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NEW MEMBER WELCOMED

THE SOUTH PACIFIC STAR PARTY A WILD SUCCESS ONCE AGAIN!

Once again, the South Pacific Star Party, held over the weekend of March 19 - 22, 1999, was a wild success attracting over 300 amateur and professional astronomers from around the world, with over 150 telescopes ranging in size from 60mm refractors to 25" Dobsonian-style telescopes and everything in between.

The image below is the logo used to represent the 1999 South Pacific Star Party, and can be found on the SPSP T-Shirts, as well as on the South Pacific Star Port, which was a surprisingly nice drop indeed. Both these collectors' items are available exclusively at the South Pacific Star Party.



This year's theme was the Magellanic Clouds, hence the Magellanic Clouds on the SPSP7 logo, and the great ship Magellan, sailing into the scene.

The Magellanic Clouds were a prominent part of the early evening's observing programs, which were organised and hosted by members of the ASNSW in the main observing field.

SPSP 2000 will be held over the weekend spanning **April 7th - 10th, 2000**, and the theme will be "**The Emu**", which is the silhouette made by the dark lanes throughout the Southern Milky Way.

See you there!

OBSERVATIONS OF THE SGP

CLASSIFIEDS

APRIL'S HORRORSCOPES

SOCIETY DIARY

BOKGLOB GRÖSEBLURTER CAPTURED

DISCLAIMER

WIRUNA TO BE NEW OLYMPIC VENUE

COMET HUNTING WITH A TELRAD

By Emmanuel Snodgrass

An increasing number of amateurs are discovering the value of a humble Telrad for their comet-seeking, and it is not clear why this had not happened sooner. With its wide field of view and freedom from chromatic aberration, it has two of the most important features valued by comet hunters.

You can either hand hold the instrument, or if you prefer, go as far as Emmanuel Snodgrass of 42 No Through Road, Dunedoo who has equatorially mounted his Telrad and fitted it with a guide-scope, a TeleVue Genesis no less!

Emmanuel was almost the co-discoverer of the brilliant comet Hyakutake, stopped only by the fact that the comet was about 25 degrees below his northern horizon when found. "I prefer to hunt for the brighter comets..." said Emmanuel "...since the Telrad is optimised for comets brighter than magnitude 4, and I am certain that if any 1st magnitude comets appear over Dunedoo, I will be the first to spot them."

Emmanuel hunts comets every evening after finishing his shift as a biological control officer at the Dunedoo Waste Reclamation Depot.

AMATEUR NEUTRINO DETECTOR DAMAGED

By Ipei Freiley

After the cumulative impact of countless trillion neutrinos, the world's only amateur built neutrino detector was recently in a state of near collapse.

As well as being amateur built, the detector was the world's only interferometric model and was based on an original design by Rube Goldberg, Honorary Health and Building Surveyor of Hog's Wallow County, Arkansas.



Construction of the Neutrino Detector at Wiruna

Built at the ASNSW property "Wiruna", at an altitude of 1007 metres, the detector relied on the impact of neutrinos in a natural, biodegradable medium, which generates radio waves in the far ultraviolet.

The intention was to focus these waves through four carefully spaced resonating steel cylinders. This quadruple amplitude was then passed through a high-pass correlator and then into a computer, which has been modified to analyse this correlated information and subsequently convert the data into readable graphs.

However, gravitational lensing of the neutrino stream during last years' partial solar eclipse smashed into the sound boards attached to the steel cylinders and set up sympathetic vibrations which spread through and decayed the entire structure.

In anticipation of end-of-millennium neutrino maxima, the detector has been re-built in re-enforced concrete as a binocular.

BARGAIN HOMEMADE WIDE-FIELD EYEPIECES

By Richmond Windsor, (HAA)

Hawkesbury Society member Richmond Windsor has been

experimenting in amateur construction of wide field eyepieces. Richmond demonstrated his prototype 25mm eyepiece at a recent field night at Crago Observatory. The eyepiece was made at a total cost of 75 cents, plus labour, and gives an impressive 105° apparent field of view.

His method involves careful grinding and polishing of the bases of eleven jars, which formerly contained pickles and onions. Years of experimentation demonstrated that if the right combination of brand names was arranged in the correct sequence, minimum figuring and polishing was required.

Rough grinding was accomplished using a Ryobi Angle Grinder, while fine grinding was done using a small concrete mixer full of carefully screened Hawkesbury River sand.

The lenses were then polished using a domestic floor polisher and iron oxide fine ground using a coffee grinder. They were then inexpensively araldited in proper sequence using an empty beer can, so that Richmond's focuser had to be fitted with a special adaptor.

Field tests were encouraging. The eyepiece brilliantly displays all the colours of the moon, and many hitherto unsuspected planetary nebulae. Richmond hopes to use

the new eyepiece with his Ultra Rich field 18" Newtonian with a stainless steel main mirror fabricated from a quality Chinese restaurant wok.

METEORIC ORIGIN FOR AYERS ROCK?

By Dr John Watson, Dep't of Elementary Science, the Holmes Building, University of Sydney.

Recent research by a team from the University of Sydney has uncovered evidence for the extra-terrestrial origin of Australia's most famous tourist destination.

Test holes drilled at various places around the rock's perimeter and on top, revealed a layer of metamorphic sandstone averaging 1.7 metres in depth, beneath which, was a carbonaceous chondrite mass. Radar imaging demonstrated the rock was a rough sphere about 5 kilometres in diameter, with a fused crust.

Intensive research was undertaken to explain why the rock did not explode at its estimated impact speed of 30km/sec.

An amazing discovery was made. A pattern of deeply buried anomalies which showed up in the multiple ultrasonic scan demonstrated that there had been not one, but three impacts about 800 million years ago.



The Ayers Rock Massif was preceded by two objects of similar size much in the manner that Comet Shoemaker-Levy impacted on Jupiter.

The second object, virtually at the focal point of the impact site, was rapidly decelerated, landing at a mere few metres per second, and thus retaining its dimensional integrity.

The bowl then filled in with sedimentary sand, and eventually hardened to sandstone.

Hundreds of millions of years of erosion then lowered the topography by 4 kilometres so the rock emerged from its sandstone prison to appear as we see it today.

Microbiologists from the University of New South Wales theorise that the event may have coincided with the well-known mass-extinction of pre-bacterial single-celled demi protoplasm that had formerly inhabited what was Western Australia during the pre-pre-Cambrian period.

ASNSW RADIO ANTENNA RAISED

Since the successful interception of extra-terrestrial signals by the ASNSW, it was decided to raise the height of our radio antenna by 37 metres, whilst restoring the antenna after a recent wind storm

which blew the antenna over the dish of our radio telescope.

This increase in height will put the receiver significantly closer to the source of the recently identified signals, thus resulting in an enhanced reception, high-gain antenna, rare amongst amateur astronomers!



The new Antenna recently installed at Wiruna

Society chess players are excited with the prospect of holding chess tournaments by radio with extra-terrestrial participants, and new rules are currently being proposed which would allow the heirs of individual players to continue the game if the duration of individual games became inconveniently long.

At the same time, society astrophotographers are keen to exchange slow-scan images of some of their favourite photos for images of photos of the same objects taken from a totally different perspective.

ENHANCEMENT OF VISUAL ACUITY

New member Dipso Maniak has been carrying out experiments on the effects on night vision using certain substances, ever since reading in UNIVERSE and

Amateur Astronomy, of research concerning tobacco and alcohol.

Using himself as a Guinea Pig, and two dozen bottles of Star Port, Dipso stumbled upon a strange anomaly. While he established that drinking three bottles of Star Port in two hours cost him a whole magnitude in his night vision.

There were certain compensations though. A large number of brighter stars which were previously thought to be single stars were reportedly clear, naked-eye double stars, and he has been able to report several suspected comets.

Following this, he has tested the theories of Dr. (Papa Doc) Duvalier, of Port Au Prince Haiti, whose historical research had convinced him of the importance of head warming, for enhanced night vision.



Demonstration of the effects of cold weather at Wiruna

Over the centuries, a broad spectrum of outdoors people, New Zealand Shepherds, Tibetan holy men, Ukrainian goat herders and Tasmanian milkmen have reported on this phenomenon. Black sheep and goats are apparently much easier to locate on dark, moonless nights if the head is warmed by the equivalent of 5mm of woven wool, while milkmen report it is much easier to distinguish bored housewives from their husbands in unlit houses when wearing appropriate protection.

The scientific reason for this is not properly understood and more

research is currently being undertaken, however, it is believed that an increased general blood flow, as well as sudden rushes of blood to the head may have something to do with the increases in night vision.

FIRST EXTRA-TERRESTRIAL SIGNALS RECEIVED!

By John Doe

Extra-terrestrial messages have been picked up on the newly rebuilt ASNSW Radio Telescope at Wiruna.

Formerly part of the historic multi-telescope array at Fleurs in Western Sydney, this instrument has been re-furbished by the handwork of the Club's dedicated Radio Astronomy Group.

The discovery was a result of a happy accident, like so many other scientific breakthroughs. While listening to the background microwave radiation of the galaxy on a day of high wind, a radio aerial on the water tower blew across both the radio dish and the adjacent farm fence.

Reconstruction from satellite photos, together with observations from ground parties later established that this linked up the dish with a grid of 3,700km of continuous farm fence stretching between Narrabri and Wagga.

This grid included 2,497 km of

rabbit-proof fencing, 242 km of electrified fencing, 70 km of chain wire fence, 18,892 farm gates of differing designs, 72 Real-Estate agents signs, 2 wrecked cars, 3 windmills and a water tower.

The battery power operating the scope could not have coped with the increased load, but for a multiple lightning strike on a connected water tower at Gulgong in the state's Central West.

This grid in serendipitous fashion replicated with precision, the interfaces of an optimally designed computer chip of extraordinary proportions.

There were, of course, some side effects. Over 7 million rabbits were instantly sterilised, while a small capsule containing 2 silicon-based pizzas materialised in the middle of the radio dish. Gulgong is now in Cuba from time to time.

Conversion of the signals via a computer to slow scan TV images produced a series of frames from the equivalent of a TV mega maxi series in 3-dimensional holographic format.

These images were analysed by the TAB Local Area Network on a non-racing day.

Initial evaluation of the frames suggest that the radio waves are part of an intergalactic sitcom concerning the doings of four dysfunctional sentients sharing the same asteroid, the first signals



First Extra-Terrestrial Signals being analysed

detected, representing episode 2,374,408 according to the Rorschach evaluation of the binary code preceding the show.

ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY: WHEN TO USE A FLASH

By Joe Rosscollis

Professional astronomers appreciate that photos taken in low light situations are invariably enhanced by the judicious use of a flashgun.

Why has this simple photographic aid taken so long to catch the attention of astro-photographers?



*Photo of Comet Hyakutake with
and without a Flash*

For example, the distances of the Moon and Solar System objects are now known with great precision, and a simple computer program can be used to calculate the appropriate delay - eg: 3 seconds for the Moon, 17 minutes for the Sun etc.

Don't try this method for Deep Sky objects, as the distances are not known with sufficient accuracy, the time delay can be inconvenient, and the Earth may be facing the wrong direction when the light returns.

This often results in a photo similar in exposure to one taken without using a flash at all!

Remember to use the X-plug for the flash for optimal results. The F-plug tends to give varying results on most objects.

DAYTIME AT "WIRUNA"

By Jackie Walker

Daytime activities at Wiruna are many and varied. Bird watching, bush-walking and photography are popular, though the Black Emu is seen only at night, while the Wine Appreciation Society holds regular tastings at the eat-in-kitchen on New Moon weekends.

1998 was a great year for agricultural activities with our newly planted trees thriving in inverse proportion to the number of clear nights enjoyed since last April.

Serious scientific experiments on dew-zapping techniques have resulted in the perfection of a rather rapid method, which must be finely judged for optimal results.

One must heap a pile of exactly 27.2 kg of extremely dry ghost gum firewood around the base of the telescope (unseasoned, green wood tends to smoke the optics up a little). You must sit on the middle of the pile, and light it using not more than 1/4 of a bottle of 1998 vintage Star Port (1999 vintage will do if you have no 1998 Port left).

Continue sitting on the fire, until it becomes a trifle uncomfortable, at which stage it is time to douse the flames using either distilled or purified water.

Leaving the flames burning longer has been known to result in slight aberrations in the primary mirror, and a small number of cases of burnt-buttock syndrome have been reported in the user.



*Drying out your
dewed optics... quickly*

Experiments using dummies fitted with multiple sensors (see photo above) have been conducted at previous Star Parties, and volunteers (both human and telescopic) will be sought for future experiments, so that the method can be further refined.





ASNSW Choir Members rehearsing a duet at Wiruna

Music is also a feature of Wiruna, where several talented guitar players can be heard playing among the trees, while the Wiruna choir has a wide range of songs with which to delight the listener (see photo over page).

At the Society AGM on 1 April 1998, it was decided not to increase the hours of darkness at Wiruna out of consideration to the young trees being nurtured there.

At the same time, members have been asked to refrain from shining red lights on the trees, as famed hack Japanese horticulturalist Sushi Chow Mein's famous bonsai experiments demonstrate that an almost exclusive diet of red light produces small, but perfectly formed specimens.

On the other hand, the introduction of daylight saving at Wiruna was not approved, as it was feared that the extra hour of sunlight might fade the new black curtains in the meeting hall.

FIGHTING LIGHT POLLUTION AND GREENHOUSE GASES - AUSTRALIAN POLITICIANS LEAD THE WORLD

By John Daniels

Australian politicians in recent years have demonstrated to the world a commitment to fighting the spread of light pollution and

greenhouse gases in a most striking and tangible manner.

To get to Mt Stromlo Observatory, you head South through Canberra and turn right at the new Parliament House.

Many visitors miss this turn off, not realising that the building which resembles a crematorium set in a lawn cemetery, is actually our national Parliament. How this came to be is exciting reading.

It seems for many years, work at Mt Stromlo had been seriously affected by light pollution from late night sittings of Parliament, while the prodigious amount of hot air emanating from the debating chamber degraded seeing to an alarming extent.

Confidential representations by influential amateurs to the more scientifically minded MP's brought astounding result. It was decided to bury the new Parliament House deep in a hill.

This not only reduced the area emitting light, but the hot air and associated noxious gases were filtered through soil and specially developed grasses where they would be mostly absorbed.

Monitoring the results, the consensus has been that the results have been worthwhile. Not only has the sky over Canberra been remarkably transformed, but a brilliant example has been set for Governments abroad.

US Government observers are reported to have been recently in Canberra developing a plan to move the White House stone-by-stone into a cavern deep in the Catskill Mountains, as a prelude to shifting congress.

Congressmen are believed to be supporting the move on defence grounds alone.

President Clinton is seriously considering re-locating the members of congress to disused WW2 Japanese bunkers on the island of Guam. The location for the senate is still under review.

PROFESSIONAL GRADE MIRRORS NOW AVAILABLE AT AMATEUR PRICES

Using the finest research grade acrylic and our advanced optical techniques, these mirrors are unconditionally guaranteed to be a genuine 1/30th wave (your choice of radio wave or Bondi wave).

Available from f/4 to f/10, or if you cannot decide, at three or four focal lengths in the one mirror, these optics are unconditionally guaranteed to show all the colours of the moon, as well as normally obscure comets around many of the brighter stars.

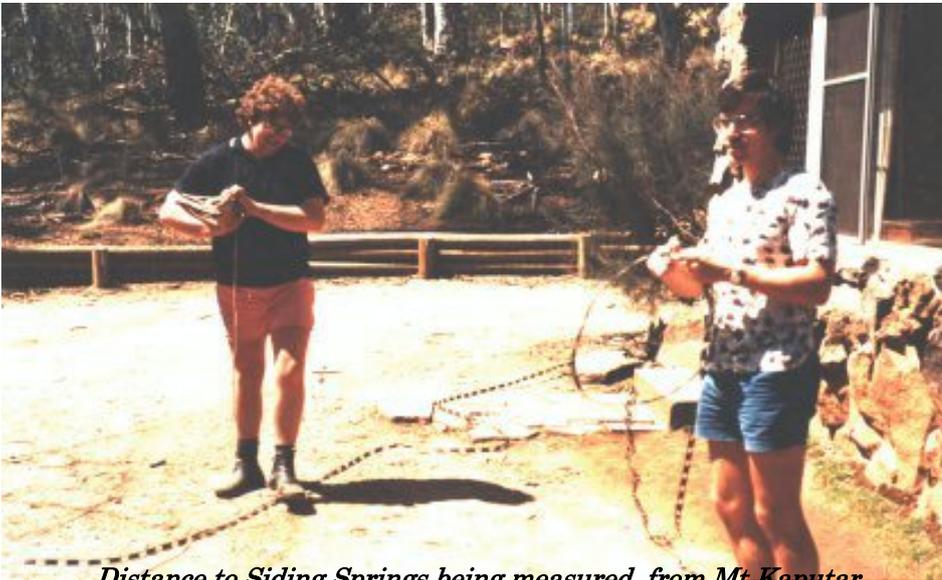
For mirrors from 10" to 50", write or call Copro Lite & Co., Slaughteryard Road, Gulgong NSW.

When ordering, please specify your choice of wave measurement: radio wave or Bondi wave.

Optical wave tested mirrors incur an additional fee of approx \$400 per inch of aperture.

PARALLAX MEASUREMENTS OF NEAR-EARTH ASTEROIDS

With the growing importance of refining the orbits of near-earth asteroids, ASNSW members Andrew Murrell and Chris Mlynarik have recently conducted very precise observations from



Distance to Siding Springs being measured, from Mt Kaputar

positions on Mt. Kaputar in the States North West, and from Siding Spring Observatory, near Coonabarabran.

Positions were determined from observations on the summit of Mt Kaputar using the Murrell 20", and again after a rapid drive to Siding Spring.

A complex formula allowing for the time delay between observations and the distance between the two sites was loaded into Andrew's field-model modified 286-12 computer, which has been upgraded with an amazing 2 Megabytes of RAM, needed for the complex calculations.

The precise distance between the two sites was carefully measured using a very long and accurate measuring tape (See image below, left).

LAST SIGHT OF COMET HALE-BOPP

During February New Moon weekend at Wiruna, a number of ASNSW members had what may be their last sighting of Comet Hale-Bopp with the Society's 17.5" Telescope, after its position had been tracked down using MegaStar and laptop.

Members were intrigued to find two objects near the indicated positions which caused some debate as to which was actually the comet, and some discussion ensued.

The mystery may have been solved. Reports in the more responsible British Tabloid newspapers, together with a major feature story in the National Inquirer suggest that what members actually saw was the long-planned rendezvous of certain earthlings, who waited until Hale-Bopp was in close proximity to the LMC, to disguise the operation.

If it wasn't for the eagle eyes of our members this important event may well have escaped detection.

OBSERVING FAINT PLANETARIES IN THE FORNAX DWARF

By Baron Beavis von Büttköpf

Deep Sky observers seeking a challenge can do worse than to cruise the fainter Planetary Nebulae of the Fornax Dwarf Galaxy.

Baron Beavis von Büttköpf from Schlöss Ratzhärz has made extensive observations from his private observatory at Schlöss Nilskor in the crystal clear air of the high Bavarian Alps using a variety of instruments and has kindly sent a selection of his observing notes, which are reproduced here with his kind permission.

Tron 96: Faint green rosette outgassing by a suspected black hole, about 3 arcsec in diameter -

easy in the 40" Schiefspiegler but a challenge in the 32" Wurlitzer - usually at mag 23, but flares occasionally to mag 17.

Holmes 14: Legendary object - rarely visible owing to death of parent star, last seen dimly over 10 years ago.

Murrell 27: Clear, but dim smoke ring - 2 arcsec in diameter and steady at mag 18. Down a bit and left a bit from the foreground 16th mag red giant.

Best seen with averted imagination. Can be seen in 36" but only by the discoverer.

ASV 99: Highly active object, spread over a broad area, and best seen in a rich field 60".

AAT 1: The Baron has searched in vain for this highly condensed object. Suspect it may be a flyspeck on a Schmidt plate.

ALIEN ABDUCTION AT WIRUNA?

New Zealand Ivor Merino has finally revealed a hitherto untold story from the 1998 SPSP.

It seems that, after enjoying the spit roast on Saturday afternoon, Ivor retired into the eat in kitchen to write a review on the 1998 South Pacific Star Port.

Mr Merino is patron of the Kickapakeha Wine Appreciation Club (KWAC) and had been sent by its members to Wiruna for this worthy task.

He clearly recalls having consumed at least 3 bottles of port and then nothing until he opened his eyes and saw, by dim flickering light, a metallic shell above him.

Dark, curiously out of focus figures moved around him, some inspecting him by ruby red light. He must have been held by some tractor beam, as, unable to move, he could make no resistance.

Becoming unconscious again, he awoke after dawn with a bruise to the back of his head, and his brain

feeling like it had been probed by alien devices.

Ivor, who is currently writing his autobiography, suspects he may have been taken through time and space to another dimension, to which the 'gate' is still open: *"Each time I have three bottles of port in two hours, the 'gate' opens again for me.."*, he told our reporter.

STAR PARTY RECIPES

By James B. Beam

With the South Pacific Star Party upon us, many members and visitors will be camping out under the stars and in the tranquillity of surrounding bushland at Wiruna.

Several attendees like home cooking, others like to buy their meals from the Ilford Roadhouse, and other prefer bush cooking, the way it was done in the early times during the white settlement of Australia. Hot food can be quite desirable at Wiruna, as the weather can get extremely cold at times (see photo below).

Some of the more favoured recipes are printed here, for you to try, should you be game enough or desperate enough to try them.

Road-kill Stew

Take 25 kg of road kill, preferably less than 2 days old, hack into bite size chunks, and place in 30 litres of water in a clean oil drum. Add one handful of salt, a half a kilo of gum leaves and 1 litre of good quality cooking oil (not mineral or sump oil). Simmer over a slow fire for two hours. If desperate, consider eating it, although you should try it on a dog first, if possible.

Witchetty grub puree

To 12 witchetty grubs, add 300ml sour cream, a pinch of pepper and a teaspoon of wild grass seeds. Beat vigorously in a bowl or billy can with a fork and heat for 10 minutes over a slow fire. Allow the puree to stand until you are hungry enough.

Chicken Surprise!

Take any bird (Crow, Kookaburra, Cockatoo etc), wrap in wet clay and

place in the coals of a fire for about 40 minutes, well covered with new coals. Then break the clay away, and the feathers will come away with it. Slice open the bird with a Swiss-army knife, and the intestines should fall out in a ball. Eat some.

If it tastes anything like a chicken, not only is that a surprise, it is bloody amazing...

MYSTERIOUS STONE CIRCLES

By Don Perigñon

News in recent years of strange circles in crops of wheat and barley in England and Europe sparked much speculation.

Leading psychics detected energy levels and vibrations consistent with them having been caused by close association with flying saucers, leading to suggestions that they may in fact be flying saucer nests, or landing pads.

Much work has been carried out in London by BIMBOS (British Intelligence Metaphysical, Bionics and Occult Scientists) to determine the origin and nature of the alien vessels, reliably rumoured to be making secret landings in the fields of darkest England.

Theories so far suggest a likely origin to be near a G-type White Dwarf star near the horn of Capricorn.

There have been few reports of crop circles in Australia. However, there has been a recent discovery of strange stone circles between Ilford and Sofala, which has caused great excitement among researchers at the Department of Oxometry, University of Western Mudgee.

One group is looking for a nexus with the Northern hemisphere circles, and is doing complex spectrum analysis of the standing stones at Stonehenge to determine if a digital resonance of like intensity, if different magnitude can be established.

Meanwhile, the historical possibilities are not being ignored. A number of papers concerning the history of the western gold field refer to strange rites being performed under a full moon by groups of Irish miners in which stone circles to link with the Celtic standing stones of the British Isles, and Brittainy, were constructed.

Elements of these rites included brewing the sacred poteen, and communing with the Great White Spirit.



ASNSW Member standing in one of the Stone Circles at Wiruna

NASA NOTES

Readers will be aware that further and clearer photos of Martian topography have established that the "face" on Mars is not a face at all, but that earlier, blurred photos had given this impression.

However, recent computer holographic enhancement of the more recent photos have led to the amazing conclusion that the feature is in fact a representation of the knee cap of an unknown alien species.

This discovery has caused much excitement in Southern California, and had sparked renewed interest in the study of potential alien biology.

Astral travellers among them are convinced that the aliens have left us clues, and that representations of other portions of Martian anatomy are widely scattered among the natural features of the planet.

All we need to do now, is identify and separate the "sculptures" from the natural formations, join the images in the correct sequence and we have the total image.

Study groups have been formed in Orange County, and a number of experimental computer programs are currently being trialed to determine the coding used in the Martian representations.

Speculation is now mounting that many other Martian surface features are really representations of an elaborate binary code holding significant messages for Earth.

NEW LIFE FOR WOOMERA

Exciting news arrived recently that a joint US / Australian consortium was proposing to use Woomera Rocket Range for a far-reaching experiment.

The plan is to launch a modified Saturn Rocket (see image above, right), to place a satellite in close orbit to the Sun, 20 million km inside the orbit of Mercury to

conduct experiments in fusion reaction, and extraction of Hydrogen from the Sun.



***Modified Rocket at Woomera
for launching to the Sun***

This valuable power source has hitherto been untapped.

US Government participation is at some risk, however, as members of the religious right in congress hold the view that the hand of man should never set foot on the Sun.

(Note: - The US political system works in this way - There is an Upper and a Lower House, the Upper being composed of Senators, and the Lower by Congressmen.)

Congress is currently divided on Rube Goldberg's proposal to build a pipeline to bring Hydrogen from the Sun, filling up the bed of Lake Eyre with liquid Hydrogen.

Mr Goldberg has met initial criticisms concerning the Sun's heat being a problem, by proposing that construction of the pipeline take place at night.

Members are from two political parties. There are the Republicans who are the direct equivalent of the British Conservative Party, and the Democrats, who are also the equivalent of the British Conservative Party.

Above this is the President, who does whatever Congress lets him

get away with, and above the President is the Special Prosecutor who does whatever he damn well likes.

AMAZING DISCOVERY

By Sam Bucca

In a carefully worded statement, The Australian Museum has announced the discovery of a genus of spider thought to be extinct since Jurassic times.

Provisionally named *Arachnis Pittoiletis*, the species was hitherto known only from two specimens preserved in amber recovered in dredging operations in the upper Franklin River in Tasmania.

Discovered by a Museum staff member at a secret location east of Sofala, the spider is as big as the palm of your hand, light brown in colour and lives in colonies of up to 20. Initial research suggests their diet consists mostly of bandicoots, bush rats and rabbits.

Dr Peter Lapin, reader in Arachnophobia at Bathurst TAFE, said that the location of the discovery had to be kept secret to protect the less than one hundred known adult specimens, who seemed to thrive in a moist environment with ample decaying organic material.

An Australian Museum officer has been appointed guardian of the colony, while attempts are being made to establish a breeding program.

The spiders show signs of intelligence and exhibit a primitive but noticeable social organisation.

Having survived the demise of the Dinosaurs, there is speculation that these spiders must have descended from Asteroid-resistant ancestors.

It is thought that research into their physiology might well isolate a gene which could be the salvation of humankind should another such catastrophe occur.

SPORT AT WIRUNA

ASNSW Members often take an interest in sports during the daylight hours at Wiruna, particularly if cloudy weather has prevented observing on the previous night. The small billiards table and the tennis table in the meeting hall are popular attractions.

However, plans to introduce a Wiruna version of the Todd River Regatta have been frustrated by the fact that our dam is invariably full of water, the colour of which, changes according to the content of mud, toxic algae and the odd red-bellied black snake.

Members who had been to the world lizard racing championships held annually at the Paroo Lizard racing track at Eulo in Queensland had suggested training a contingent to enter in next year's event.

Alas, perhaps due to altitude and cooler conditions, our local specimens are less active than their Queensland cousins, so that our Shinglebacks, Bearded Dragons and Goannas prefer sleeping in sunny spots around the property.

Accordingly, ASNSW Webmaster Lachlan MacDonald theorised that perhaps we could make Wiruna the centre for Spider racing.

To this end, he collected a fine variety of Huntsman, Funnel-Web, Red-Back, White-Tail and House spiders, and a collection including Bull Ants, Scorpions, Centipedes and as-yet unidentified other insects and arachnids.

The more scientifically minded members suggested that these latter inclusions of non-spiders should be disqualified, as they did not pass as a spider, and having an unfair advantage of not having the same number of legs as the Arachnids themselves.

In spite of his best intentions and efforts, the collection could not be persuaded to race, or at least run in the same direction.

Suggestions that they be placed in the middle of a circle drawn in the dust, with the first to reach the outside being the winner, were objected to by some cowardly spectators.

Unfortunately, feeding time on day two degenerated into a free-for-all frenzy which demonstrated that if the beasties could not be trained to run, they needed no training at all to start a fight!

In the end, the Huntsman was declared the winner, after the Bull ant, being the last to expire, was declared disqualified, as it was not considered to be a spider.

Trainer Lachlan MacDonald, who is believed to have (somehow) ingested some of the mix of stray venoms through the pores of his hands, and who was feeling poorly after laying the beasties down to their final resting place, has not so far been persuaded to continue with the experiments.

It has since been rumoured that Lachlan is now considering making Wiruna the centre for snake racing (see photo below, left).

VIEWS OF THE LEONIDS FROM CENTRAL AUSTRALIA

Although the much-vaunted Leonids put on a muted display, much below some expectations, some observers in the outback reported some interesting sightings.

Patrons at the Kulgera combination Bar / Roadhouse / Campground in the Northern Territory, saw some brilliant fireballs from midnight to 3 am. The most amazing sighting was of an object that went horizontally from West to East, emitting a shower of sparks, loud noises and a strong smell of burning.

Patrons who saw it described it as a terrifying sight, although one backpacker who had run out of money and was more or less sober expressed the opinion that it was a wedge-tailed eagle, which had unwisely landed on high-tension wires, which stretch alongside the Stuart Highway.

Further research on this sighting is being conducted by Ph.D students from the University of NSW, who are currently searching out those patrons present on the evening in question, and then attempting to replicate the level of sobriety experienced by each at the time of the sighting.

The University will gratefully accept all donations of spiritous beverages, so that the witnesses can be properly interrogated in the right state of mind, by interrogators in a like state.



ASNSW Member considering the feasibility of Snake Racing at Wiruna

AN AUSTRALIAN OUTBACK ADVENTURE

Harry Janos came from his native Hungary to Australia in 1963, and as a young man of 25, settled in the rough, tough opal mining town of Coober Pedy, deep in the heart of South Australia.

After many hard years, Harry enjoyed some modest success in his search for the precious opal - at one stage making news by finding the complete opalised skeleton of a Diprotodon. In 1966 he married Nelly Wallaroo.

Harry was introduced into astronomy in 1967 by members of the ASNSW travelling North to Tennant Creek in order to observe M31 and other northern objects at a favourable altitude.

Having been shown through a member's 6" Newtonian telescope, Harry was hooked, started a subscription to Sky & Telescope, and read every book in the Mechanics Institute Library at nearby Oodnadatta.

His first telescope was a 60mm refractor, but Harry aspired to bigger things and set about building the biggest telescope in Coober Pedy.

Carefully cutting out a section of rock containing patch/opal of little colour or commercial value, Harry

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cut out a 20" disc, and making his own version of a hindle machine, started grinding with six grades of finely sieved desert sand, aided by an early edition of Texerou.

He built his own Foucault tester, searched a car wrecking yard at Port Augusta until he found a wing mirror from a 1961 Vanguard Utility which was almost an optical flat, and after several months of hard work, finishing with star testing, had a fully functional set of optics for a 20" f/6.

Polishing was done using tar laps on those winter nights when the temperature was just right to get the correct hardness, the polishing agent being finely ground bull-dust from beside the local movie theatre.

In this pre-dobson era, Harry opted for a mount using a mirror cell welded out of light rail track (from abandoned mines) and set in a surplus council concrete mixer from which Harry had carefully chipped the hardened concrete.

The skeleton tube was finely crafted out of West Australian Jarrah, and an elaborate gear train, which included two Limited Slip Differentials, seven gearboxes, and various pieces of three mountain bikes completed the drive mechanism.

Mr Janos silvered the optics himself using silver nitrate.

The dry, non-polluted desert air is so clean that thirty years later, the surface remains untarnished. His eyepieces and finder came from three pairs of binoculars in various states of disrepair.

Since its inauguration, Harry has used the scope every clear night, sometimes from the bottom of a 20m shaft to avoid stray light and wind vibration (see image below).

He has observed all the Messier objects visible from his latitude, and similarly with NGC objects. Harry has discovered 9 comets, but unfortunately the mail is so slow from Coober Pedy that the credit has gone to others with quicker means of communication. He is fond of planetary nebulae, and is of the opinion that his scope shows many more than appear in the catalogues.

Currently, Harry is working through the extended catalog of lesser Murrell objects, and hopes to see one some night.

U.S. NEWS - DISTINGUISHED VISITOR

Visiting US Amateurs have discussed the possibility that renowned Columbus astronomer, Dr. Biff Smooter, may one day cast the sunshine of his countenance on our fair country.

After his first unhappy experience observing with a 60mm equatorially mounted department store refractor outside a McDonalds restaurant, Biff decided to graduate to somewhat larger optics, and darker skies, where he is reliably rumoured to have become an avid Deep Sky observer.

Honorary steeplejack to several 36" Dobsonians, He has heard stories of the Southern stars from several intrepid travellers, but has so far been unable to visit these shores in view of his absolute indispensability to the functioning and survival of Columbus.

The search for a stand-in of sufficient status continues.



One of Harry's underground Observatories, showing the diagonal and spider emerging from the shaft of the observatory

Several retired senators have indicated availability.

Dr Smooter is currently consultant in Extra-Terrestriality to Unesco and author of "Simian Astronomy", and several papers concerning evidence for circumnavigation of Rhode Island by Christopher Columbus.

ASTRONOMERS OF THE GRECO ROMAN WORLD

Much of the foundation for the work of Newton, Kepler and Copernicus was laid by the writings of Great thinkers and scientists of the Nations of the Mediterranean world some 25 centuries ago or more.

Much of our knowledge is fragmentary, as much ancient literature has been lost, but some hitherto unknown facts are emerging following the successful unrolling and deciphering of carbonised papyrus scrolls in a Roman villa recently excavated near the village of Pompeii.

Included is a whole codex of successful predictions of the dates of the Full Moon for March 454 BC by Sinecure Gratias, Court Astronomer to King Halitosis the Great of Macedon.

Sinecure was the first to combine mathematics and observational astronomy, building on Egyptian foundations. He referred in his book to the lost writings of Protractor, Surveyor of capital works to King Cheops, and who measured out the foundations of the Great Pyramid, near modern Cairo.

Protractor had, for 32 years, precisely fixed the rising positions of the Full Moon on the flat Egyptian desert East of the Nile, and constructed an elaborate grid reference, which enabled him to form a precise estimate of true east.

Combining this with observations of the star Thuban, enabled him to deduce the direction of North, after which South and West soon followed. Sinecure was able to

translate the writings of Protractor from the original demotic script, and quoted fragments extensively.

A great loss to ancient astronomy was the early death of the Roman philosopher Oratorio, who was tragically killed during the Civil War following the assassination of Emperor Gluteus Maximus who was stabbed in the rotunda in the year 82 AD.

Oratorio deduced from harmonic scales the underlying order of the universe, and using musical analogies, drew the correct conclusions from the reports of the transit of Mars across the Sun during the Bacchanalia of August, 79 AD.

His ship was sunk when he was taking passage to Alexandria to take up the position of astrologer in residence, to which he had been appointed by Alexander the Median, descendent of Halitosis, and Chief Gravitass of that Museum.

Alexander had developed the novel theory that the pyramids were actually anti-gravity flying devices which could move between the stars using energy generated by the matrix of some hundreds of thousands of carefully shaped stone blocks.

He deduced that mummification was actually a form of suspended animation to enable themselves to travel far in space and time in their protective sarcophagi, and then conducted experiments attempting to revive many of the thousands of mummified cats excavated from caves near Thebes.

Much of the medical work in this regard was performed by his pupil, Feline the Persian. These experiments were, alas, unsuccessful but did produce several accidental discoveries.

It was found that cheese stored in the burial chamber, deep inside the pyramid of Khufu, kept much better than similar cheese stored on the head of the Sphinx, and that mummified cats made superlative fertiliser.

After the death of Alexander, Feline, being passed over for promotion, moved to Roman Londinium and established a brewery producing Egyptian-style beer.

It is believed that the British preference for warm ale dates from this event.

It is not widely known that Emperor Nero had a scientific bent, as well as being bent on many other things. His much maligned burning of Rome, so newly discovered chronicles tell us was partly directed to slum clearance, but principally motivated at examining the spectral emissions of a whole range of burning objects through one of the new glass bottles of Egyptian wine.

Nero's partner, former slave Genda Unspecificus, had been conducting numerous experiments with glass bottles and a surviving portion of Nero's biography, which survived in the villa collection, tells of this.

The biography, by Roman scholar Erudite suggests that Genda may have made the first advances in the study of optics.

Certainly, he personally emptied thousands of bottles of wine, and is reported to have said that the further he went in his experiments, the more different things looked.

NEW MEMBER WELCOMED

The ASNSW's newest member may well be shorter and hairier than most members, but she has been nonetheless welcomed by all.

Australian born-and-bred, our new member is an eastern grey Kangaroo from the northern New South Wales suburb of Dawsons Spring, in Mount Kaputar National Park near Narrabri.

Due to visitors in the park feeding her bread, she is now blind in one eye, with a cataract caused by the cow's milk which is used in the production of bread.

Binoculars are useless to her now.



New member being educated about telescope construction

She doesn't let this worry her however, as with one eye still in full working condition, she regularly observes through the telescopes of ASNSW members during their visits to the National Park at Mt Kaputar.

As regular visitors to Mt Kaputar National Park will know, the skies from the summit of the mountain, are the best from anywhere in the state. The seeing is usually excellent, and the transparency is by far superior to any other location in New South Wales. At an altitude of 1,524 metres at the summit, it is hardly surprising.

OBSERVATIONS OF THE SOUTH GALACTIC POLE

Ever since John Herschel's historic observations of the SGP during his South African visit in the early 19th Century, Southern hemisphere amateur astronomers borne a special responsibility to monitor it's appearance owing to it's not being visible from the Northern hemisphere.

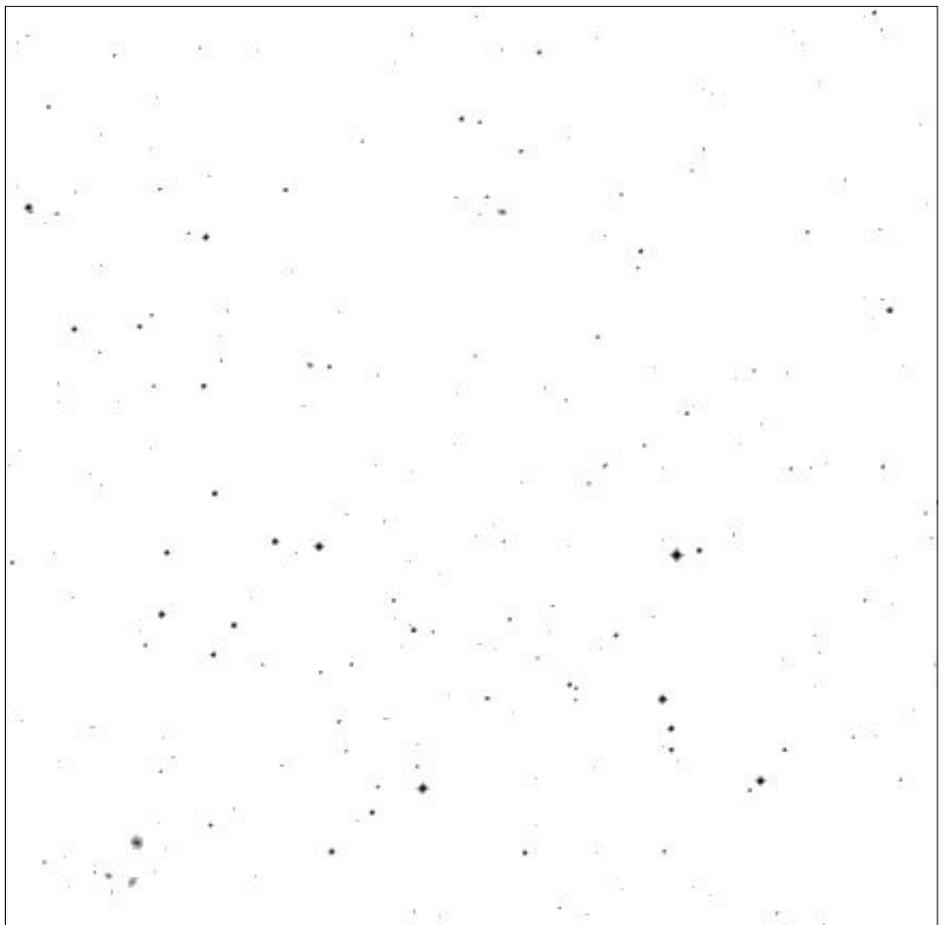
As early as 1892, however, a remark ascribed to John Tebbutt during the annual dinner of the Australian Comet Seekers Society suggested that the visual appearance of the object had materially altered since Herschel's day. Unfortunately, no details survived.

During the opposition of Mars in 1892, it appears that a number of Sydney amateur astronomers visited the private observatory of Hans Frandsen Madsen, surveyor in the New South Wales Lands Department and a highly regarded amateur astronomer.

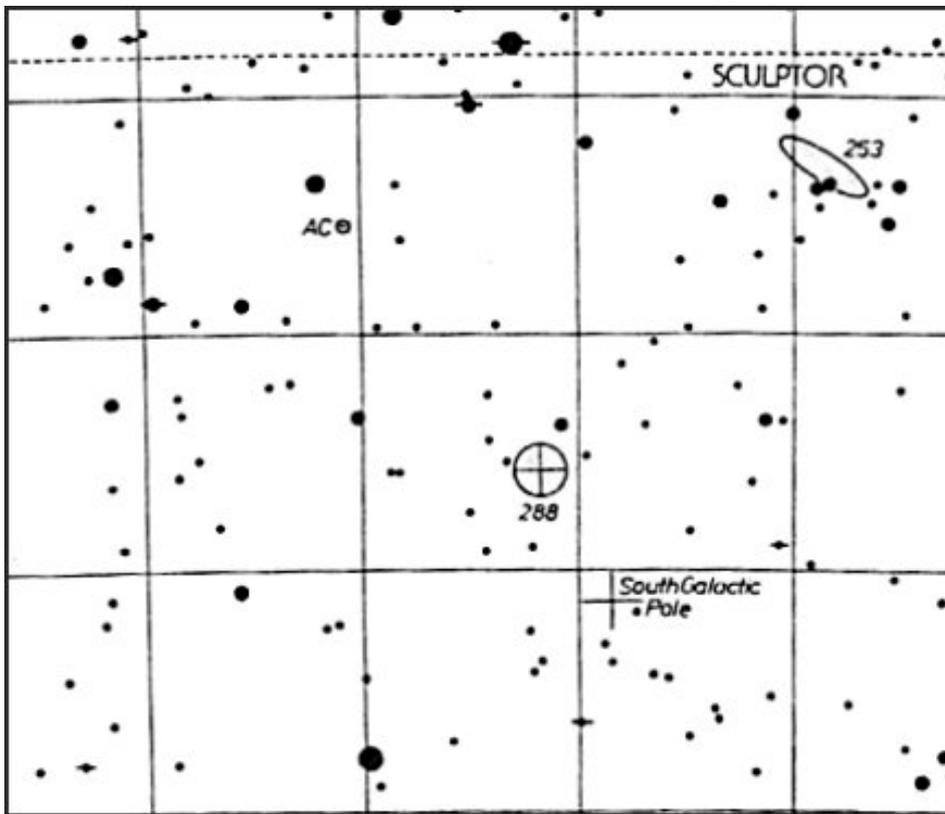
Madsen's observatory, a substantial building with a copper dome, was at his Newtown residence, and housed a 46 cm (18") Reflector with highly regarded optics, and though used primarily for planetary observations, it seems that the group took turns in making comparison drawings of the SGP on nights when the transparency was above average, and the seeing did not lend itself to planetary work.

Respected member of the BAA Cedric Heath-Robertson, who has been collating John Herschel's writings, and monitoring the North Galactic Pole with his 16" Calver reflector, has asked that any members with current SGP observations forward them to him at 33B Baker Street, Wuthering Heights WD40, Surrey, UK.

The image below, shows the South Galactic Pole itself (somewhere in there), while the image over the page, is a finder chart, adapted from Uranometria 2000.0 Volume II, map 307.



*The beautiful South Galactic Pole
(Image courtesy DSS)*



*Finder Chart for the South Galactic Pole
(Image courtesy Uranometria)*

APRIL'S HORRORSCOPE

By Con Huckstar

♈ Aries: Venus visits your sign for a week before giving you the flick for Taurus, so go for it before the second week of April. For the rest of the month, if you think people are looking at you, plotting against you or laughing about you, they probably are!

♉ Taurus: Venus moves into Taurus this month, flirts with the Seven Sisters and occults Aldebaran. If you are a male, by the end of the month, you will have seven potential girlfriends to choose from. If you are a woman, stay clear of Greek Goddesses in ambivalent moods.

♊ Gemini: With Comet Hale-Bopp at Apogee and Olympus Mons in the descending node, Gemini won't know if they're coming or going.

On the other hand, do Gemini's give a damn? Does anyone who knows a Gemini?

♋ Cancer: On April 15, the moon stands between Mercury and Jupiter. What this has to do with Cancer is unclear, except that Cancerians are advised to avoid getting between a rock and a hard place this month, or any other month for that matter.

♌ Leo: Charles Messier has been haunting Leo ever since he missed adding NGC3628 to M65 and M66. Seems he was on a bender that night. If you get lost star hopping in your sign, Charlie's ghost is probably in the way, still looking.

♍ Virgo: All you have going for you is minor planets Flora and Metis! Take up flower arranging or celibacy. Your time will come one of these years. Take warning from your close proximity to the Sombrero and wear a hat and block-out in summertime.

♎ Libra: Boring, Boring, Boring. This sign may host a telescopic meteor or two this month, otherwise steady as she goes. That suits most sensible people just fine. The problem, is that most Librans are Fruitcakes!

♏ Scorpio: Isn't having the most spectacular constellation in the Zodiac enough for you Scorpio without wanting a forecast as well? OK then, beware the ides of March and the tides of April. Think about that for a bit!

♐ Sagittarius: The near collision of Sagittarius with Capricorn this month gets your goat! Do not respond with road rage, and never drive your car unless you are wearing a seat belt and you are inside the vehicle.

♑ Capricorn: Uranus and Neptune are in your sign, and if you don't like it, tough luck, as you are stuck with the bastards for quite a while, however, the Moon is in a planet busting mood this month, so if you try a change of direction, pick the 10th or the 11th when the brutes are occulted in turn, and rely on Comet Forbes for guidance.

♒ Aquarius: Mercury is your ascendant, and it's near daylight crash against the Moon on April 14th vibrates your constellation. Be careful crossing the road this month, and don't step in front of truck until mid May.

♓ Pisces: Nothing much happens in Pisces these days, however, the Full Moon shines on the Polar caps on Mars, and in your general direction. If you start (a) howling at the Full Moon, (b) growing excessive body hair, (c) planning to join the foreign legion - or all three, seek medical help.

Con Huckstar has made his riches forecasting the lives of Astronomers, and is a well respected member of the Astrological Society of NSW U^{nco}.

If you would like a personal consultation to have your horoscope made or psycho-analysed, Con Huckstar can be contacted via the Society's email address.

BOKGLOB GRÖSEBLURTER FINALLY CAPTURED!

Immediately prior to the Star Party of 1998, a reward of 10,000 Plutonian Würtzels was being offered to any sentient contriving information which would lead to the constriction and incarceration of the notorious Bokglob Gröseblurter, Alias Andrew Mullet, Alias The Callisto Kid.

Bokglob was believed to be responsible for most of the missing mass of the Galaxy, and was being sought by the Police Farce for the specific crimes of:

- *Exceeding warp factor 6 while the holder of a provisional licence*
- *Defacing the face on Mars with a spray can*
- *Stealing Captain Picard's wig*
- *Selling blue rinse to Grey Aliens*
- *Out-gassing on Public transport when in zero gravity*
- *Joyriding in a Tardis*
- *Harassing Miss Alternate Universe with telepathic calls proposing marriage*
- *Consistently failing to abduct his monthly quota of Earthlings*
- *Hypersensitising his averted vision, leading to perverted imagination and hallucinating with a telescope*
- *Impersonating a Human Being*
- *Menacing Earth Police Farces with a fully-loaded Darlek Dis-assembler*

Bokglob, when captured, was about 0.6843212^{14} parsecs taller than expected, and had lost about 2.076^{97} Neutrinos in weight.

He was modelling a new head at the time, but was easily distinguished by the distinctive holograph imprinted on the left-hand side of his right heart.

The captor wishes to remain nameless at this stage, as pronunciation of their name in the

English language is intolerable to both our ears and to theirs.

The reward of 10,000 Plutonian Würtzels was paid in the form of a cheque to a certain Doctor (Who shall remain nameless) early last week, and will be used to finance a new Tardis with Cruise Control and built-in GPS System.

Bokglob Gröseblurter is now doing Time in the Intergalactic Police Farce Headquarters located in the East Wing of Quadrant #5 of the Local Group of Galaxies.

WIRUNA TO BE NEW OLYMPIC VENUE

With various new sports being included in the Olympic Games over the last few decades, the latest suggestion has been for amateur astronomers to have an observing contest, which would include such events as finding and identifying the largest number of objects in the shortest period of time.

There would, of course, be limits set, as to magnitude and size of objects, however the use of Star Port as an observing aid would not be permitted.

Using a 10" f/5.6 Dobsonian telescope (for example) equipped only with a Telrad, representatives from each country would have to find a certain number of objects in a given 10° area of sky (to be identified at the beginning of the event).

The observer with the most identified (and perhaps even sketched) objects, would take home the Gold Medal, followed of course by the Silver and Bronze Medals.

Suggestions for rules and other guidelines, are currently being considered by the IOC, and can be emailed to the Society's Email address. Nominations are also being considered at this stage, and once again, these can be emailed to the Society, and should be received by no later than the last day of SPSP 2000.0.

CLASSIFIEDS

For Sale:

60mm Refracting telescope. Genuine Department store quality, with 1200x magnification! Comes with 40mm, 20mm, 10.5mm and 2.2mm eyepieces for those objects which need an extra bit of power. Also included, 5x24mm finder (effective aperture: 4.8mm) and a tripod and mount built from very light materials for ease of transport. Excellent quality optics, as new, which still show most of the colours on the moon. Bargain at \$1000 ono. Contact Limon Ruski on 8852-4685 for more information.

Wanted:

200" Primary parabolic aluminised mirror, with cell if available, for use in a small backyard observatory in the dark streets of Haymarket. Also require tube assembly if available and a working Telrad would be highly appreciated. Willing to pay cash or personal cheque. For more information, please contact D. Reamer on 8876-5543 ah.

New Product:

Forget using distilled water and cotton balls for cleaning your mirror to perfection! Try New Shine with Tortoise Wax on your delicate optics, to give them a beautiful shiny finish, and a hard, clear protective coating of Tortoise Wax to protect against scratches and unwanted acid stains.

New Product:

Is your Dobsonian getting a little flimsy in it's old age?

Try a new strand of Pine developed by scientists in the US, known as Pinus Viagris (Blue Spruce). This new strand of Pinewood is guaranteed to stay much firmer for much longer than other types of wood.

Give Pinus Viagris a go, and compare your wood with a friend's wood today! See the difference, feel the difference.

Available now, in 9-ply, at all good Hardware stores.

RRP: \$69m²

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HOW TO GET TO MEETINGS

Meetings are held in the ATNF Headquarters building, located in the CSIRO Department of Radiophysics complex on the corner of Pembroke Road and Vimiera Roads, Marsfield. If arriving by car, turn right in the main gate, then immediately right past the main office entrance, proceeding about 50 metres to a small car park area. Adjacent to this is the "West Door", which is our entrance.

All meetings start at 8pm sharp. The doors will be opened at 7.45, 7.55 and 8.10pm. If you arrive after 8.10pm, knock loudly on the door to attract the attention of the attendant, who works in the adjacent office. There may be a short delay before answering. Please note that you will be shot on site and used as guinea pigs in secretive Government experiments if you fail to comply with these strict guidelines as set out here.

ALTERNATE EDITOR

Lachlan MacDonald

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SOCIETY DIARY

April 2 / 3	Full Moon	SpringFest - Morris Dancing at Stonehenge to celebrate Full Moon - <i>ASNSW Admirers</i>
April 9 / 10	Last Quarter Moon	Crago Observatory, Bowen Mountain
April 16 / 17	New Moon	New Moon Observing Weekend at Wiruna, Ilford NSW
April 23	Technical Meeting	"Collimating your Horoscope effectively" - <i>Dr. Con Huckstar</i>
April 30	Ordinary Meeting	"Was Errol Flynn a Virgo?" - <i>Dr Kinsey</i>
May 7 / 8	Last Quarter Moon	Crago Observatory, Bowen Mountain
May 14 / 15	New Moon	New Moon Observing Weekend at Wiruna, Ilford NSW
May 21 / 22	First Quarter Moon	Collision of Asteroid with Earth causing massive Tsunami across the South Coast of NSW. - Recommend Wiruna for the weekend.

DISCLAIMER

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