

Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 43 No. 06

June 1, 2006

NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, June 5, 2006

Maturango Museum, 100 East Las Flores Avenue, Ridgecrest

PROGRAM FOR THE JUNE 5 MEETING

Our June program will feature the return of geologist Gary Peterson of San Diego State University. In previous visits, Gary has told us about the geologies of Earth, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, and the Jovian Satellites of Jupiter. This year his talk is entitled "The Problem with Pluto". This talk is timely with the recent launch of the Pluto probe. We hope to have many answers when it arrives in 2015.

DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

Monday, June 5, 2006: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, June 28, 2006: Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter

Friday, June 23, 2006: Public Star Party. See below.

Monday, July 10, 2006: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR THE 2006 SEASON:

Star Parties will be held on the dates listed below. Star Parties are an activity where members and guests join together to share views of the skies. If you have a telescope, bring it. If not, come and look through someone else's. Star parties are held at a site in the open desert south of Ridgecrest. To reach the star party site from Ridgecrest, go south on China Lake Boulevard 6.5 miles from its intersection with Ridgecrest Boulevard. Continue straight across Highway 395 and you will be on Brown Road (Old Highway 395). Follow Brown Road as it curves to the right and goes west. After 2.3 miles there will be a 30-inch orange cone on the left. Turn left and follow the dirt road marked by 12-inch cones. The CLAS Star party is 0.5 miles along this road. Watch for signs and cones, which will be put out about a half hour before viewing starts. Call Carroll Evans 760-375-5681, or Bruce Churchill 760-375-7247, for more information.

Friday, June 23: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, July 28: Signs out at 8:00 p.m., Star viewing at 8:30 p.m.

Friday, August 25: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing at 8:00 p.m.

Friday, September 22: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing 7:30 p.m.

Friday, October 20: Signs out at 7:00 p.m., Star viewing at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, November 17: Signs out at 6:00 p.m., Star viewing at 6:30 p.m.

THE SKY IN JUNE (Roger Brower)

1. Venus is in the morning sky and rises about 5 a.m. local daylight time. This month it is located near the Pleiades star cluster. Look for it low in the east-southeast before dawn.

2. Mercury can be seen in the evening sky where it is located in the west-northwest after sunset.

3. Jupiter is just past opposition so will be finely placed for viewing all night. Look for it rising in the east just after sunset.

4. Saturn and Mars will both be in the western sky in the evening. Look for them in the west-southwest near the beehive cluster after dark.

PUBLIC STAR PARTIES AT THE MATORANGO MUSEUM, 2006 SEASON

The China Lake Astronomical Society will host public viewing at the Museum's Observatory on the following Thursday evenings: June 22, June 29, July 20, July 27, August 17, and August 24. The dome will be open, of course, and CLAS members are requested to bring extra telescopes to set up in the vicinity. Call Carroll Evans for details.

TILLIE CREEK PUBLIC OUTREACH PROGRAMS

The Forest Service is continuing its series of "Campfire Talks" at the Tillie Creek Campground amphitheater. Astronomy will be the subject on three Saturday evenings, June 24, July 29, and August 26. This year the Kern River Valley Astronomical Society, under the leadership of Rich Burdge, is coordinating the programs. A whole new set of slides has been prepared, and they will be projected as PowerPoint in the modern way. CLAS members are still invited to bring telescopes for the public viewing before and after the talk. Call Rich at 760-376-1291 (Work) or 760-376-6290 (Home) for details. We look forward to another great season.

REPORT ON THE APRIL 28, 2006 CLAS STAR PARTY (Bruce Churchill)

Our April star party was held on Friday the 28th. It was an exceptionally clear night in our valley, but a breeze arose around sunset, and this reduced the quality of our viewing somewhat. Jerry Ott provided me with the following account of his activities with his 14.5" Starmaster with Sky Tracker drive.

Omega Centauri is the globular star cluster <http://www.seds.org/messier/cluster.html> in the constellation of Centaurus, and is the largest star cluster within our Milky Way galaxy. Omega Centauri, also known as NGC 5139, has a total mass of about five million suns or roughly ten times as large as the other larger globular clusters. Like other globular clusters the stars are gravitationally bound into a spherical configuration, with the highest density of stars at the center. MGC 513 is also the brightest globular cluster, easily visible to the naked eye if observed from the southern hemisphere. It should also be visible to the naked eye in the northern hemisphere if you know where to look and if you are able to look far enough south. I did not look for it visually after finding it in my telescope. Will have to try that sometime. I have observed Omega Centauri several times from the CLAS observing site. Its distance is 16,000 light years and has a visual magnitude of 3.68.

I also observed the large edge-on galaxy NGC 4565 in Coma Berenices at 31 million light years. The Whirlpool galaxy in Canes Venatici (M51 and NGC 5194/5195) is 37 million light years away and in prime position this time of year. M3 (NGC 5272) is also in Canes Venatici. It is a large globular cluster 330,900 light years away. M100 (NGC 4321) in Coma Berenices is a large face-on spiral galaxy 56 million light years away. M44 (NGC) 2632) is an open cluster in Cancer visible to the naked eye as a large fuzzy patch. It is 577 light years distance and variously known as Praesepe, Bee Hive Cluster, Little Cloud, cloudy Star, and Little Mist over the last 2000 plus years. NGC 3242, also known as the ghost of Jupiter, is a nice planetary nebula in Hydra approximately 2700 light years from us. I also observed the B fragment of Comet 73P/Schwassmann-Wachmann 3. It was very good with a nice tail.

A STAR PARTY

Rocky Mountain Star Stare (RMSS) is not your typical star party. It's laid back. It's family oriented. It's in the

heart of the Rocky Mountains, just 65 miles west of Colorado Springs. You don't camp on top of your neighbor. You can set up outside of your tent or RV. You have great trout fishing just a short drive away. You have turn of the century casinos just a short drive away. There is white water rafting, nature hiking, and horseback riding just a short drive away. But best of all there's a universe of stars, galaxies, nebulae, and clusters just above the horizon in every direction. Whether you are looking through a 20 inch Dob or a pair of binoculars there's more to see in a night than most people get to see in a month and some see in a lifetime.

Introduce your family to the wonders of the Colorado Rockies and the awesome spectacle of dark skies. Who knows, you might make a scientist out of one of your kids yet. And even if you don't it will be an unforgettable family experience. Join us for our 20th Anniversary celebrating the night sky.

This year's event is held from June 22nd-25th and pre-registration is currently open. Information on RMSS and online registration can be found at <http://www.rmss.org>. To speak to someone regarding RMSS, groups, or other items pertaining to RMSS, please contact Alan Gorski, Public Relations Director, Colorado Springs Astronomical Society, at csaspr@csastro.org or 719.651.8476.

ANNOUNCEMENT FOR SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA ASTRONOMY CLUBS:

Dear Star Gazers,

You are invited to come hear Geoff Marcy, one the world's foremost astronomers, speak at the University of California, Irvine this fall and to learn more about why ancient cultures were interested in the stars.

Geoff is currently Professor of Astronomy at UC Berkeley and he is well known for having found more planets around other stars than anyone else on earth. In addition to finding almost 100 planets, he and his team discovered the first system of planets around a sun-like star, the first Saturn and Neptune size planets, the first transiting planet around another star and the first planet orbiting beyond 5 AU.

Dr. Marcy has appeared on ABC Nightline with Ted Koppel, The McNeil-Lehrer News Hour, CBS Nightly News, NBC Today Show, BBC, Time Magazine (cover story), Washington Post and New York Times (front pages), Newsweek, Sky and Telescope, The Late Night Show with David Letterman and in a numerous other media.

The UCI event is the "Conference on Precession and Ancient Knowledge" and Geoff will be appearing along with explorer Graham Hancock, author of Fingerprints of the Gods, archeo-astronomer Walter Cruttenden, author of Lost Star of Myth and Time, Mayan scholar John Major Jenkins, author of Maya Cosmogenesis 2012, rebel Egyptologist John Anthony West, author of Serpent in the Sky, and megalithic investigator John Burke, author of Seed of Knowledge, Stone of Plenty. Other presenters include advanced cultures physicist John Dering, paranormal investigator Dr. Claude Swanson, author of The Synchronized Universe, nanotechnology and Sanskrit specialist Boris Fritz from Northrop Grumman, and famed geologist Robert Schoch, author of Voices of the Rocks, known for re-dating the Sphinx.

If you have any interest in archaeo-astronomy or cutting edge science and history theory, then don't miss this event at UCI on October 14-15. For more information or to register go to www.CPAKonline.com

Hope to see you there! Heidi Hall, Conference Coordinator, 949-399-0314

OUT OF THIS WORLD INFORMATION (Robert Shaw)

As of May 16, 2006, there are 155 known planetary systems around main sequence stars, including the solar system, containing at least 182 known planets. Note the proviso about main sequence stars, meaning that the planets found orbiting pulsars are not included; including these would bring the total to over 190. **The Extrasolar Planets Encyclopaedia** is a treasure trove of data about exoplanets; <http://exoplanet.eu/>

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Basic CLAS dues are \$20.00 per year, which includes the *Skywatchers Newsletter*. As a benefit of membership you may also receive *Astronomy Magazine* and/or *Sky and Telescope Magazine*. The fee schedule is as follows:

Basic membership	\$20.00 per year
Membership with Astronomy magazine	\$51.00 per year
Membership with Sky and Telescope magazine	\$53.00 per year
Membership with both S & T and Astronomy	\$84.00 per year

Send your check to: Roger Brower, Treasurer, China Lake Astronomical Society, P.O. Box 1783, Ridgecrest, CA 93556.

PRESIDENT – Earl Wilson – 760-876-5455 (email zearl.email@gmail.com)
VICE-PRESIDENT – Bruce Churchill - 760-375-7247 (email bchurchill@atsecure.net)
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TREASURER – Roger Brower - 760-375-1181 (email brower@iwvisp.com)
NEWSLETTER EDITOR – Carroll Evans Jr. - 760-375-5681 (email clevans@ridgenet.net)

WESTERN AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS WEB SITE <http://www.waa.av.org/>

Meetings of the China Lake Astronomical Society are held at the **Maturango Museum** at 7:30 p.m. on the first Monday evening of each month, except when the first Monday is a holiday.

SKYWATCHERS

Newsletter of the

**CHINA LAKE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
POST OFFICE BOX 1783
RIDGECREST, CA 93556-1783**

FIRST CLASS

**NEXT MEETING: 7:30 p.m., MONDAY JUNE, 5, 2006: “The Problem with Pluto”
AT THE MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE.
CLAS WEB PAGE <http://www1.iwvisp.com/brower/clas.html>
INDEX OF CLAS NEWSLETTERS <http://www.ridgenet.net/~jebush/clas/>**