



# Snake River Skies

*A monthly publication of The Magic Valley Astronomical Society, member Astronomical League*

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Yearly membership is \$10 per person, \$15 per family, \$6 per student. Benefits include magazine discounts to Sky & Telescope and Astronomy, club activities, and Astronomical League benefits.

## April 14th Meeting: Paul Verhage on the Idaho Near Space Program



Paul Verhage from the Boise Astronomical Society will discuss the Idaho Near Space Program. Paul was heavily involved in the Kansas Near Space Program from 1996-99 where 19 near space missions that performed experiments in meteorology, remote sensing, engineering, radio propaga-

tion, space science and life science.

Paul has developed an educational program, where high school students develop experiments to launch into the stratosphere. He is a former network administrator at Kansas State University, and currently teaches high school in Nampa.

The club meeting begins at 7pm in the Herrett Center Classroom on the campus of the College of Southern Idaho.

## Science Trek Star Party April 20th

Friday night, April 20th, MVAS will be assisting the Herrett Center in sponsoring a star party for Science Trek, a program introducing science to third, fourth, and fifth graders. The Herrett Center is expecting about 100 kids. Volunteers are needed to man telescopes and help give the kids a great introduction to the stars. Please come out to lend us a hand! We need to have the telescopes

ready to go by 9pm, and the party should last about an hour and a half. A telescope isn't necessary to help. See you there!



## From the President—Tom Gilbertson

Thanks to those who participated in the simultaneous sky viewing on March 22, 2001 at the **Filer Elementary School** and



**Gooding School for the Deaf and Blind.**

I believe these are the ones who participated in the Filer event, Forrest Ray, Jay Hartwell, Melanie Burtis-Watson, and Phil Hafer. Joining me at the Gooding event were Randy James, Robert and Debbie Bennett, John Dean, and Rick Widmer.

Before we started viewing I had a few moments to answer some of the questions Gooding students had about what we would be seeing in the sky that night. I have seen signing before, but this is the first time

I have had a signing interpreter. I remember one young girl signing her question of **why the stars have different colors**. I answered that colors indicate that stars have different temperatures. She asked is a red star the hottest? I answered no blue is hottest. Oddly enough a red star is cooler than blue star. I was impressed on how efficient this means of communication is and now wished I had had more time to field more questions before the darkness came. These students were very inquisitive and we had a very successful viewing of the planets, beehive clus-



*(Continued on page 4)*

## Gooding Star Party at Idaho School for the Deaf & Blind

Hey, just wanted to thank your group for coming out to the Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind last night for the star party. It was outstanding! Everyone remembers his first glance at the Jovian moons through a telescope and these kids will never forget it. It's hard to measure the impact on their imaginations, but the questions I was interpreting for them showed me their high level of interest. The visual nature of the activity was ideal for the hearing impaired.

The information and excitement provided was such that even one young blind student looked through a telescope and claimed he saw Saturn! Amazing! I include a few snapshots I took at the event -- I wanted

to take more but my blinding flash made me highly unpopular! They are fairly low res for web use or 2x3" printing. If you need larger file sizes for larger printing, fire me an e-mail and I can send you the larger files from my work T-1 line. Thanks for your patience trying to communicate with students/interpreters in the dark as well as the continuous adjustments necessary to realign your scopes after clumsy students would jiggle them.

Good show!

Kevin Weiche  
Dean of Students  
ISDB

## ISDB and St. Edwards School Star Parties

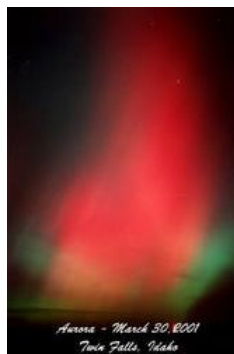


## Aurora Borealis Tries to Outshine MVAS 2001 Messier Marathon

True to form March in Idaho continues to be a difficult month to plan sky viewing. After two cloud outs on April 23, and 24, the outlook for April 30 was uncertain. I arrived at the Jerome Rod and Gun club at about 7:30 pm on the 30<sup>th</sup> and unloaded my 2-ton (it may not be 2 tons, just feels like 2 tons) 17" inch telescope. There were only a few high cirrus clouds in the sky and a stiff cold west wind. Soon Tyler, Matthew, and their mother Janet Shropshire braved the wind to help me set-up. Chris Sutton came just in time for the dusk start of the marathon. Chris had little trouble finding the first few difficult objects and things progressed very nicely as the darkness came.

Rick Widmer had sent me a message earlier that day that an enormous solar storm had occurred and tonight would be a good night for possible aurora displays. I had checked the sun out with my solar filter earlier that afternoon and sure enough the sun had an immense collection of sunspots. As we looked to the north in between Messier Objects we saw a growing glow along the northern horizon. The aurora was clearly evident by 10:00 pm and was an interesting side note to the Messier Objects we were viewing.

The glow from the north continued to grow and at about midnight there was a distinct haze covering the sky well into Leo. The glow was so prominent we could no longer find the faint Messier objects and even the bright stars of the big dipper were barely visible in the haze. I thought to myself what bad luck, a cloudbank is moving in and we would probably be done for the night. Chris assured me that this was no cloudbank or bad luck.



This would be one of the best aurora displays seen from this latitude in years. Sure enough the bright glow starting turning a deep red and a shimmering pattern of lines developed in the haze. An occasional bright patch would light up in the sky then fade to red and disperse in an eerie umbrella-like pattern. The maximum display lasted 30 to 40 minutes and left me spell bound.

Chris compared the view we were seeing to the view through a colorful nebula and sure enough you could imagine for several minutes what the view would be like on a planet in a solar system outside the eagle, lagoon, or other similar nebula in our galaxy. At maximum the aurora covered parts of Corvus. I heard a crackling sound coming from somewhere in the rifle range and walked over to the strange sound. It was probably an insect as mystified as we were at this stunning nighttime sight. The display died down back to the northern horizon, but never disappeared until dawn Saturday Morning.

By the end of the night Chris had shown me all but one of the Messier objects. In a strange coincidence the 1st Quarter Moon hid M1, the colorful Crab Nebula. I owe a special thanks to Chris Sutton for sharing with me his extensive knowledge of the night sky and sticking it out to the end for another successful MVAS 2001 Messier Marathon. As I headed out of the Gun Club at dawn I saw a bright sliver in the sky. It was the thin crescent of Venus, which has recently made its transition from evening to morning star. I thought to myself that I too had made a transition from an occasional stargazer, to a witness of one of Idaho's most memorable nighttime skies.

Tom Gilbertson, *photos by Forrest Ray*



## National Astronomy Day - Saturday April 28th

Saturday April 28th is National Astronomy Day. The Herrett Center has a day of activities planned that are fun for the whole family. Please come out to support the event. Any assistance you can offer is much appreciated!



<u>Time</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Location</u>	
1:30pm to 5:00pm	Solar viewing (weather per.)	Front lawn	<—Need MVAS Volunteers!
1:00pm to 5:00pm	Solar System scale model	North College	
1:00pm to 3:00pm	Make & Take (Water bottle rockets, etc.)	Classroom	<—Need MVAS Volunteers!
2:00pm	"The Dinosaur Chronicles"	Planetarium	
3:15pm	Rocket Launches	South of Museum	
4:00pm	"The Dinosaur Chronicles"	Planetarium	
7:00pm	"The Dinosaur Chronicles"	Planetarium	
7:30pm	"The Shrouds of Pluto" by Jay Sneddon	Classroom	
9:00pm	Star Party	Front lawn	<—Need MVAS Volunteers!





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## Message from the President *continued*

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ter, Orion Nebula, and other features.

I heard from a parent from the Filer school say that their event went very well and Melanie sent me a message saying how rewarding she felt that evening was. We had a cloudy night for the **Bickle Elementary School event**, but got some good press with a picture of **Phil Hafer's telescope making the Times News**. Thanks again to the participants and we hope to promote more sky viewing nights with other schools in our area.

Be sure to come to our next meeting April 14 and hear **Paul Verhage give a talk on high altitude balloon launches**. Paul is an active member of the Boise Astronomical Society and is an avid electronics hobbyist. He has a very sophisticated package of instruments including video cameras that he sends up to high altitudes. Some of the pictures and data he receives are very interesting. Paul is a very good speaker and may plan to have a launch here in Twin Falls this summer.

Other coming events include **Astronomy day, April 28, 2001** at the Herrett Center. Famous rocket scientists Rick Greenawald and Chris Anderson will thrill those wanting to witness the water rockets. Other fun events are planned for that day.

Tom Gilbertson, President

## MVAS CLUB CALENDAR

### NEXT CLUB MEETING:

Saturday April 14th, Paul Verhage on the Idaho Near Space Program. 7pm at the Herrett Center Classroom. Star Party follows.

Friday April 20th, Science Trek Star Party, Herrett Center. 9pm.

Saturday April 28th, Astronomy Day at the Herrett Center. All day activities.

Saturday May 12th, MVAS Club Meeting.

Saturday May 19th, MVAS Bruneau Dunes Observatory trip. Bruneau Dunes State Park.

June 22-24th, Craters of the Moon Star Party, Craters of the Moon National Monument

August 17-19th, Idaho Star Party, Bruneau Dunes State Park

*The Magic Valley Astronomical Society meets the second Saturday of each month at the College of Southern Idaho, Herrett Center Classroom at 7pm. Star Party at the Herrett Center follows. Visit us at <http://www.mvas.net> Please submit web site materials to [mvas@mvas.net](mailto:mvas@mvas.net) We welcome photos and other materials.*