

Skywatchers

Newsletter of the China Lake Astronomical Society

Volume 47 No. 4

April 1, 2010

NEXT MEETING 7:30 p.m., Monday, April 5, 2010

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

PROGRAM FOR THE APRIL 5 MEETING – CHINA LAKE MOONWATCHERS

The Russians first launched an artificial satellite into successful earth orbit in October of 1957. A lot has happened in space since that time; however, our program will take us back to the first days of satellite observing. Moonwatch was an amateur volunteer program to observe satellites as they orbited the earth. Last September 27 C.L.A.S. member Carroll Evans gave a talk as part of the “Old Timer’s” lecture series at the Naval Air Warfare Center’s Technical Library. This talk was videotaped; the 44-minute DVD will be shown at our meeting.

Additionally, we will show coverage from last July’s total eclipse, as photographed by Msgr. Ronald Royer, in China.

DATES TO KEEP IN MIND

Monday, April 5, 2010: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, April 9, 2010: Regular CLAS Star Party, see below.

Tuesday, April 20, 2010: Deadline for next Skywatchers Newsletter.

Monday, May 3, 2010: Regular CLAS Meeting at the Maturango Museum in Ridgecrest, 7:30 p.m.

STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR THE 2010 SEASON:

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, April 9: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing at 8:00 p.m.

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

Friday, June 11: Signs out at 8:30 p.m., Star viewing at 9:00 p.m.

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

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

Friday, September 10: Signs out at 7:30 p.m., Star viewing 8:00 p.m.

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

Friday, November 5: Signs out at 6:30 p.m., Star viewing at 7:00 p.m.

MUSEUM STAR PARTIES

Public star parties are scheduled, weather permitting, at 8:30 p.m. at the Maturango Museum's observatory, on Thursday evenings, May 6, June 10, July 8, August 5 and September 9.

THE SKY IN APRIL by Roger Brower

1. Venus rises higher in the evening sky this month. Look for it in the west soon after sunset.
2. Saturn just past opposition is in the evening sky this month and rises at sunset. Look for it in the southeast after sunset.
3. Mercury remains in the evening sky with Venus this month. Look for it in the west soon after sunset. On April 4th, it will be just 3 degrees from Venus.
4. Jupiter is in the morning sky this month. Look for it low in the east-southeast just before sunrise.
5. Mars, just past opposition, will be a fine all night object throughout March. Look for it in the east after sunset.

CHINA LAKE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OUTREACH

Again, this year our far-flung outreach program reached out to our neighboring community down the road. CLAS members Roger Brower, Chuck Morgan, and Earl Wilson took solar telescopes to the annual Trona Spring Fling. The weather started out with clear skies, and deteriorated later. Not as many of the younger set got to view the sun, as a children's bounce area had been set up at the other end of the event. Thus, the solar viewing opportunity was not discovered by many of the kids.

APPLIED ASTRONOMY AT THE MATURANGO MUSEUM, Carroll Evans

Last month we talked about the Maturango Museum's new sundial, one in which you, the visitor, are the gnomon; Saturday, March 20, 2010, the Vernal Equinox, was chosen by the Museum docents as the date for its formal dedication. A crowd of museum members and friends gathered under clear blue skies for the formal dedication of the sundial, and other newly installed garden features.

2010 ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY HANDBOOKS AND CALENDARS ARE 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 \$32.45 US. We get them at a group rate, and share the savings with our members. If you buy in person from C.L.A.S., we are charging \$20.00 for the handbook, and \$12.00 for the calendar. Calendar and Handbook will be sold together for the combined price of \$30.00. If you picked up calendars at the December meeting, your handbook can be discounted.

Most of you know all about the handbooks and calendars. Suffice to say that the *Observer's Handbook* is 356 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 publications will be available at the April meeting, or you may contact Roger Brower at 760-375-1181 to pick up a copy.

ASTRONOMY ON THE INTERNET

SOLAR SAILS TAKE SHAPE (Based on MSNBC's Cosmic Log)

Editor's note: Some of this information is slightly out of date, but the project is interesting and contemporary. The full article is at: <http://cosmiclog.msnbc.msn.com/archive/2010/03/19/2233551.aspx>

As Japan gears up to send the first working solar sail into deep space in a couple of months, the Planetary Society is moving ahead with its own solar-sail project. You can put your name on both sails ... if you act now.

Sunday is the deadline for adding your name to the list for Japan's **Ikaros spacecraft**, due to piggyback on the May 18 launch of the Venus-bound **Akatsuki** orbiter aboard a Japanese H-2A rocket. More than 25,000 people have **signed up already using the Planetary Society's "Sail Away" Web page** - and when those are added to the **Japanese list**, the tally goes up to 60,000 names.

All those names will be digitally encoded on the same kind of silica glass mini-DVD that was sent to the Red Planet on the **Phoenix Mars Lander** as well as on each of NASA's **Mars rovers**, said Bruce Betts, director of projects for the Planetary Society. The California-based society is a space advocacy group co-founded by the late astronomer Carl Sagan.

If you sign up now, you can get a two-fer: The list of names will also be encoded on a mini-DVD accompanying the Planetary Society's **LightSail-1**. If you miss out this weekend, you can still make it onto that later flight.

How much later? When the \$1 million-plus LightSail mission was **announced last November**, its backers hoped to get it off the ground sometime this year. But the Planetary Society's executive director, Louis Friedman, told me today that schedule would have to be stretched.

"We can still be ready by the end of 2010, but the launch vehicle will probably not be available until the first part of 2011," he said.

In fact, LightSail-1's launch vehicle has not yet been selected. The Planetary Society is planning to piggyback on someone else's liftoff - perhaps on a defense-related flight, or a commercial launch, or a mission launched from outside the United States.

"The good news is, we have many options. The bad news is, we have many options," Friedman joked.

FROM THE BBC NEWS, EUROPA AND GANYMEDE MISSION

March 8, 2010 - <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8537992.stm>

NASA's SPITZER UNEARTH'S PRIMITIVE BLACK HOLES

March 17, 2010 - <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/news/news.cfm?release=2010-088>

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 rb-churchill@live.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 Carroll.L.Evans@gmail.com)

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

Meetings of the China Lake Astronomical Society are 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 APRIL 5, 2010: “CHINA LAKE MOONWATCHERS”
AT THE MATURANGO MUSEUM, 100 EAST LAS FLORES AVE., RIDGECREST, CALIFORNIA**

CLAS WEB PAGE <http://www.chinalakeastroc.org>

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