptical companion along side, but I doubt that anything under eight inches in aperture would show it. More interesting but somewhat fainter is NGC4656, located less than a degree southeast of 4631. It is an irregular galaxy that is shaped somewhat like a fish hook, but the hook feature is difficult in anything under an eight inch.



by
David Knisley

A nice edge on spiral is NGC4244, located 6 1/2 degrees due west of Alpha Canum. It is an 11th magnitude narrow streak of light that should be easy in a six inch. And, if by some strange quark of fate, you are tired of looking at galaxies, take a look at M3, the spectacular globular cluster 4 1/2 degrees east of Beta Comae. It shows many stars in a six inch, and in an eight inch the sight is glorious. Another globular cluster in the area is NGC5466, located 4 3/4 degrees east of M3. 5466 shows a few stars at high power with an eight inch telescope but isn't very spectacular.

HALLEY FACTS...

(from the Westminster Astronomical Society Newsletter)

PERIOD: 76 years

FIRST OBSERVED: 239 B.C.

FIRST PREDICTED RETURN: 1759

EPIHEMERIS: The following events are for the coming apparition:

September: visible in large backyard telescopes

October: visible in modest backyard telescopes

December: visible in binoculars and maybe naked eye

January: comet brightens, but sinks lower in west

February: invisible as it goes around the sun

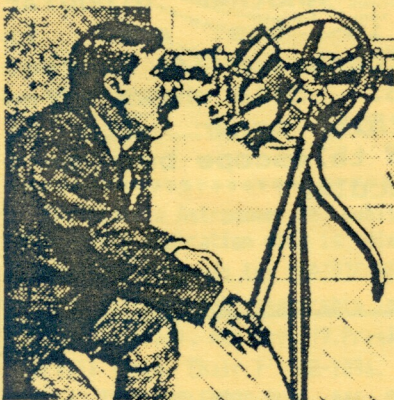
March: reappears as morning object

April: best views; closest to Earth on 11th

THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER
c/o Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc.
P.O. Box 80553
Lincoln, Nebraska 68501



FIRST CLASS MAIL



Earl Moser 9/85R
Hickman, NE 68372