

Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 45 No. 2

February 1, 2008

NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, February 4, 2008

Maturango Museum, 100 East Las Flores Avenue, Ridgecrest, California

PROGRAM FOR THE FEBRUARY 4 MEETING – THE WINTER SKY

Winter brings longer hours of darkness in which to observe, which is particularly convenient in the early evening, and the winter sky has a character of its own. Let's talk about the finest objects to observe in the winter sky. If you have pictures or observing tips, bring them along.

DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

Monday, February 4, 2008: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, February 20, 2008: Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter

Monday, March 3, 2008: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, March 7, 2008: Public Star Party at Brown Road Site, see below.

STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR THE 2008 SEASON: Public star parties resume March 7, 2008.

Star Parties will be held on the dates listed below. Star Parties are an activity where members and guests come together to view the skies. If you have a telescope, bring it; if not, come and look through someone else's. They are held at a site in the open desert south of Ridgecrest. To reach the 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. Signs and cones 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, March 7: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing at 8:00 p.m.

Friday, April 4: Signs out at 8:00 p.m., Star viewing at 8:30 p.m.

Friday, May 2: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, June 6: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, July 4: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, August 1: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

Friday, August 29: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing at 8:00 p.m.

Friday, September 26: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing 8:00 p.m.

Friday, October 24: Signs out at 7:00 p.m., Star viewing at 7:30 p.m.

Friday, November 28: Signs out at 5:30 p.m., Star viewing at 6:00 p.m.

2008 ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY HANDBOOKS AND CALENDARS AVAILABLE

For many years the China Lake Astronomical Society has provided the RASC Observer's Handbook to our membership. The retail price for a single copy (delivered) is \$31.95 US. We get them at a group rate, and share the savings with our members. For the past two years we have sold them at less than cost, as a service to members. However, prices have increased to where we must again cover costs. If you buy in person we are charging \$17.00 for the handbook, and \$10.00 for the calendar.

Most of you know all about the handbooks and calendars. Suffice to say that the *Observer's Handbook* is 320 pages of astronomical data, which is presented as tables, charts and annual and daily information. The calendars also present useful information, along with great astronomical photographs.

THE SKY IN FEBRUARY by Roger Brower

1. Jupiter and Venus are in the morning sky this month. In fact, on the first of the month they will be only .6 degrees apart. Look for them in the east rising about 2 hours before sunrise.
2. Saturn reaches opposition on February 23rd so it will rise at sunset on that day. Look for it in the southeast shortly after sunset.
3. Mars is the best object in the evening sky. Look for it high in the east after the sun sets.
4. Mercury, also, moves to the morning sky by mid-month. Look for it very low in the south-southeast the last half of the month.
5. Two eclipses occur this month. There is an annular solar eclipse on February 6th. Unfortunately, it occurs over the Antarctic, New Zealand and part of Australia. A lunar eclipse occurs on February 20th. Totality occurs from 7:05 to 7:48 p. m. PST. The partial eclipse will occur about 1 1/2 hours either side of totality.

STAR WATCH FOR FEBRUARY 2008 by Bob Stewart

There is one bright naked-eye variable star this month that we can see from Ridgecrest. It is Mira.

If you ever observe only one variable star it should be Mira, Omicron Ceti. Mira is the brightest of the red long-period variables. While it has an unusually brilliant maximum of 3.4 it also fades to invisibility for the naked eye observer. Moreover, while it typically peaks at magnitude 3.4, in March of last year, it reached second magnitude, brighter than any other star in the constellation of Cetus. Mira's period of 332 days means its maxima come one month earlier each succeeding year, so we should see it brighten and fade for the next couple of winters. It reaches its brightest point February 3rd but should be bright throughout the month before fading. Look for it in the southern sky. For a comparison chart go to: http://www.aavso.org/charts/CET/O_CET/

OBSERVATORY FOR SALE by Claude Wood (Reprinted from last month)

Complete observatory for sale. Can be set up for remote robotic operation:

Celestron CGE 1100 w/enhanced coated optics, Astro pier pedestal (also tripod), SGIG ST-2000 XM CCD camera, Telrad Finder, Robofocus robotic focus drive, Televue 35 mm 2" Panoptic, Televue 27 mm 2" Panoptic, Televue 2" Dielectric Diagonal, Televue 2" Barlow, Nine miscellaneous 1.25" eyepieces, 12.5 mm illuminated Plossl, Filter holder, Miscellaneous filters, Meade axis guider, Celestron radial guider, Telescope control PC and software, Camera control PC and software., Pentax K1000 35mm film camera, Televue 2" T-Adapter for camera

Over \$10,000 invested. Asking \$7000. Claude Wood, 377-5558

EQUIPMENT FOR SALE by Jim Leonard (Reprinted from last month)

I am at it again. Selling out more stuff: (1) Pentax K 10 D SLR Digital Camera. In original box with all the goodies. Charger, USB cables, books, software, 4 GB memory chip, T-Mount adapter, remote cable switch, 18-55 mm F3.5-5.6 AL zoom lens, and a Vanguard Wave photo/video bag.

Original cost was around \$1400.00 and will part for \$900.00. Let's talk?

Jim Leonard ex OCA now China Lake Astronomical Soc.
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MISCELLANY by Carroll Evans

Robert Shaw has called my attention to a good YouTube video. Try http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_WEL117xXpw&mode=related&search=
This video shows the relative sizes and characteristics of planets and stars. This is the same YouTube video that I have been intending to show at a club meeting for some time. We have either not had time, or I was out of town.

ASTRONOMY WEEK 2008 IN DEATH VALLEY

Death Valley National Park, the Las Vegas Astronomical Society, and Furnace Creek Inn and Ranch Resort will present Astronomy Week, Jan 28 - Feb 2. Activities will include guided walks, solar and night observing, and evening lectures outdoors and indoors.

Activities start at 7:00 p.m. on Monday with a program about the Moon in the auditorium at the Visitor Center. The days continue with Solar Viewing at various locations, ranger walks and ranger talks. Some activities are repeated, so you don't have to spend the week there. Looks like an excellent program. See http://www.nps.gov/deva/parknews/upload/DEVA_NR_011708_%20AstronomyWeek.pdf for complete information.

DAWN SPACECRAFT

The following is from the NASA website: Dawn's goal is to characterize the conditions and processes of the solar system's earliest epoch by investigating in detail two of the largest protoplanets remaining intact since their formations. Ceres and Vesta reside in the extensive zone between Mars and Jupiter together with many other smaller bodies, called the asteroid belt. Each has followed a very different evolutionary path constrained by the diversity of processes that operated during the first few million years of solar system evolution.

Dawn has much to offer the general public. It brings images of varied landscapes on previously unseen worlds to the public including mountains, canyons, craters, lava flows, polar caps and, possibly ancient lakebeds, streambeds and gullies. Students can follow the mission over an entire K-12 experience as the mission is built, cruises to Vesta and Ceres and returns data. The public will be able to participate through the Solar System Ambassadors and through participation on the web.

This is a long term project. Launch was September 27, 2007. There will be a Mars gravity assist in February of 2009. Arrival at Vesta is scheduled for August 2011. It will stay there until May 2012, then get to Ceres in February 2015. The primary mission ends July 2015. The spacecraft has an ion propulsion unit, so slow and steady wins the race.

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	\$54.00 per year
Membership with Sky and Telescope magazine	\$53.00 per year
Membership with both S & T and Astronomy	\$87.00 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 rbc605gem@yahoo.com)
SECRETARY – Ted Hodgkinson - 661- 824-2738 (email ghodkinson@sbcglobal.net)
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 FEBRUARY 4, 2008: “The Winter Sky” AT THE
MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE., RIDGECREST, CA
CLAS WEB PAGE <http://www.chinalakeastroc.org>
INDEX OF CLAS NEWSLETTERS <http://www.ridgenet.net/~clevans/clas/>**