



# The Prairie Astronomer

The Official Newsletter Of The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc.

February 2002

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 NEB-STAR [www.neb-star.org](http://www.neb-star.org)

## FEBRUARY'S PROGRAM:

February's program: check PAC Website

**PAC-LIST:** If you have an e-mail address and are not on the PAC List, you may subscribe by submitting an e-mail to [list@4w.com](mailto:list@4w.com). Write "Subscribe PAC-List" in the body of the e-mail.

## NEWSLETTER UPDATE

Those who wish to help with publishing and postage costs by receiving only the on-line version of the newsletter should contact Liz Bergstrom at 464-2038. Mark Dahmke or Liz can give you the logon account and password for access. You may receive both the mailed version and the on-line version if you wish.

## Eyepieces for sale

5.2mm Lanthanum (Orion) \$80  
 6.7mm Series 3000 Plossl 30  
 10mm Lanthanum (Vixen) 75  
 15mm Super Plossl 45  
 2x Orion Shorty Barlow 30  
 All eyepieces are in very good to excellent shape.  
 Call: Dave Churilla, 402-467-1514  
 Or email: [weber2@inebraska.com](mailto:weber2@inebraska.com)

## CLUB EVENTS

### PAC MEETING

Tuesday, February 26, 2002, 7:30 PM  
at Hyde Memorial Observatory

### NSP PLANNING MEETING

Thursday, March 14, 2002  
Mahoney State Park

### CLUB STAR PARTY

Friday, March 15, 2002  
Olive Creek S.R.A.

### PAC MEETING

Tuesday, March 26, 2002, 7:30 PM  
at Hyde Memorial Observatory

### Mahoney Star Party Dates

May 17<sup>th</sup>, 5 days after new moon  
 June 14<sup>th</sup>, 4 days after new moon  
 July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2 days after new moon  
 September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2 days before 3rd quarter.

### Astronomy Day

April 20th at Mueller Planetarium

## CONTENTS:

Secretary's Report - By Lee Taylor	Page	2
Hyde Schedule	Page	2
Star Chart	Page	3
Tom Gehringer Passes Away by Jack Dunn	Page	4
Asteroid Named in Honor of Tom Gehringer	Page	4
New Scope Owners Night by Brian Sivill	Page	6
Public Survey for Input to the Planetary Decadal	Page	6
Survey	Page	7
PAC Calendar	Page	8
Club Viewing Site Directions and List of Club Officers		

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 and renewals to: The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc., PO Box 5585, Lincoln, NE 68505-0585. For other club information, please contact one of the club officers listed on the last page of this newsletter. Newsletter comments and articles should be submitted to: Mark Dahmke, PO Box 80266, Lincoln, NE 68501 or [mdahmke@4w.com](mailto:mdahmke@4w.com), no less than ten days prior to the club meeting. The Prairie Astronomy Club meets the last Tuesday of each month at Hyde Memorial Observatory in Lincoln, NE.

# Secretary's Report

By: Lee Taylor

## Prairie Astronomy Club Minutes for Tuesday January 29, 2002

Dave Knisley called the meeting to order. We had four new visitors to the meeting as well as several new people with new telescopes to get help with.

Jupiter and Saturn are still beautifully placed for viewing (when weather cooperates). There is an occultation of Saturn with the Moon on Feb. 20.

Hyde news: First the bad news, the grant for the solar panels didn't come through, but it's not the last chance (keep hoping). Also, the 12.5" is in useful condition again, THANKS Ron and Rick!

Hyde events: Any volunteers wishing to help out should contact Dave Churilla for the 11th and 18th of February for two LARGE groups out on those dates.

Astronomy Day 2002 will be April 20th at Mueller Planetarium. Anyone wishing to help out that day contact Jack Dunn.

The new electronic PAC newsletter needs articles so if you've done anything of interest, write to Mark about it so he can put it in the newsletter. Also, if you're interested, you can contact him about getting the electronic version only and save the club some postage.

Treasurer's Report: We have some items in our inventory for sale, jackets, caps, etc. If you'd like one, see Liz. We expect our bylaw required audit to be completed sometime in the next month. Finally, the new electronic newsletter saved us \$4.76 this month, but the increase in copy and postal costs more than made up for it.

NSP brochures are here! Pick one up to learn more about the Nebraska Star Party (or visit the PAC or NSP websites!)

Adjourn to Program: Telescope Premier night!

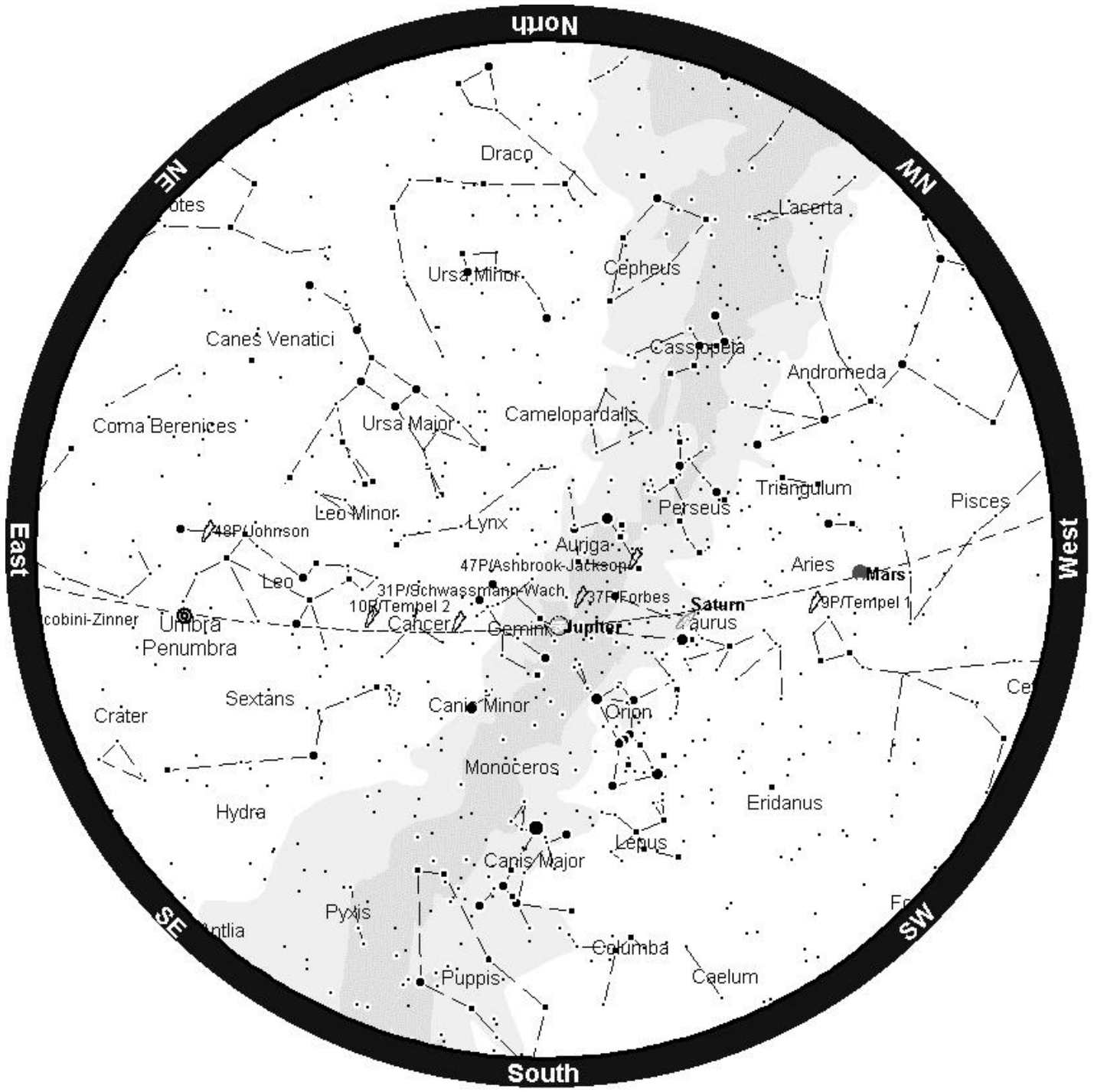
Respectfully submitted by:

Lee Taylor

## Hyde Schedule

	<u>Team Leader</u>	<u>Telescope Operators</u>		<u>Supervisor</u>
2/23/02	Brian Sivill	Dan Delzell	Jared Delzell	Rick J
3/2/02	Dave Hamilton	Joe Babcock	Jeff Campbell	
3/9/02	Bill Wells	Justin DeVries	AJ Benker	
3/16/02	Dave Churilla	Joey Churilla	Bob Leavitt	Erik H
3/23/02	Brian Sivill	Dan Delzell	Jared Delzell	Rick J
3/30/02	Jeff King	Steve Lloyd	Dave Hamilton	Dave C

# March Star Chart



## Tom Gehringer Passes Away

by Jack Dunn

Our friend, and GPPA member Tom Gehringer passed away peacefully Saturday, January 12 following his lengthy battle with cancer. An Omaha native, Tom had been interested in space since hearing Sputnik on his dad's Ham radio. He bought his first telescope while in the seventh grade. Tom received his B.S. in Architectural Studies, University of Nebraska, Lincoln, 1977. Later he found the way to combine his love of astronomy with an interest in teaching as he received his B.S. Secondary Education University of Nebraska, Omaha in 1992. He began teaching in the Omaha Public Schools and took over the planetarium at Burke High School to make it nationally recognized.



An active member of the Omaha Astronomical Society, he was currently the vice-president of the club. As an avid amateur astronomer, he observed the night sky whenever he could, often taking his wife and boys out to see something spectacular in the heavens. Seeking to further challenge his students, Tom participated in the first Research Based Science Education program, a program sponsored by the National Optical Astronomy Observatories and the National Science Foundation. The project allows students to use real astronomical data on active galactic nuclei and novae to do research - leading his students to national recognition and a trip to the annual meeting of the American Astronomical Society. Tom also created an honors astronomy program at Burke High and was most recently engaged in upgrading the school's planetarium facilities and planning for an observatory. Tom leaves behind wife Pat and his two sons Eric and Brian. Memorials to St. Bernards Renovation Campaign or Burke High Scholarship Fund.

We have been notified by sources at the International Astronomical Union that amateur astronomer and NSO/GONG engineer Roy Tucker has donated an asteroid from his discovery list and the IAU Committee is unanimous in voting to have the asteroid named for Tom.

### Asteroid Named in Honor of Tom Gehringer

Asteroid 1997 AT17 is now officially called (31086) Gehringer.



Tom Gehringer taught at Burke High School in Omaha. He participated in an NOAO Teacher Enhancement program called RBSE in 1998, and so had access to images of M31 from Kitt Peak telescopes. His students analyzed the images and contributed to the discovery of 73 novae. They reported their findings at the January 2000 AAS Meeting in Atlanta, a story which was picked up by Sky & Telescope and more. Tom Gehringer was a source of inspiration to the teaching profession for his dedication to students and colleagues while dealing with incredible health obstacles. For more information see: <http://www.noao.edu/outreach/press/pr00/pr0001.html>, <http://www.skypub.com/news/000120.html> and <http://www.noao.edu/outreach/rbse/nova.html>.

R. A. Tucker at Goodricke-Pigott Observatory discovered the asteroid on Jan. 12, 1997. Roy Tucker is an engineer with the National Solar Observatory's GONG project, and an amateur astronomer. He began making astrometric observations of asteroids in October of 1996. After only about a month, he began making his own asteroid discoveries. He found 1997 AT17 as a relatively bright object in the constellation Gemini in early January 1997. 1997 AT17 or (31086) Gehringer is a Main Belt asteroid about 2 to 4 miles across and takes 5.4 years to orbit the sun once.

The International Astronomical Union (IAU) is the only recognized organization with the authority to officially name astronomical objects. The discoverer of a particular object has the privilege of suggesting a name to an IAU committee of professional astronomers that judges its suitability. The Minor Planet Center (MPC) operates at the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, under the auspices of the IAU and is a nonprofit organization. The MPC is responsible for the efficient collection, (computation,) checking and dissemination of astrometric observations and orbits for minor planets and comets. It is a significant honor for the IAU to name a minor planet (asteroid) after someone. It requires that you discover, or know someone who has discovered, a suitable object. Second, you have to propose and justify the naming, and third, the IAU committee has to agree with you! It's not a rubber stamp procedure. There are more than 30,000 numbered asteroids, but only a small fraction of these have been named. It is not something that can be purchased.

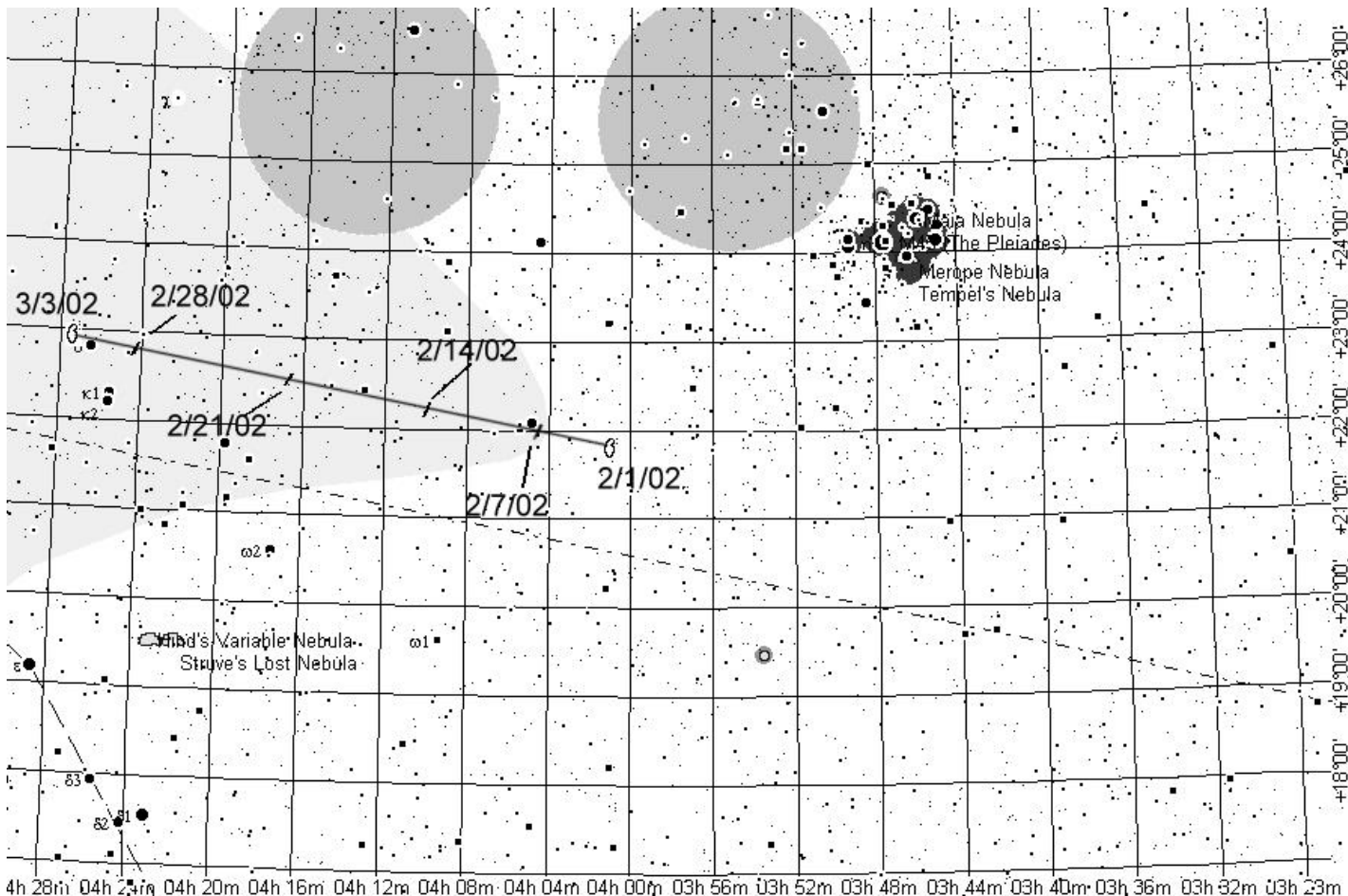


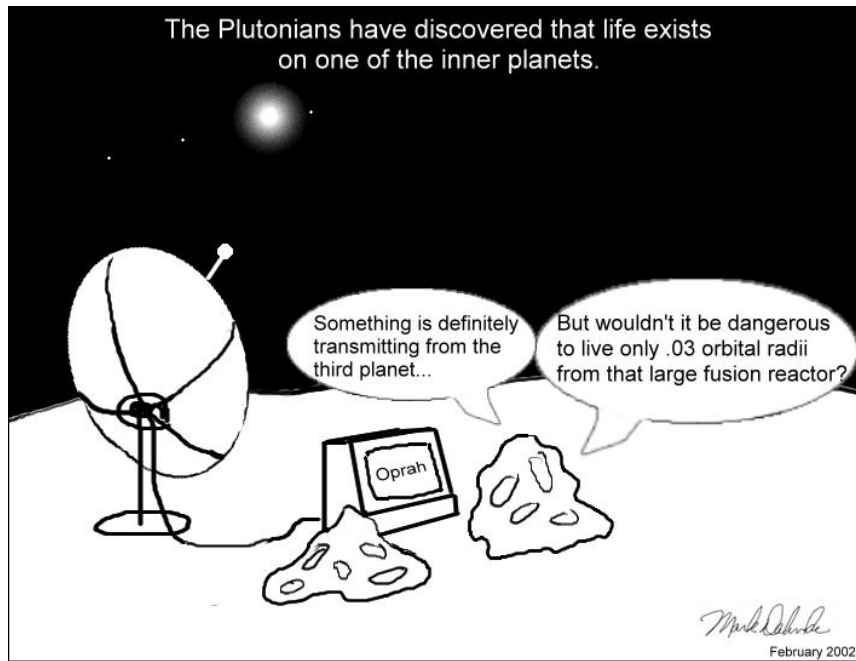
Figure 1: Finder Chart for (31086) Gehringer (20<sup>th</sup> magnitude)

## New Scope Owners Night

by Brian Sivill

On the evening of Tuesday, January 29th, the Prairie Astronomy Club held its second annual "Learn How to Use Your Telescope" program. The program helps people who have just purchased a telescope, or who are looking to buy a telescope. Around 10 non-members showed up with their telescopes needing assistance. Many different varieties of telescopes were present. The evening started off with a 30 minute presentation from Brian Sivill which covered basic telescope knowledge and setup. After the presentation, there was a full complement of friendly club members on hand answering questions and fixing problems. The evening was a success and many people went home very satisfied with their telescopes, eager to put them to use.





### Public Survey for Input to the Planetary Decadal Survey

Mars Missions	91%
Moon Missions	65%
Europa Missions	62%
Pluto/Kuiper Belt Missions	37%
Io Missions	34%
Comet Missions	30%
Titan Missions	28%
Venus Missions	21%
Jupiter Missions	19%
Phobos Missions	12%
Saturn Missions	12%
Asteroid Missions	12%
Mercury Missions	8%
Neptune Missions	5%
Uranus Missions	4%

At the request of NASA, the National Research Council is conducting a planetary science community assessment of the priorities for the U.S. planetary research programs for the next 10 years. The Planetary Society was asked to assist this "decadal survey" by seeking input from the general public about planetary exploration. Data were gathered through January 31, 2002. Over 54,000 people responded to this online survey.

Missions and scientific objectives are decided upon based on many considerations, including anticipated scientific return, cost, feasibility, and public interest. This survey represented one opportunity for members of the public to tell NASA how they would like to be informed about their missions and about their priorities for planetary exploration.

Of the more than 54,000 people who responded to the online survey run by the Planetary Society, more than 90 percent ranked Mars exploration among the top five mission priorities.

Missions to the Moon and Jupiter's moon Europa were the next most popular, were both ranked in the top five by more than 60 percent of respondents. The next closest contender for favorite destination was Pluto, along with its neighboring objects, at 37 percent.

Choice	Overall Rank	Percentage who ranked it 1st
Scientific Exploration—learn everything we can about the planets	4.0	23%
Search for any potential danger to Earth from space	4.2	25%
Determine the suitability of other planets for human colonization	4.2	25%
Search for resources in space for use in space or for export to Earth	4.3	19%
Look for life on other planets	4.5	20%
Establish permanent robotic outposts on other planets	4.8	12%
Learn lessons about the Earth by studying other planets	4.8	11%
Understand the origins of the Solar System	5.4	9%

# THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB CALENDAR

March 2002						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
					1  Sun: 07:00 - 18:16	2  Sun: 06:59 - 18:17  Hyde Observatory open to the public 7-10 p.m.
3  Sun: 06:57 - 18:18	4  Sun: 06:55 - 18:20	5  Sun: 06:54 - 18:21	6  Sun: 06:52 - 18:22	7  Sun: 06:51 - 18:23	8  Sun: 06:49 - 18:24	9  Sun: 06:48 - 18:25  Mercury/Venus 1.5 deg apart.  Hyde Observatory open to the public 7-10 p.m.
10  Sun: 06:46 - 18:26	11  Sun: 06:44 - 18:27	12  Sun: 06:43 - 18:28	13  Sun: 06:41 - 18:30  Europa, Callisto 16" apart at 9:46pm.	14  Sun: 06:39 - 18:31  NSP Meeting, Mahoney, 7:30	15  Sun: 06:38 - 18:32  Club Star Party	16  Sun: 06:36 - 18:33  Hyde Observatory open to the public 7-10 p.m.
17  Sun: 06:35 - 18:34	18  Sun: 18:34 - 06:35	19  Sun: 18:32 - 06:37  Vesta 2' S of Saturn.	20  Sun: 18:30 - 06:38  March Equinox 19:16UT.	21  Sun: 18:29 - 06:39	22  Sun: 18:27 - 06:40	23  Sun: 18:25 - 06:41  Venus near 88 Piscium.  Hyde Observatory open to the public 7-10 p.m.
24  Sun: 18:24 - 06:42	25  Sun: 18:22 - 06:43	26  Sun: 18:20 - 06:44  PAC Meeting 7:30pm Hyde Observatory	27  Sun: 18:19 - 06:45	28  Sun: 18:17 - 06:46	29  Sun: 18:15 - 06:47	30  Sun: 18:14 - 06:48  Hyde Observatory open to the public 7-10 p.m.

**Directions to Olive Creek  
Observing Site**

Shorter:

Take Hwy 77 South out of Lincoln until you get to the Crete corner (junction Hwy 77 and Hwy 33). Go West on Hwy 33 (toward Crete) until you get to SW 72 St. Turn Left (South) on SW 72 St. and go about 5 miles until you get to SW Panama Rd. Turn right (West) until you get to SW 100 St. (SW 100 St does NOT go through to Hwy 33). Turn Left (South) on SW 100 St and go about 1 to 1 1/2 miles until you see the sign and entrance to Olive Creek (this is the West side of the Park). It's on your left (East) side of the road.

More Black Top:

Take Hwy 77 South out of Lincoln until you get to the Crete corner (junction Hwy 77 and Hwy 33). Go West on Hwy 33 (toward Crete) until you get to about SW 114 St. - the first intersection after SW 100 St. (forgot to look at this street sign, sorry - you'll see a sign for Olive Creek though at this road- but don't count on anymore signs after that, I didn't see any). Turn Left (South) on SW 114 St and go about 5 miles or so until you get to SW Panama Rd (you'll see a church and small school on your right). Turn Left (East) and go about a mile to SW 100 St, then turn Right (South) and go 1 to 1 1/2 miles until you see the Olive Creek entrance and sign (on your left hand side of the road).

**OFFICERS  
OF THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB**

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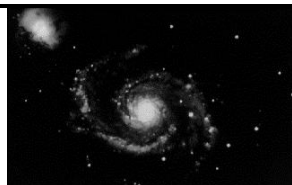
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nanoamps@aol.com

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**The Prairie Astronomer  
C/o The Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc.  
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Lincoln, NE 68505-0585**

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First Class Mail

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**Next PAC Meeting  
February 26, 2002  
7:30 PM  
Hyde Observatory**