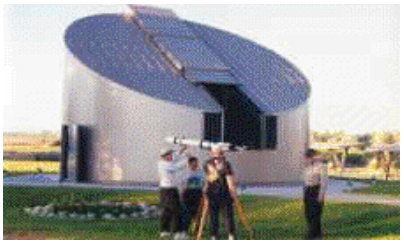
S N A K E R I V E R S K I E S

M a g i c V a l l e y A s t r o n o m i c a l S o c i e t y



Bruneau Dunes Observatory

Next MVAS Meeting: Saturday Feb 14, 2004

Join us for a special guest speaker, Bob Niemeyer, director of the Bruneau Dunes Observatory. Bob is an expert at Astro Photography and has visited many of the nation's leading observatories. The program starts at 7pm in the Herrett Center. A public star party follows.

Volume 5, Issue 2

February 2004

Message from the President: Phil Hafer

As we enter February, we are greeted by the icy chill of winter. The nights are cold and as of late, the wind never seems to stop blowing. But when the wind does stop, and the sky is clear, we have great observing.

This year we are going to reinitiate our monthly **Dark Sky Night**. The program will not work without the help and support of the membership of the club. So I would encourage everyone to participate each month to make these observing sessions a success.

We will be starting a new session of classes on observing this year. The classes will be geared toward the Beginning Observer or those just wanting to refresh their knowledge.

The class will have six sessions beginning in April. Each class will begin at 6:00 P.M. the second Saturday of each month.

The six sessions will be as follows:

Constellations (Tom Gilbertson)

Telescopes (Phil Hafer)

The Moon (Cheri Lowman)

The Solar System (TBA)

Stars & Deep Sky Objects (Ken Thomason)

Planetarium Presentation

The cost for the six sessions will be $20-25.00 to cover the cost of materials.

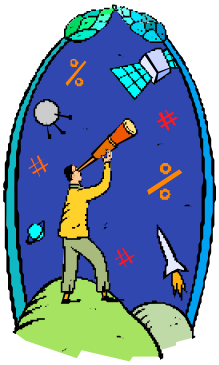
This year, Matt Holmquist will be sending a reminder when your dues or magazine subscriptions are due. If you have any questions about your membership or would like to subscribe to either Astronomy Magazine or Sky and Telescope, at a discount, contact Matt.

Our speaker this month will be Bob Niemeyer, Director of the Bruneau Dunes Observatory. Bob is a member of our club, and lives and works in Boise. He is a very good speaker and this is a program you definitely will not want to miss.

If you have any suggestions on speakers, or on a program you would like to have presented at a meeting please e-mail me so it can be scheduled.

Phil Hafer, President

Magic Valley Astronomical Society



Bring Your Valentine! This Month's Star Party

What could be more romantic than a night under the stars? Bring your valentine to the Herrett Center this Saturday for our monthly star party. The theme this month is "Planets Across the Sky." Venus, Mars, and Saturn will be visible when the star party begins at 7:00pm, with Jupiter rising around 8:30pm. It won't be many more months until the observatory is up and running, but for now we'll still be on the front lawn of the Herrett Center, weather permitting. Telescopes are provided by the Herrett Center and members of the Magic Valley Astronomical Society, and best of all it's free.

MVAS Officers 2004

- *Phil Hafer, President 734-8719 phafer@pmt.org*
- *Cheri Lowman, Vice President, 736-7293, clrcl@rmci.net*
- *Rick Widmer, Secretary/Webmaster, 539-5162, rwidmer@developersdesk.com*
- *Matt Holmquist, Treasurer, 735-5085, mholmquist@coopernorman.com*

Write to MVAS P.O. Box 5101, Twin Falls, ID 83303

If you would like to write an article or otherwise make an entry for the club newsletter, contact Jay Sneddon, 736-2447, jaysneddon@yahoo.com.

Yearly membership is $20 per person, $20 per family $10 per student, Sponsor $100

Look up - Skies above Crater Lake are clear, too

Published September 25, 2003, Herald and News, Klamath Falls, Oregon

For more than 100 years Crater Lake's blue waters have been regarded as a world wonder.

Now Crater Lake is ranked by the National Park Service as one of the system's top 10 spots for star-gazing.

The park service's "dark sky team" said the absence of light pollution from cities and suburbs provides excellent conditions for amateur astronomers.

Owen Hoffman, a former Crater Lake park ranger and member of the Crater Lake Institute, said Crater Lake and other national parks are "also major destinations for tourists in general, many of whom have little knowledge of the night sky. Thus, a perfect opportunity is created in national parks for the public and the amateur astronomer to meet."

Hoffman said that when amateur astronomers share their time, knowledge and equipment with a public curious enough to stay out after dark, the activity is often referred to as "sidewalk astronomy."

Sidewalk astronomy was a focus last month of the Crater Lake Institute, a non-profit public service organization formed in 1995 by former park ranger-naturalists. Hoffman said the event was especially popular with guests of the Crater Lake Lodge, including many first-time star watchers.

Hoffman said the Crater Lake Institute encourages amateur astronomers to "serve in our outstanding natural areas as volunteer sidewalk astronomers and promote public enjoyment of dark skies above our sacred lands."

Owen Hoffman sets up a telescope for sidewalk astronomy along Crater Lake's rim near the Crater Lake Lodge.

What's up in the Sky for February 2004? By Tom Gilberson, MVAS

Venus, as seen in a telescope. Because Venus is an inferior planet, we see it in phases, similar to the Moon.

Even with the winter storms and cloudy weeks we have had this year, you still have a reasonably good chance to see very bright Venus burn her way through the evening western sky. When the skies are clear Venus shines like a very bright searchlight. Small wonder when you consider that she is making her best evening apparition in her 8-year cycle of recurring appearances. Yes be prepared for your friends asking what weird object they are seeing. When she is this bright Venus is often confused as a UFO.

Mars is still visible, but at +1 magnitude (the magnitude of Aldebaran) he is a fast fading glow as we pull farther ahead in our faster orbit about the sun. This planet is best viewed right now on the Internet with the very exciting images being transmitted back by the two Mars rovers Spirit and Opportunity currently exploring this mysterious planet.

Saturn, photographed by Todd Gross

Saturn is still an excellent target with an especially good view of the ring system and moons. Jupiter is rising earlier and is nearing opposition on the night of March 3-4.

This year we are blessed with an extra night for star gazing as this year is a leap year. Late February on moonless nights is an ideal time to look for zodiacal light. 1 to 2 hours after sunset toward the ecliptic near the sun. Also Gegenschein around midnight toward the ecliptic high in the sky. These are caused by sunlight reflected from meterioric dust lying the plane of our solar system.

For more information see This Weeks Planet Roundup on Page 4.

Promoting and Protecting Dark Night Skies in Our National Parks

Courtesy National Part Trust Web site, January 8, 2003. See http://www.parktrust.org/parklandnews/articles/DarkNightSkies.htm

Our National Parks contain the most splendid parts of this country's landscape and history. Many of these protected resources were well recognized at the time the parks were created, for example the geysers of Yellowstone or the giant trees of Sequoia. But as the interest of the public changes and the natural landscape is altered, what is valued as a park resource also changes. **Today, the National Park Service is adapting its management toward the protection of dark night skies.**

The night sky is a timeless and boundless resource, possessing value as a cultural, scenic, natural and scientific resource. It is germane to no particular nation, religion, or belief, but is universally important. The impression of a dark and starry sky has evoked countless myth, art, literature, and inspiration.

As the public loses the experience of a dark sky at their homes, they are increasingly seeking it out in their national parks. National Parks harbor many of these last portals to a dark night sky.

The role the NPS can play has been underscored by non-profit organizations such as the George Wright Society and the International Dark-sky Association. **In response, the park service initiated a small but aggressive program to measure light pollution levels at numerous parks throughout the country.**

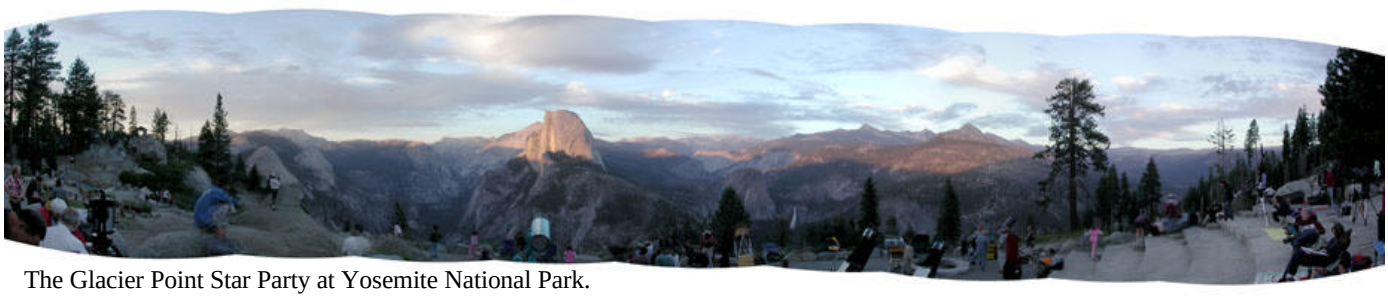
Amateur astronomers and skygazers can play a significant role as park volunteers. Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico has done this beautifully. A small army of volunteers give frequent nighttime programs to park visitors, providing views through numerous telescopes and linking the sky above to the ancient American culture and stone ruins that are the park's namesake.

In Yosemite, visiting San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomers encourage public viewings through large and moderate sized telescopes set up during the evening hours at major viewpoints. During 2002, the Crater Lake Institute recruited former NPS naturalists with an interest in astronomy to bring the joy and inspiration of the night sky to Crater Lake National Park visitors *(see story on Page 2)*.

At the rim of the famous caldera, visitors were treated to informal star walks, all night star gazing, and discovered the "other half" of the park. Other parks, like the Grand Canyon and Bryce Canyon have become destinations for special "star parties" where amateur astronomers from all over the country gather to compare views of the heavens through binoculars and portable telescopes.

The task of promoting the value of dark skies above National Parks has only just begun. Activities focused on public enjoyment of dark skies are likely to spread throughout the entire National Park System. Special programs can be established on an ongoing basis without a major impact to limited park budgets by **forming partnerships with local and national groups engaged in the study and enjoyment of the night sky**. Amateur and professional astronomers can be purposefully invited to visit the parks with the express objective of sharing knowledge and equipment with a curious public.

A positive dark sky experience in our National Parks, enhanced through interaction with knowledgeable naturalists of the night, will lead to increasing public awareness of the joy of gazing upward and a burning desire to protect and reclaim starry nights beyond park boundaries.



The Glacier Point Star Party at Yosemite National Park.

Magic Valley
Astronomical Society

Magic Valley Astronomical Society
P.O. Box 5101
Twin Falls, ID 83303

,

Planet Roundup courtesy skyandtelescope.com

This Week's Planet Roundup

Mercury is hidden low in the glow of dawn.

Venus (magnitude –4.1, in Pisces) is the brilliant white "Evening Star" shining in the west-southwest during twilight and early evening. A telescope will show its gibbous shape.

Mars (magnitude +0.9, in Aries) glows weakly orange high in the south-southwest at dusk. Look for it about three fist-widths at arm's length to the upper left of brilliant Venus. Mars gets lower in the southwest later in the evening and sets by midnight. In a telescope it's a tiny gibbous blob, just 6 arcseconds in diameter.

Jupiter (magnitude –2.5, in the hind feet of Leo) rises in the east around 7:30 p.m. It's shining brightly well up in the eastern sky by 10, and it's at its highest in the south around 2 a.m. If you're out at dawn, look for Jupiter getting low in the west.

Saturn (magnitude –0.2, in the feet of Gemini) shines high in the east in early evening and is highest in the south around 9. Saturn is roughly midway between Capella and Procyon. **Uranus** and **Neptune** are hidden in the glare of the Sun.

Pluto (magnitude 14, in Ophiuchus) is up in the southeast just before dawn.

Club Calendar

Saturday February 14th. MVAS Meeting 7pm, Herrett Center. Bruneau Dunes Observatory Manager, Bob Niemeyer is the featured speaker.

Saturday March 14th. MVAS Meeting 7pm Herrett Center.

New! April 10th Beginning Observing Class. See page 1.

The Magic Valley Astronomical Society meets the second Saturday of each month at the College of Southern Idaho, Herrett Center at 7pm. Star Party at the Herrett Center follows.