

The *Prairie Astronomer*

The Official Newsletter Of The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc.
December 1997

Volume 38 Issue #12

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NEW PAC OFFICERS

President: Dave Knisely
Vice President: Doug Bell
Program Chair: Erik Hubl
Secretary: Dave Scherping
Treasurer: Liz Bergstrom

Dates Set For 1998 PUBLIC STAR PARTIES at MAHONEY STATE PARK

Friday May 29th
Friday June 26th
Friday August 21st
Friday September 25th
Friday October 23rd

All events held at Mahoney S.P. soccer field, beginning at sunset. Be sure to add these dates to your calendar and support PAC's & OAS's efforts to bring astronomy to the general public.

DECEMBER & JANUARY MEETINGS & EVENTS

PAC MEETING

TUESDAY DECEMBER 30, 1998, 7:30 PM
at Hyde Memorial Observatory

NSP-5 PLANNING MEETING

THURSDAY, 7:30 PM
at Mahoney State Park lodge

PAC MEETING

TUESDAY JANUARY 27 1998, 7:30 PM
at Hyde Memorial Observatory

December's Program will be:

"OBSERVING PLANETARY NEBULAE"

Dave Knisely will present a program on the origin of planetary nebulae and their classification. Dave will share with us some tips on finding and observing planetary nebulae and will suggest some representative planetaries for amateur viewing. This is sure to be an interesting program so come early. The meeting starts at 7:30 PM.

If you would like to present a program at the monthly Prairie Astronomy Club Meeting, call **Erik Hubl** at 488-1698 or email at ehubl@ci.lincoln.ne.us

DEDICATION OF NEW OBSERVATORY AT UNL

The new parking garage observatory at UNL is scheduled for a formal dedication ceremony with Chancellor Moeser at 4:00 p.m. on Tuesday January 13, 1998 (subject to possible change).

All PAC members are invited to attend.

If you would like to come contact Martin Gaskell (home: 464-9664 or gaskell@unlinfo.unl.edu) for details of location of the ceremony.

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The Prairie Astronomer is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc. Membership expiration date is listed on the mailing label. Membership dues are: Regular \$20/yr, Family \$22/yr. Address all new memberships, renewals, or questions to: The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc., PO Box 80553, Lincoln, NE 68501. For other club information, contact one of the following: Dave Knisely -President (402) 223-3968, Doug Bell - V.P. (402) 489-8197, Liz Bergstrom - Treasurer (402) 464-2038. All newsletter comments and articles should be sent to: Dave Scherping, 640 S. 30th St., Lincoln, NE 68510 (402) 477-2596 or e-mail dscherping@juno.com ten days prior to the club meeting. Club meetings are held the last Tuesday of each month at Hyde Memorial Observatory in Lincoln, NE.

OBSERVING REPORT

For January 1998

By: Doug Bell

New Moon: January 28, 1998
Lunar object: Libration features
Planet: Saturn
Messier monthly: M 15
Top 40: Deneb
Deep sky: NGC 1501
Challenge: Stephen's Quintet

Quote of the month: "Look how big the Moon is Daddy!"
- anonymous 4 year old

Lunar feature: Libration features

Would you believe that we can see almost 59% of the Moon's surface. It's true. Because the Moon's orbit is an ellipse, it cannot be totally tidally locked. The slop is known as libration and gives us a peek around the corners. Look for monthly libration charts in the astronomy magazines.

Planet of the month: Saturn

The Planets are disappearing quickly. Thankfully Saturn still rules the roost. A beautiful sight, as always.

Messier Monthly: M 15

A globular in Pegasus. Globular season run about the same as baseball season. So here's a last chance look until next year.

Top 40: Deneb

Look quick to see the Cygnus become the Christmas cross at sunset. The brightest star Deneb is around 1,500 light years away, yet still shines at magnitude 1.25. Its absolute magnitude is a whopping -7. That is, if it were "only" 10 parsecs away it would still be a magnitude -7 object. At that distance our Sun would be an insignificant magnitude 4.8.

Deep Sky: NGC 1501

A faint planetary in Camelopardalis. And who would consider a giraffe to be half camel and half leopard anyway?

Challenge: Stephan's Quintet (NGC 7317)

Quintet means five, but how many can you see? A couple are easier but it gets difficult fast. As always, dark skies and big scopes are the rule.

Astro-Trivia:

Last month's answer: The third brightest planet? Rarely seen, often overlooked, hardly bigger than our Moon....Mercury.

Astronomer's use three physical principles to collect light. The oldest is refraction, the next is reflection. What is the newest way that astronomers intensify an image?

SECRETARY'S REPORT

Minutes From The November PAC Meeting

By: Liz Bergstrom

The 25 November 1997 meeting of the Prairie Astronomy Club was called to order at 7:30 PM by president, Doug Bell. Dour brought up a trivie question: "If you were on the first expedition to the Alpha Centauri System, what constellation would you see when you looked back toward Earth?"

There were no guests at the meeting. However, there was a guest at the Hyde supervisor's meeting which preceeds the PAC meeting. Jill, a student at Southeast High School, came to the Hyde meeting to advise that the school had formed an astronomy club and had about 40 members. She wanted to know if someone from Hyde could meet with and assist their club.

Doug, our illustrious president, heartily apologized for the October meeting cancellation due to the 13.5" very heavy & wet snow storm of 26 October. At the time of the cancellation, he thought it was best to do so. He did not know at the time that the parking lot and road to Hyde had been plowed and that the observatory was accessible to the members. This meeting was the one in which the next term officers were to be elected.

EVENTS:

On Thursday night the 9th of October & Friday night the 10th of October Jim Reinert, of PAC, went to Omaha to 2 of the 3 night lecture series on astronomy & the Bible by Jim Burr of Jim's Mobile Industries. Jim Reinert also helped with the telescopes that were set up for public viewing after the lectures. Jim thought it would be a great idea for those who had received certificates from helping during the locature series to pool the certificates and donate them for a use to be decided upon by the club. Thank you Jim for your suggestion. [See page 8 of this newsletter - Ed]

CLUB BUSINESS:

Erik Hubl, who volunteered this year to spearhead the ordering of the 1998 Guy Ottwell and the 1998 RASC observer handbooks for the club, said that the proces break is \$12.00 per handbook. Erik said that this is the last chance to order and that the lsit would be passed around again for those who still wished to order. The order list must be completed at this meeting night as Erik plans to send in the orders tomorrow 26 November 1997 in hopes that delivery will be sometime during the month of December 1997.

NEWS:

Election of officers was brought up by the current president, Doug Bell. Doug stated that he did not want to run for president this year. He stated that the office was not all that he had anticipated and was not as bad as he had expected As the outgoing president, Doug thanked all the members for their help and cooperation. Nominations were opened again for additional candidates for the various officer positions. These nominations were:

President: Louis Dorland, Dave Knisely
Vice president: Doug Bell
2nd Vice President: Erik Hubl
Treasurer: Larry Hancock, Liz Bergstrom
Secretary: Dave Scherping

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Secretary's Report

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Vote was opened for the president's office. Louis Dorland declined nomination. Dave said he would honor his nomination. There were no other nominations. Vote was taken and Dave Knisely was unanimously voted into the president's chair.

There were no other nominations for the president in charge of vice. Vote was taken and it was a landslide for Doug Bell as president in charge of vice.

There was only one nomination for the position of second in charge of vice. This office also has the responsibility for lining up the monthly programs for the club. Erik Hubl said that he would do a good job and that he was honored to take the office. He also admonished everyone that when he asked for a program to be presented he expected that person to fulfill their obligation.

The next office voted upon was that of treasurer for the club. Larry Hancock declined nomination. Liz Bergstrom said that she would accept nomination and would do the best job possible in this position. Vote was taken and Liz was ushered in as the new club treasurer.

Liz has previously been nominated again for the secretary position. Liz declined as she was already voted in as the new treasurer. Dave Scherping volunteered to take the secretary position. He said that it would fit in well with editorship of the club newsletter. Vote was taken for this final position and Dave won hands down.

As a result of the elections, your new club officers for the 1997/1998 term will be installed during the December meeting. The new club officers are as follows:

President:	Dave Knisely
Vice President:	Doug Bell
2nd Vice President:	Erik Hubl
Treasurer:	Liz Bergstrom
Secretary:	Dave Scherping

SITE NEWS:

Dave Knisely said that there are some possible very good viewing sites located on NRD land. He is checking with the NRD on the possibility of leasing land at one of their sites for a club viewing site. The land would most likely be southeast of Lincoln and far enough away from the reflected glow and light pollution from the city of Lincoln.

NSP NEWS:

Dave Hamilton, NSP5 coordinator, brought some NSP5 brochures to the meeting and passed them out to members in attendance. John Bruce said that the Valentine High School gave a \$500 donation to NSP4. An 8" Meade telescope was bought with the proceeds and donated to the high school. John also mentioned that there is a need for books about astronomy at the Valentine Public Library and at the high school. Donations of books on astronomy or back copies of Astronomy and Sky & Telescope magazines would be welcome.

MOTION:

Dave Knisely made a motion regarding PAC's co-sponsorship of the NSP parties:

BE IT RESOLVED: The Prairie Astronomy Club's co-sponsorship of the Nebraska Star Party is formally recognized, with the club providing a separate bank account for use by the NSP organizing committee. This account is only for the funds which are to be used exclusively for Nebraska Star Party expenses, consistent with the Articles of Incorporation and the Bylaws of The Prairie Astronomy Club. These funds are not part of the club's main account, nor can these funds be used by the club without the consent of the NSP committee. Also, no debts incurred by the Nebraska Star Party can be assumed by The Prairie Astronomy Club without the consent of the membership of that club. In the event that the Nebraska Star Party evolves into an event which will be run by a separate non-profit organization, the funds in the NSP account will be transferred in full to the NSP sponsoring organization at the time the separate organization is created.

A rider was added to the motion as follows:

RIDER: In the event of the dissolution of NSP, the funds would be divided equally between the sponsoring organizations of the preceding NSP star party.

Dave Scherping moved that the motion be approved by the club members. John Bruce seconded the motion. The club unanimously passed the motion and its rider.

The answer to the trivia question is: You would see the constellation of Cassiopeia.

No further business was brought up for discussion, therefore the meeting was moved and seconded for adjournment.

PROGRAM:

No formal program had been planned. However Martin Gaskell jumped up to advise that the 16" Meade telescope had been finally installed in the dome at the top of the UNL parking garage and that a formal dedication program will be forthcoming. Doug Bell, the outgoing president of the club, asked if Martin would give a small talk on some of the details of the telescope. Martin gave a brief summary of the building of the dome and building housing the controls and lecture space. There are problems with the building and the dome being too close together, {see the September 1997 newsletter for Martin's full report on the construction of the building and dome}. Martin said that the telescope is mounted on a solid pier with an equatorial mount. There is the problem of vibration however. The pier looks to be very solid but the telescope vibrates for 10 seconds or so after being moved. On the day of our meeting, Martin, who had been to the new dome and building that morning, said that a huge pile driver which is being used by the road construction crew {the I-180 bridge near the university was being removed} made the whole parking garage vibrate including the astronomy building and dome. He also said that he experimented with the switch that is to turn off the parking lights at the top of the parking garage. It only turns off a portion of the lights. However in spite of these few problems it is very nice to have the telescope finally installed for use.

Congratulations Martin. Let us all know when the dedication will take place. [See page 1 of this newsletter - Ed]

AN "OK" EVENING

By David Knisely

I am one of those "second-shift" people, whose day doesn't begin until almost noon, and ends in the wee-hours of the morning. This puts a damper on my evening activities, except for Tuesdays and Wednesdays, which I have off for club meetings.

One Monday two months ago, I attended a daytime seminar required for my job, which made for an early end to the work day. That left me free at sunset, so with my scope packed in my minivan and my "portable library" of books under my arm, I heeded the clear-sky call and headed out to Rockford Lake for what I hoped would be a decent "solo" observing session.

I don't like observing alone all that much, but since I can't make too many of the club's star parties, I have gotten at least somewhat tolerant of the solitude I must sometimes face. The radio in my minivan and the coyotes in the hills are usually my only companions.

Things got off to a depressing start, when I realized that I had left my Telrad at home. I had my 8x50 finder, so I could still find things fairly easily, and I continued to get ready to observe. The seeing was not all that good, and my ten inch (which had sat in my warm house during the day) wouldn't settle down all that quickly. The "new age" music piece on the classical radio station I had been tuned to was a little depressing, and I ended up wasting 20 minutes trying to find a planetary nebula which, I later found out, was on Barbara Wilson's "AIN'T-NO" list! It was definitely NOT a good start to the evening.

I fondly recalled the wonderful camaraderie and pristine dark skies of the Nebraska Star Party from a few months ago, and the Rockford Lake scene that night, while fairly good visually, didn't quite measure up to that memory. A wisp of loneliness came drifting in like a forming fog, making me wonder a little why I had bothered to come out to this spot in the first place. I had long ago located all the Messier objects, the Herschel 400, and many other nice but little-known jewels in the night, so, I mused, why was I still obsessed with getting out to observe?

The low point of my depression came when an old beat-up pickup truck with its brights on came driving down the off-road loop right past where I was set up. Blast it! Who in their right mind would go joy-riding on a chilly autumn evening to an unoccupied lake miles from anything on a Monday night!? With some words said under my breath, I was about ready to pack it in right

then, when the truck's lights went out, and it slowly drove up to me, with a young couple inside. The man in the driver's seat said that they were out in the country to look at the stars, and asked me about my telescope. They wanted to know where I got it, how much it cost, and what could I see with it.

They didn't ask to have a look, but somehow, it seemed that it was the logical next step. The woman got out and looked over my scope, as I explained how I built it, while the man continued to ask more intelligent questions about it. I put the scope on Jupiter, and surprisingly, things had settled down quite nicely. The woman oohed and ahed at the crisp view of the belts and moons. I moved the scope to M11, and again blew both of them away with a high-power look at the cluster. The Lagoon Nebula and the starfields of Cygnus held the couple in awed rapture, as I talked about Hyde Observatory, available telescopes, binoculars, magazines, and our astronomy club. As a final shot, I sent them millions of light years away to gaze at the heart of the Great Andromeda Galaxy.




As I did all this, a curious thing began to happen; I began to feel a little better. The equipment problems, the bad seeing, and the loneliness were fading into the night. I was interacting again with people who shared my appreciation of the wonders in the night sky. I was sharing a unique experience with them, one which is at its best both humbling and uplifting. This impromptu "three-person" star party reminded me that the single most important reason we as amateurs have Astronomy clubs or star parties is to SHARE this observing experience. Sharing reinforces and enriches the experience beyond that which only a single lonely individual might have. Once again, I was having fun, which is why I got into this weird and wonderful hobby in the first place.

The couple thanked me profusely and then drove away, leaving me once again alone with the stars. I stood there, watching their tail lights vanish over the hill, and marveled that in this day and age, there are still some people who get a kick from watching the skies, as opposed to Monday Night Football.

I soon went back to hunting down more faint fuzzies, and making some notes on filter performance, but now, the night seemed a little warmer and friendlier than it had first been. In the end, it turned out to be a very good evening overall, and I had two perfect "strangers" to thank for it!

The PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB CALENDAR

JANUARY 1998

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1 <i>New Years Day</i>	2	3
4	5	6 1ST QUARTER MOON 	7	8 NSP-5 Planning Meeting 7:30 pm at Mahoney State Park Lodge	9	10
11	12	13 OBSERVATORY DEDICATION at UNL 4:00 PM ***** FULL MOON	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21 3RD QUARTER MOON 	22	23	24
25	26	27 PAC MEETING 7:30 PM Hyde Observatory !!!	28 NEW MOON 	29	30	31

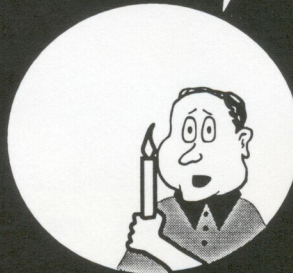
ASTROMAN

BY DAVE SCHERPING

HEY...
WHAT HAPPENED
TO THE SUN ?

LOOKS LIKE THE
KYOTO CLIMATE SUMMIT
FOUND A SOLUTION TO
GLOBAL WARMING !!

Ughh...
Who passed
"Greenhouse
Gas" ?



JMI Presents Astronomy to Home-Schoolers
- A review by John Reinert -

The following summarizes the Jim Burr event held in Omaha: Clear skies and warm weather greeted Jim Burr and his traveling road show as several hundred home schooled children attended a series of lectures on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday evening October 9, 10, and 11. Joint efforts to support the event with club members' telescopes were made by both the OAS and PAC as just under a dozen telescopes were set up in a parking area adjacent to the Omaha Memorial School, 840 No. 72nd Street. A wide variety of celestial objects were targeted by club members each evening with Mars appearing briefly in the southwestern sky, Jupiter, its moons, a waxing Earth's moon, and Saturn all shining brightly throughout the evening. An early evening capture of the planet Uranus (Mag. 5.6) was accomplished by John W. Reinert using the PAC 13" Dobsonian, which added to the planetary parade as its greenish glint finally showed itself later that first night. The seeing was somewhat improved as low clouds and blustery conditions blew in on Friday and additional objects were shown to interested latecomers including M57, M31, and a double star in Lyra. If the wide eyed stares of the youthful crowd were any indication, Jim Burr's presentation inside the gymnasium coupled with our expert stargazing outside will ensure renewing interest in astronomical programs in the weeks and months ahead. OAS club members are pooling many of the incentives offered by JMI to procure needed telescope hardware for the club. A similar option could be explored by PAC if there is sufficient club interest.

John (jr6@aol.com)

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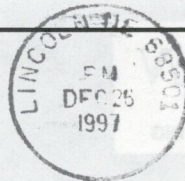
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Next PAC Meeting
December 30, 1997
7:30 PM
Hyde Observatory

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12-97

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