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Editor’s Message

There are a couple of changes to the bulletin. From this month onwards, I won’t be listing the outreach program events, because the bulletin can’t possibly be current enough to handle that. It takes upwards of two weeks to get the bulletin out, and Don informs me that additional dates come thick and heavy this time of year. So I will just list the contact information.

And where are those images from the banquet? On that note, please submit only a few images, and resize them so they’re 1024 pixels at their widest or tallest, which ever one is longer. I don’t have the time nor patience to go through dozens to hundreds of images and pick what I think are the best ones. Pick a few, up to 6 or so, shrink them, and send them to me via Email.

The March 15th star party was cancelled due to clouds, some rain, and a lot of wind. Only one or two people showed up as far as I could see (I was working at Griffith that day), and they left long before night.

My thanks to all who have contributed to the success of the bulletin. We always invite more input from members. Please consider writing or submit images. The deadline for submitting bulletin material is the 10th

(Continued on page 3)
Griffith Observatory
Public Star Party Procedure

PJ Goldfinger handles our Griffith Observatory Public Star Party List. As patrons may drive up freely and reservations are no longer needed, we will continue to keep a sign up list for this event. Please note changes may occur in future PSP events and to read the policy below each month.

LAAS Members must still sign up on time - Deadline is no later than the Tuesday night prior to the Saturday GO Public Star Party each month. The list information required is:

• Your name, any LAAS Members and Non members in your car.
• Bring Telescope y/n.

NOTE: Those attending without a telescope as a favor will be required to be of some assistance if asked, needed and able.

It is primarily the main focus of any LAAS member who attends this event to be of Public Service with their telescopes in showing the patrons of Griffith Observatory the delights of the nighttime sky. New Members are not expected to adhere to this policy. Please feel free to come up and enjoy the event given you are signed up.

Parking will be on the east side of the Griffith Observatory Hill designated for GO employees. A guard will be stationed with the LAAS GO PSP list. It is always wise to have one’s LAAS name badge and/or club ID on them just in case. Unloading telescope and equipment will remain the same procedure as well, with a drive up, drop off and park down hill routine.

The list currently has been updated to 30 spots for LAAS members. First come, first serve.

Please check the LAAS website and Yahoo list for changes and updates in any LAAS event, as there are many communication mediums and some are missed.

To sign up for the Griffith Observatory Star Party the email address is: laas.starparty@gmail.com. Attendance is only granted once a confirmation email has been received. Most important though is to have fun and enjoy!

PJ Goldfinger
**Outreach Program**

Come on out to the school and show all the enthusiastic kids, parents, and teachers the night sky. They always appreciate it. And if you get WOW's when they look through your scope, you'll feel good. If no scope, come out anyway and help set up or answer questions from the kids. So, Outreach volunteers, let's pitch in. I'm sure the kids and adults will appreciate our effort.  

Thanks!  
Outreach@laas.org  
(818) 891–3087 ✿

*Don DeGregori*

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**New Member Potluck/Star Party**

The date for the 2008 New Member Potluck/Star Party has been set for **Sunday, April 27th**

It will be held at the LAAS facility in Garvey Ranch Park in Monterey Park beginning at 5:00 PM with the potluck. This will be followed by speakers who will give short talks aimed toward beginners. After the talks door prizes will be given out to new members. A star party will then be held on the lawn in front of the class room. The Moon will be at last quarter, so the sky will not be overly bright. Saturn should put on a good show. These events have always been well attended. ✿

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**Many Thanks to the Banquet Donors**

The LAAS wishes to thank all those members and non-members who donated items so generously for the raffle drawing at this year’s banquet. The LAAS wishes to thank the following commercial companies for their generous donations:

- Oceanside Photo & Telescope
- Scope City
- Orion Telescopes & Binoculars
- National Optical Observatory- NOAO
- Celestron
A FIRST TELESCOPE

By David Sovereign

Many times we have been asked what would be a good first telescope to buy for themselves, a friend or a child. There is no simple or straightforward answer. There are many variables to consider before making a choice and putting down any money. Foremost would be to consider what the instrument is to be used for. It is true that most telescopes will do most things, but some types are better than others for a specific application. A spotting scope for wildlife would not have enough power for lunar or planetary observation or a large telescope designed for deep sky visual observation would not be useful for astrophotography. Other considerations would be how much the individual is willing to spend and how serious the user is about the telescope. If the telescope is to be taken regularly out to a dark sky site, the size of your car or van is also to be considered. In general the buyer should stay away from 900 power toy telescopes from Wal Mart or other retail outlets. This does not mean that a telescope capable of good performance would necessarily cost a fortune. The price of a simple telescope that is still capable of good performance starts at about $200 to $300. Premium telescopes can cost up to 10 to 20 times this for the same size instrument.

Some will insist that a beginner should start with a pair of binoculars. A good pair of binoculars would be excellent for wide field use to observe wildlife or deep sky objects such as star fields and comets. Binoculars are identified by a pair of numbers, such as 6x35 or 7x50. The first number is the magnification and the second number is the diameter of the objective lens in millimeters. Many visual observers use both binoculars and telescopes to widen their range of observation. Binoculars are small and easy to hold in the hand. However, it is difficult to hold binoculars over about 10 power in the hand with any degree of steadiness, so a mount would be required. This could be either a heavy camera tripod or better would be one of the parallelogram mounts that maintain the field when the binoculars are moved up and down to accommodate observers of different height.

Over the past few years two groups of beginner telescopes have come on the market. The first, basic, group consists of telescopes that are moved around by hand. If it is on an equatorial mount, a clock drive can be added on the polar axis to allow the telescope to follow the stars across the sky. The basic telescopes are less expensive and are easier to set up and use. They require the user to find objects based on star charts and observing guides. In this manner the observer will get to know where objects are in the night sky. The second, newer, group consists of the Go-To telescopes. They have a computer built in to the hand control unit that can find and point the telescope to any object in its
data base. These are more expensive and require more extensive set up and alignment. When properly aligned, they will find many dim, hard to find objects. They also require batteries or a power pack.

A good size for a first instrument would be, in the author’s opinion, a 4.5” to 6” reflector or an 80mm to 100mm refractor. Any of these are small enough to be easily carried and set up but will have enough aperture to provide good views of celestial objects. I have observed through several 4.5” Newtonian reflectors and have found them to be good performers. My own 80mm refractor can pick out most of the Messier objects and Cassini’s division in Saturn’s ring is obvious. Along with a new telescope, a good set of eyepieces is needed along with a case to keep them and other accessories in to keep them clean and dry. Most new telescopes come with a set of, usually two, eyepieces. Like the instrument itself, it is not necessary to purchase expensive, premium eyepieces at first. Plossls or even simple Kellners are a good start. Although aperture fever is common among amateurs, it is not necessary to jump into a giant telescope at first. The most important thing is to enjoy the night sky.

SOHO-6, 23 December 1996, the 6th out of 1432 sungrazing comets discovered by the LASCO instrument. The tail of the comet does not point directly away from the sun, as you might have expected it to do, because of the very high speed of the comet as it swings so close past the sun. For more on sungrazers, read Tim Thompson’s article at right.
As of now, as near as I can figure, there are 3418 known comets. You might be surprised to learn that 42% of them, 1432 comets, were discovered by looking at the sun (through a safe & properly filtered telescope 900,000 miles in space). That’s right, all of you experienced comet hunters who were busy looking the other way have missed the show.

More people saw the Great Comet of 1843 (1843 I = C/1843 D1) than any previous comet. It was visible in daylight and became a spectacular evening comet with a tail at least 30 degrees long, and raised great consternation in the public. But astronomers realized that the comet had passed within 100,000 km from the sun at perihelion. It became the first comet definitely identified as a sungrazing comet. Further research by Edward Cooper and Daniel Kirkwood laid the groundwork for the German Astronomer Heinrich Carl Friedrich Kreutz to recognize what we now call the Kreutz Group of sungrazing comets.

In 1979 the US Air Force launched test satellite P8-1, also known as SOLWIND. It carried a solar coronagraph, and surprisingly discovered 6 sungrazing comets, adding to the 14 that were already known from ground based discoveries dating back to Ephorus. The first of the SOLWIND comets, C/1979 Q1 evaporated at its close approach to the sun, and produced a visible brightening of the corona. Many other sungrazers have been seen to dissipate on close approach to the sun, but C/1979 Q1 remains the only one to produce a visible effect on the corona.

The Solar Maximum Mission (SMM) launched on 14 February 1980, failed in January 1981, and became the first satellite to be rescued, repaired, and returned to orbit by a space shuttle mission in April 1984 (it was the shuttle Challenger). On 2 December 1989 SMM re-entered Earth’s atmosphere and was destroyed. Between 1987 and 1989 SMM added 10 more sungrazers to the list, bringing the total known to 30. So it’s no great surprise that sungrazers were thought to be quite rare at the time, and also no great surprise that the coming of SOHO in 1995 was expected to produce a few more.

And so it was. The Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO) launched on 2 December 1995, and carried amongst its several instruments the Large Angle Spectrometric Coronagraph (LASCO), which was activated on 30 December 1995. LASCO has wildly exceeded all of the pre-launch expectations for finding new sungrazers. Rather than adding a few to the list, or even adding many to

(Continued on page 8)
the list, LASCO has so far discovered 1432 sungrazing comets. By discovering 42% of all known comets, sungrazers and non-sungrazers, LASCO has become the most prolific comet discoverer of them all. This is attributed to the considerable increase in sensitivity over previous sun observing missions. This is an excellent example of how spectacular the unexpected can be; a telescope intended to study the sun becomes a major player in the comet hunting business. Who would have thought of that?

There are now 6 known sungrazer groups. Dynamic analysis of the comet orbits can trace their history, and both of the Kreutz groups can be traced back to the breakup of a single progenitor comet about 300 AD. But there is no historical record of this comet. The accepted progenitor in many papers and webpages is a comet seen by Aristotle and the Greek historian Ephorus in 317 BC, which they appear to have seen to breakup. That’s what Kreutz thought, from his analysis in the late 1800’s. But modern analysis shows that the progenitor could not have broken up that long ago. So the true nature of the source for the sungrazing comets remains obscure. But the comets themselves are anything but obscure, once you realize that the way to find comets is to look at the sun (through a safe & properly filtered telescope 900,000 miles in space). 💫

The angle that this image was taken at gives the impression that the meeting is being attended by 6 people! Actually, the size of a typical meeting is around 4 to 5 times this number. Image by David Nakamoto.
A painting by Mary Morton Allport (1806-1895) of the Great Comet of 1843, as seen from Tasmania.
Comet P/2007 R5 (SOHO). In 2005 Sebastian Hoenig, a German PhD student realized that the SOHO comets of 5 Sep 1999 & 8 Sep 2003 were on orbits so similar, they could be the same comet. He predicted that the comet would return on 11 Sep 2007. His prediction was accurate enough to confirm the first “officially” periodic comet amongst all the sungrazers discovered so far.
The Solar and Heliospheric Observatory (SOHO). The Large Angle Spectrometric Coronagraph (LASCO) instrument is the big black box on the right.
Astronomers usually enjoy cool nights, occasionally cold ones. But every now and again we have to deal with extraordinary weather.

Take time in the early 90s when I was observing at the annual Nightfall star party at Anza Borrego. I was using my laptop to control my deep sky camera quit on me, and it quit working. Perhaps the 90° F temperature and 90% humidity at 11:00 pm at night might explain that! It turns out that during that time of the year, September, monsoonal weather often comes up from the south, sometimes from as far away as the Gulf of Mexico, and blankets the local area in a grip of heat, even late into the night. I can say that the heat and humidity never quit, up to 2am that night when I finally gave up. Astronomers liken the effect of turbulence as looking up from the bottom of a swimming pool. Well, that night, that was exactly the view everyone had.

Or take the case of Jeff Schroeder, who was observing with a few other people through his 11-inch refractor, the entire telescope and mount made of metal, at Joshua Tree Park. In the distance, lightning appeared, and moved towards them. Jeff claims that was the fastest his telescope, which was also a fine lightning rod, had been disassembled in this life.

Legends abound about the weather at Griffith, and long-timers there will vouch for them. Take the case of eclipses at Griffith. The author can vouch for the strength of the evidence that when an eclipse is visible from Griffith, and particularly a rare event such as a deep partial, a deep lunar event, and most famously, the 1992 annual eclipse, clouds will appear, often in abundance, and it may be clear the night before or after. Frustrating to be sure.

Then there is the contention that if someone mentions, even close to a week before an event, that “the news predicts clouds on that day”, then that person has cursed the event. And, it seems, more often than not, clouds do appear, in abundance. Not something that endures one to his fellow astronomers. And since such a thing happened for the March 15th public star party, the author wishes to ask his fellow LAAS members to refrain from such proclamations in the future.

David Nakamoto
Telescopes for Sale

1st Telescope — New fully equipped 4" F/10 Celestron refractor w/finder scope, star diagonal, 2 Plossl eyepieces (25mm & 10mm), EQ3 mount, and a large sturdy wooden tripod. $400.00. Contact Gabriel Reyna (323) 255—4346

2nd telescope — 10-inch F/5 Truss tube telescope in excellent condition w/ Telrad & Crayford Focuser. $700.00. Contact Gabriel Reyna @ (323) 255—4346 (1)

12" Meade LX200GPS Schmidt-Cassegrain with Autostar II hand control, includes extra filters and lenses, solar cover and scope buggy. $3700
Stacy Trevino— W- 909-5971904, H- 951-808-8784 (2)

Map to Monterey Park Observatory
(The place to build your telescope)
It might not look like it, but the spring and summer star parties are just around the corner. Now is the time for new members and existing members that would like to try out something new to check out one of the LAAS loaner telescopes. At the present time there are several available. All are fully equipped with a set of eyepieces. A simple collimating tool is included with all reflectors and a star diagonal is included with refractors.

LAAS-1: 4.5” f/8 Celestron reflector on a Polaris mount.

LAAS-2: 4.5” f/8 Tasco reflector on an Edmund equatorial mount with a clock drive. This telescope has been upgraded with a 1.25” focuser and 6x30 finder.

LAAS-4: 6” f/5 Telescopics reflector on a Dobsonian mount.

LAAS-6: 10: f/4.5 Discovery reflector on a Dobsonian mount. This fast telescope is also equipped with a Tele View Paracorr to correct off axis coma common with fast paraboloids.

LAAS-7: 80mm f/15 Meade refractor on an Orion Sky View Deluxe equatorial mount. This is an excellent instrument for the Moon and planets.

LAAS-8: 80mm f/11.4 Selsi refractor on an equatorial mount.

LAAS-9: 80mm f/6.25 refractor with University Optics objective on an equatorial mount. This fine Rich Field Telescope is good for going through the Messier Catalog.

For more information call: David Sovereign at (626) 794—0646.

David Sovereign
# Events Calendar

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Location and Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Apr 5th (Sat)</td>
<td>Dark Sky Party</td>
<td>Lockwood Valley Check for weather conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 12th (Sat)</td>
<td>Public Star Party</td>
<td>Griffith Observatory. See pg 3 for details on how to attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr 14th (Mon)</td>
<td>General Mtg</td>
<td>Griffith Observatory Dr. Kartik Sheth on Evolution of Galaxies</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 3rd (Sat)</td>
<td>Dark Sky Party</td>
<td>Lockwood Valley Check for weather conditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 10th (Sat)</td>
<td>Public Star Party</td>
<td>Griffith Observatory. See pg 3 for details on how to attend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 12th (Mon)</td>
<td>General Mtg</td>
<td>Griffith Observatory Speaker to be announced</td>
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The board meeting is held at 8pm on the Wednesday night prior to the general meeting, at Garvey Ranch Park. The Monday general meetings start at 7:30 pm unless otherwise noted. See each month’s bulletin for updates.
**LAAS Yahoo Group—how to join**

The group is private, and therefore does not come up in a search. To join, send email to: LAAS-subscribe@yahoogroups.com. Include your full name so the moderator can verify your LAAS membership. Your full name is necessary so we can check our records to see if you really are a LAAS member. If approved, you will receive further instructions via email. ✩

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**Sky and Telescope Subscriptions**

Sky and Telescope subscriptions renewals should be sent directly to Sky Publishing. To start a Sky and Telescope subscription, contact the LAAS Treasurer (see the contact information on page 2) directly to get the club rates, then thereafter send the renewal bills directly to Sky Publishing. ✩

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**Astronomy Magazine Subscriptions**

For those that subscribe to Astronomy Magazine through the LAAS, the rate has gone up to $34 a year, $60 for two years. ✩

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**New Members Corner**

Welcome to the Los Angeles Astronomical Society! Right now, we have lost our previous New Members Coordinator to college, so we’re looking for someone to take over this position. If you’re interested, please contact one of the board members on page 2. ✩

Email: <mailto:coordinator@laas.org> coordinator@laas.org

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**Membership Annual Dues:**

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<td>Regular (18-65)</td>
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**Additional fees:**

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<tr>
<td>Star member, no pad</td>
<td>$ 60.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*(Membership due date is indicated on the mailing label)*

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**HANDY PHONE LIST**

- LAAS Answering Machine .... (213) 673-7355
- Griffith Observatory
- Program........................ (213) 473-0800
- Sky Report.................... unavailable for now
- Lockwood Site............... (661) 245-2106
  (not answered, arrange time with caller. Outgoing calls – collect or calling card)
- Mt. Wilson Institute........ (626) 793-3100