



ASEM NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2012



Getting the New Year started off in fine fashion, we received a report from Bill Sheehy regarding his trip to the 40" out in Etlah Missouri on the 29th of October 2011:

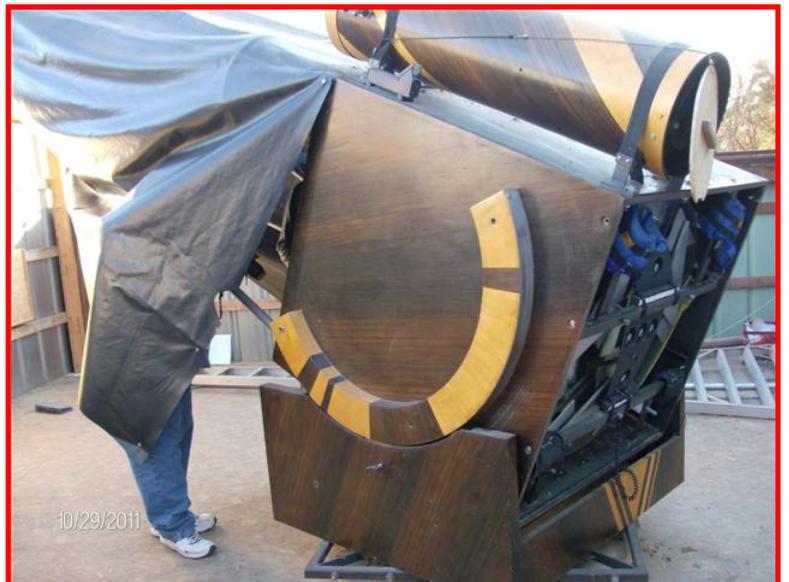
Journey to Etlah

One Saturday in late October, two vehicles turned down a narrow rutted path in the woods near Etlah, Missouri. In the first vehicle were Thane Bopp, Thane's son who is also named Thane, and Jerry Kelley. They all had been here before. In the second vehicle were my wife, Flory, and two newcomers to the scene. Later a third vehicle, driven by Grant Martin, another newcomer, would join us.

The path wound down a slope and through a clump of trees before emerging into a small open area in which stood the object of our trip: a twenty-four foot roll-off observatory housing a massive 40-inch Dobsonian telescope. Lucky Thane owns a share of both and had graciously invited us for an evening of observing.

Talk about aperture envy! Grant was beside himself, and I was dumbstruck literally. As I walked around the outside of the observatory, I brained myself on an inch-thick metal rod that stretched between two upright posts at just above shoulder height. As I stood there rubbing my forehead in pain, Jerry nonchalantly admitted that he had seen it coming but said I was just too quick to warn. Yep, that's what he said.

Anyway, the trip was very informative and (aside from being nearly decapitated) a lot of fun. Since I am planning an observatory of my own, my main goal was to check out the construction of the building, which was designed by



Jerry. But I also wanted to see how a familiar deep sky object like the Andromeda Galaxy looked in the 40-inch, which has a mirror by Swayze. Until then, the largest scope I had ever looked through was my new 16.5-inch Starmaster with a fast Lockwood mirror, and I wondered how much of a difference I could actually see. Although the clouds were rolling in by the time we got everything cleaned up, collimated, and ready to go, I did get my chance sort of.

You have to stand next to the 40-inch to appreciate how big it is. Two people could comfortably sleep in the rocker box (along with the mouse that had constructed a nest out of insulation inside). It reminded me of one of those circus canons that shoot a man into a net. The thing is so gargantuan that a 12.5-inch reflector attached to the top of the mirror box serves as a finder scope. In fact, it had to be stationed catawampus to the side walls just to fit it into the observatory.



Flori (Left), Jerry (Top center) Bill (Bottom Center) Thane (Right)

So what was it like looking through such a behemoth? Just ponder the task of reaching the eyepiece with the scope pointed to the zenith, as it almost was when my turn came. Imagine yourself standing before the steps of an extremely tall orchard ladder, supported on the opposite side, not by another set of sturdy rungs fastened between two legs, but by a thin, bendy aluminum pole attached to the top of the ladder with a small hinge. Only a thin chain, halfway down, between the pole and your side of the ladder keeps the whole contraption from collapsing.

It's dark and, high above, you can barely make out the eyepiece silhouetted against the night sky. Now imagine putting your foot on the first rung and feeling it deform under your weight as the ladder sways. Start to climb, one tentative foot after another. Keep climbing and climbing until you're almost to the top. Look up, and discover that

despite being higher than you've ever been on a ladder before, you're less than half way there! Pause, take a deep breath to control your quaking, and proceed with the climb. Up, and up, and up you go.



Bill ascending to heaven

The jokes about altitude sickness and nose bleeds that emanate from the darkness below hardly instill confidence. You remember someone remarking that he had once been as high as the rung just below the top, but you're sure you won't have to go that high. Then, just as you think you must have reached the eyepiece, you look up and realize, to your horror, that you may indeed have to climb to that dreaded next-to-last rung. You almost decide to terminate the climb; but you don't.

And then, at long last, there you are! Seventeen feet in the air, atop a trembling aluminum tuning fork, your palms moist despite the cold night air. Trying desperately to focus all your attention on the eyepiece in front of you without looking down, you gingerly crane your neck until your eye lines up with the exit pupil. To your great dismay, nothing much is visible, not even a star.

You inform those below, and they shout back, "It's cloudy, it's cloudy." After such a long, perilous climb, however, you are reluctant to descend in total defeat. You conclude that the object the Andromeda Galaxy must have moved out of the field of view. Ever so carefully, you try to move the scope with your right hand while your left hand maintains a death grip on the ladder.

No good. You will have to let go of the ladder completely and reach out with both hands to reposition the scope. Slowly, like an astronaut working on the Hubble, you unclench your left fist, stretch out your arm and gently grasp the end of the eyepiece cage. Having only the unsteady ladder itself to push against, you nudge the scope until, at the top of the field, Andromeda just comes into view.

Even though it's hardly what you expected from such a large mirror, at least you've seen something. At that height, even a cloud-smear smudge constitutes a successful observation. You shout out triumphantly, relieved that you can finally put both hands back on the ladder and descend to the safety and comfort of Terra Firma. And so you do.



The journey is half the fun! (Another expedition may be in the offing for those who also suffer from aperture fever and would like to take the cure.)

REGULAR CONTRIBUTORS OR USUAL SUSPECTS – YOU DECIDE

MARV STEWART

I was interested in the night sky before I knew there was a science called astronomy. Living in a small town in southern Illinois meant that you could walk out into the yard at night and see the Milky Way. There were three street lights on our street; all three were blocked by trees. So I could lay on the lawn and look up at the night sky and see the Milky Way and the one group of stars I knew, the Big Dipper.

It wasn't until I was in college I was able to take an astronomy course. Since I had a job working on the local newspaper I elected to go to the Junior College. I remember very little about the class, but somewhere in that time I found an old issue of National Geographic that showed the night sky in the configurations of the Greek myths. I gently removed that article from the magazine and got a plastic bag from my mom that just fit it and I would carry that map with me for the next five years.

On Valentines Day 1961, I enlisted in the Air force. I had considered the Army and the Navy, but my chances of seeing the world and getting to get more education were better in the Air force. And, I was able to do both. I was disappointed to be made military policeman, but they needed them everywhere. Also, this gave me the opportunity to travel and spend a lot of time alone in the dark, with my National Geographic sky maps. My four years turned into four years and nine months, because I was in what the USAF felt was a critical career field.

I studied the night skies of Texas, the Philippines, Taiwan, England, Denmark and Louisiana. By the time I was discharged, I knew the sky and stars and planets pretty well and had developed an interest in how men had navigated by them. Its still an interest of mine today.

Seeing the stars from different latitudes helped develop that interest. Now I am looking forward to the celestial events of 2012, and having the chance to share them with you.

AMY WHITE

Creve Coeur Camera has a branch store on Zumbahl Road in St. Charles. A couple of days after Christmas, I made a visit to the store to promote ASEM and all the friendly and helpful experience our members have to offer. The salesman I talked to said a lot of the telescopes people buy from CCC get returned, as the purchasers or recipients just can't figure out how to use them. So he was grateful to get information about ASEM, especially our asemonline.org web presence.

Also, the salesman I talked to at CCC was not aware that binoculars can be used extensively for astronomical viewing. I told him about the Astronomical League awards for people who complete their binocular observing programs. If you have not yet had the opportunity to do "star gazing" with binoculars, you are in for a pleasant surprise! In addition to enlarging objects a bit, binoculars will brighten objects too. For example, the Pleiades star cluster, aka Seven Sisters, will show many more stars when you view it with binocs. For those of you who do not know about "star hopping," practicing this skill with binocs will make it so much easier when you are doing it with a telescope. Just so you know, star hopping is not a new YouTube viral dance craze.

If you got a new telescope or binoculars this holiday season, attend the Beginners Meeting on Thursday, January 5th at 7pm in our usual ASEM meeting room (Weldon Spring Interpretive Site). Bring your scope if you like. If you miss the 1/5/2012 Beginner Meeting, be assured that this is a monthly event, held on the first Thursday of the month. Don't be embarrassed if you don't know much about your telescope. All of us were beginners once. Among our members, there will no doubt be

somebody who owns, or has used, a telescope just like the one you have. Or if you have not made the commitment yet, and spent your hard-earned cash on a telescope, ASEM members are here for you. To solve the problem of choosing a scope, attend a Beginners meeting or two, and talk to folks who can give you good honest guidance. Actually looking through different kinds of telescopes at Broemmelsiek Park's Astronomy Viewing Site will help you a lot with choosing an instrument that is just right for you.

Thanks for reading, and I hope to see you at the Weldon Spring Interpretive Center or at Broemmelsiek. Amy White 12/27/2011

CALENDARS

CLUB

Monthly Beginner Meeting 5 January:

Moves to the first Thursday of the month. It will still meet at the Weldon Spring Center at 7:00 p.m. Amy White will lead the meetings starting January 5th.

Monthly Membership Meeting 14 January:

Regular Monthly Membership Meeting at Weldon Spring Interpretive Center. Start at 6:00 pm with a pot luck supper, telescope clinic, and general networking. "Formal" meeting starts at 7:00 pm. Announcements, videos, presentations & etcetera (See program notes below).

SIG news (Special Interest Groups). All SIG meetings take place at the Weldon Springs Nuclear containment site at the specified times (Don't worry, you won't be irradiated any more than usual ;)

DigitalSIG – January 24th at 7:00 p.m

Topic: To be determined. Check the ASEM website.

Hands-On Computer Related Imaging January 28th 8:30Am – 4:00PM:

A daylong workshop. Bring your laptop and work on improving your digital imaging skill. Sessions ideas include:

- Photoshop post-processing
- Stacking with DeepSkyStacker
- Imaging with MaximDL
- Imaging with CCDStack
- Imaging with Nebulosity

Watch the DigitalSIG and StLouis Astronomy Yahoo lists for more information.

DIY-ATM-SIG

Wednesday January 25th at 7:00 p.m.

Observers SIG

There has been some interest in forming an observer's Special interest group. This group would be oriented around observing with a social aspect. This is still in the development stage so talk with Steve Boerner at this Saturday's ASEM general meeting or contact him at steve.boerner@asemonline.org for more information.

OUTREACH (VIA JIM TWELLMAN)

Looking at the ASEM calendar and the STLAstronomy calendar, I see no upcoming "road-trip" outreach events from now thru February. We of course will have FNOH's [Friday night open houses - ed], weather-permitting.

ASTRONOMICAL EVENTS FOR JANUARY (VIA MARV STEWART)

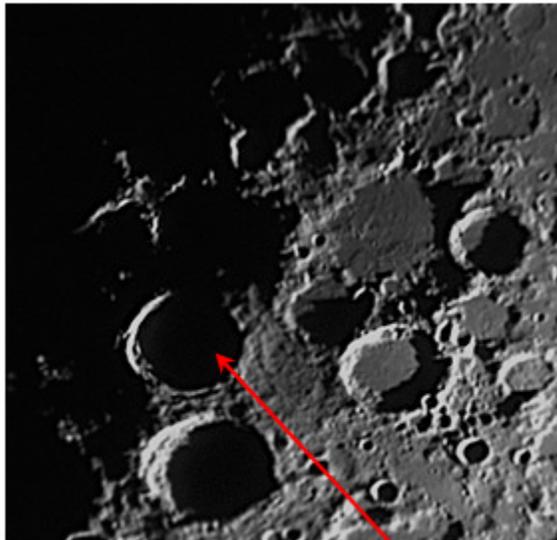
- 1 First Quarter Moon.
- 2 The Moon moves above Jupiter by about 5deg.
- 4 The Quadrantid meteor shower peaks, but many of the dimmer ones may be drowned out by waxing Moon.
The Earth reaches perihelion, its closest point to the Sun.
- 9 Full Moon (AKA Wolf moon).
- 13 Venus 1 degree SE of Neptune
- 14 The Moon passes below Mars.
- 16 The Last Quarter moon will pass south of Saturn.
- 23 New Moon.
- 26 The Moon passes 7 Deg. north of Venus at 1 p.m. CST. (Early risers saw this on December 27, 2011)
- 30 First Quarter Moon. Asteroid Eros in constellation Sextans closest to Earth.
Elusive Lunar "X" visible after 4PM (see graphic below)

For you comet observers (or wannabes), Comets Garrad (C/2009 P1) is in Hercules and setting fast. David Levy's comet P/2006 T1 is could be a good sight in a telescope (but you know how those predictions go ;). We'll have to check in with Jim Twellman on this one.

Asteroid 433 Eros makes its closest approach to us at the end of January and beginning of February (closest on 30 Jan in constellation Sextans). It will be magnitude 8.5. What makes this one so special is that the interplanetary space probe NEAR (Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous) landed on this object back in 2001. The spacecraft was later renamed *Shoemaker* in honor of geologist Gene Shoemaker. You should read up on Gene. He played major roles in lunar crater theory, Seleneology training of the Apollo astronauts and comet hunting with his wife and David Levy: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugene_Merle_Shoemaker

Quite a show of evening planets: Venus is bright and sets around 7PM followed by Neptune at 8:15PM then by the minor planet Ceres at 10:15 then Uranus at 11:15 and finally Jupiter at 2am. Mars and Saturn are rising fast and will be easily visible in the late evening by mid spring.

Lunar "X" above and to the left of crater Werner:



Crater Werner

CLUB NOTES

Well, last month, we said “Next month we will be publishing more information regarding the committees, their responsibilities and their members.” So now it’s “next month” and we don’t have these things well defined or resolved yet. We are working on it but it’s a slow process. For now, use the contacts below for communications. This is a work in progress and we have VERY LARGE shoes to fill.

MEMBERSHIP

Membership issues can be addressed through our executive director Stacy Thater (pronounced “totter”) at these addresses:

Email: sthater@stchas.edu

Snail mail:

Alliance for Astronomy (ASEM)
PO Box 141
New Melle MO 63365

CLUB CONTACTS

Comments, questions, suggestions and money (just kidding) may be sent to the following addresses:

programs@asemonline.org

Use this address to communicate with the program committee. If you have something to present at a meeting or wish to contribute and let someone else perform, send it here. Questions and/or suggestions about programming etc. Remember, they are here to help you. This is a user friendly society and we like to see members get up and share.

equipment@asemonline.org

This address is used to find out about ASEM loaner equipment. If you find something amiss at BPark by all means report it here. If you are curious about borrowing an item, put in a request via this address.

hospitality@asemonline.org

Got a main dish you’d like to bring to the potluck? We sure could use it AND you will be reimbursed for your expenses.

newsletter@asemonline.org

Primary contact for the newsletter. Got an article or notice you’d like to see published? Send it here and be famous!

Outreach@asemonline.org

Special requests for groups at Broemmelsiek Park including:

- notice of large party (more than groups of twenty)
- request for specific requirements needed (school assignment, merit badge requirements, etc.)
- Requests for Star Party / Telescope event at another location

steve.boerner@asemonline.org

Web page and all other communications not covered above

ENTERTAINMENT

Late breaking news and member adventures (or shenanigans as the case may be) can usually be found at STLAstronomy in yahoo groups. If you aren't a member, you should join. Go to

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/STLAstronomy/>

and click "Join"

▲ NOTE FROM THE DECEMBER GENERAL MEETING:



Thane Bopp brought in his astronomy related stereo astrophotos for the membership to view. They were awesome shots especially in stereo! You just never know what's going to happen at an ASEM general meeting (Thanks to Jim Twellman for being alert enough to capture AND provide this image for your enjoyment). As Jack Horkheimer would say: "Keep looking up!"

Think Clear, dark skies