

# ABOVE THE FOG

• BULLETIN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS •

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VOL. 49, No. 9 – September 2001

## **Speaker, General Meeting, September An Evening with John Dobson**

John Dobson is one of amateur astronomy's most ardent and visible advocates. It seems that, whenever he is in town and the night is fine, he is out on the sidewalk extolling the virtues of just looking up. John was born in Beijing, China in 1915 and moved to the United States with his family in 1927. He graduated from U.C. Berkeley with a degree in chemistry and mathematics. After working at Caltech and the Rad Lab in Berkeley, John became a Vedantic monk in 1944.

In the early 1950's, John built his first telescope and set out on a path that has made his name a household word. He is the inventor of the Dobsonian telescope mount, seen at star parties and on sidewalks everywhere. He appeared more than once on the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. John has also enlightened countless live audiences, both in auditoriums and on sidewalks. You will often see him with other Sidewalk Astronomers, amazing and educating the public.

John will be answering questions this evening, so be prepared to be entertained! And, bring your questions!

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## **Speaker, City Star Party, September 29**

**Nancy Cox**

*The Messier Objects*

Nancy is a long time member and past president of the SFAA. She is one of a select few amateur astronomers to have used the Hubble Space Telescope. She has also been a Project Astro volunteer for some time, helping to encourage Bay Area school children to learn more about astronomy and science.

Nancy always gives a wonderful, well-researched talk. Her discussion promises to be very interesting.

San Francisco  
Amateur Astronomers

**Web Page:**  
[www.sfaa-astronomy.org](http://www.sfaa-astronomy.org)



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of the Universe

**Information Hotline**  
(415) 566-2357

## 2001 Club Officers & Contacts

<i>President</i>	Al Stern (415) 929-7035	<i>City Star Party Coordinator</i>	Toney Burkhart
<i>Vice President</i>	Bill Stepka (415) 928-2367	<i>Membership &amp; Subscriptions</i>	Chelle Owens (415) 479-5313
<i>Secretary</i>	Jason Burkhart	<i>Bulletin Editor</i>	Lorrie Boen (415) 921-1432
<i>Treasurer</i>	Chelle Owens (415) 479-5313	<i>Telescope Loans</i>	Pete Goldie (415) 206-9867
<i>Honorary Director</i>	John Dobson	<i>SFAA Website</i>	<a href="http://www.sfaa-astronomy.org">www.sfaa-astronomy.org</a>
<i>Board Members</i>	Lorrie Boen Jason Burkhart Dan Christian	Nancy Cox Rita Nossardi Stern	Fraser Reich Dennis Tye
<i>Alt. Board Members</i>	Randy Taylor	Jim Webster	

### Club Telescopes

The SFAA owns 3 club loaner telescopes, Dobsonian/Newtownian reflectors: 6" f/10, 8" f/7, and 10" f/8. These are available for extended periods (30 days or more) to SFAA members. These are generally very fine scopes, easy to use and well-suited for deep sky, planets, and star parties. The loaner custodians are Pete Goldie & Sarah Szczechowicz, located in San Francisco. If you are interested in borrowing a scope, or if you have items you can donate for the loaner program (eyepieces, star maps/books, collimator, etc.) please contact them via email (pg@lbin.com) or phone (415-206-9867). Email communication is preferred and strongly recommended for a quick and accurate reply.

### Important Dates

**Board Meeting – September 12 - 7:00 p.m.**  
Western Addition Library, Scott & Geary Sts., SF

**SFAA General Meeting – September 19**  
Morrison Planetarium, Golden Gate Park  
Refreshments at 7:00 p.m.  
Speakers begin at 7:30 p.m.

**Mt. Tam Star Party**  
August 18 at 8:00 p.m.  
September 22 at 8:00 p.m.

**City Star Party**  
August 25 at 8:00 p.m.  
September 29 at 7:30 p.m.

*Above the Fog* is the official bulletin of the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers. It is the forum in which club members may share their experiences, ideas, and observations. We encourage you to participate by submitting your articles, announcements, letters, photos, and drawings. We would also like to hear from our new members. Tell us about yourself – what you have done in the past and what other clubs you have joined. **The deadline for the next issue is the seventh day of the month.** Send your articles to Lorrie Boen at 765 Geary Street #302, San Francisco, CA 94109 or at [LorrenLee@aol.com](mailto:LorrenLee@aol.com)

## *From the President*

We have had some very successful events this year. Our star parties are well attended and we have had good weather. As you will receive this bulletin before the end of the month I would suggest that people who are not going to Yosemite or the Davis Star Party on the weekend of August 24<sup>th</sup>, please show up at the City Star Party in San Francisco, which starts at 8 PM. The weather and viewing there has been good for most of this year's star parties but dress warm as the sea breeze can be cool and maybe even a bit refreshing as well.

The SFAA picnic at the western end of Stern Grove (no relation to me) in San Francisco will be Saturday September 8<sup>th</sup>. The picnic has always been a relaxing event. It is also a chance to talk with club members and their families.

Our September general meeting's guest speaker on Wednesday September 19<sup>th</sup> will be John Dobson. For those of you who don't know John Dobson, he is the founder of The SF Sidewalk Astronomers. He is the father of the Dobsonian telescope mount. He is a member of SFAA and an honorary board member. He will speak at Stellafane this year and is a member of the Springfield Telescope Makers astronomy club which sponsors the Stellafane convention. Please be thinking about any questions you want to ask him and show up for an interesting talk by a very significant contributor to amateur astronomy.

Don't forget the Mt. Tam star party Saturday Sept 22<sup>nd</sup> and the City Star party Sept 29<sup>th</sup> either.

Please welcome Jason Burkhart, a current board member and a familiar family name to club members, who will fill in as secretary until the elections. Anyone who is interested in running for the board of directors or running for a club office please contact a current board member listed in this bulletin so we can get your name on the ballot for the December meeting when the elections are held.

Al

### **SFAA SPEAKERS CALENDAR 2001**

- |                          |   |
|--------------------------|---|
| <b>October 17, 2001</b>  | Bob Naeye, editor of the ASP's Mercury Magazine will give a presentation and then lead a discussion on the merits of Pluto being a planet and the other guys out there, where they are and what is being said about them. |
| <b>November 14, 2001</b> | November's meeting is the second Wednesday of the month to avoid Thanksgiving eve. Speaker to be announced.   |
| <b>December 19, 2001</b> | Members' night. SFAA members talk about their astronomical experiences.   |

### **Special Interest Group for CCD Bob Berta**

The Special Interest Group for CCD Imaging in the SFAA is just starting up. I am happy to report that 21 people have expressed an interest in the group and many also returned surveys so we could get an idea of what people were hoping for. While there were a couple of people who have intermediate or advanced skills...most of the respondents were either beginners or just ready to take the plunge and purchase CCD gear.

Comments that came back included requests for occasional articles in the newsletter, demos and help during club star parties, personalized help when setting up gear and help in selecting equipment. You will see all of these ideas in the future. In the meantime if you have any specific ideas, needs or just want someone to help you figure out how this stuff works...fell free to contact me. Email at rkb4@pge.com.

**Mt. Tamalpais State Park**  
*Star Programs*

August 18 - 8:30 p.m.

**"Superman's Telescope"**

Robert Naeye, Editor of Mercury Magazine, ASP

Astronomers studying the way the universe looks in X rays finally have their equivalent of the Hubble Space Telescope.

September 22 - 8:00 p.m.

**"Life's Expansion Beyond its Planet of Origin"**

Dr. Rocco Mancinelli, NASA-Ames Research Center

Is there potential for survival, adaptation, and biological evolution of life beyond the home planet?

**Dinners with the speakers:** at Lau's China Bistro, Tam Junction, 252 Almonte Boulevard, Mill Valley, 2 1/2 hours before the scheduled talk. To participate, call the restaurant at (415) 389-8868, and add your name to the "Mt Tam Party." The no-host dinners run between \$10 and \$15, including tax and tip.

Information: **Telephone: (415) 455-5370, (415) 388-2070 Same day Hotlines: (415) 566-2357, (415) 455-5370 (messages after 4:00 pm)** Mailing Address: **MTIA/Astronomy Programs, P.O. Box 3318, San Rafael, CA 94912**

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**SFAA Annual Picnic**

***Set aside the date! Get out the map and mark the spot!***

**September 8, 2001 - Stern Grove**

**Western End of the Grove**  
(at the east end of Laguna Puerca)

access the park by Vale off Crestlake on the south side  
the BBQ area is about 100 yards west of the parking area



Hamburgers and Hot Dogs will be provided.  
Any contributions of other food items will be most welcome and gratefully devoured!!!

# Be Prepared for Summer Observing

By Morris Jones

Jane and I spent our fall and winter doing mostly casual sidewalk astronomy and observing the giant planets. When the spring temperatures started to warm and the clouds parted, we were itching to spend some time alone under a dark sky hunting down the faint fuzzies we love to see.

Going out for serious observing takes a little practice. Many of us have had (or will have!) the experience of driving an hour or more to a favorite dark sky location, only to discover that some essential piece of equipment was left at home. Where is the eyepiece case? Did I really leave the drive battery plugged into the charger? How could I forget to bring pencils? Where is my favorite observing list?

Jane and I were so excited to find a good observing site near our home in the North SF Bay that we made four consecutive weeknight observing excursions in April. It was heavenly! But after two evenings of leaving one thing or another behind, I decided it was time to deal with the issue.

Astronomical equipment inventories grow with time spent in the hobby. Very soon the list grows beyond anyone's ability to recall on demand every piece of equipment or supplies.

Can you name the fifty states from memory? Most people can name about forty-seven on demand. It doesn't take very long before an observing session equipment list grows that large or larger. It's perfectly normal to forget one or two items on occasion!

One way to assist your preparation memory is to compartmentalize the objects being remembered. For instance, it's easier to recall the contents of one equipment case at a time, or one designated container for supplies, than to remember the contents of all the containers. The typical maximum for easily remembered lists seems to be about five items. If you can remember five containers, that each have five sections, that each hold five objects, you stand an excellent chance of remembering everything. (It's much easier to remember an area code, prefix, and number, than ten random digits!)

But the best preparation tool for complex activities (like amateur astronomy away from home) is the checklist. Checklists are a time-honored tool for all complex endeavours, from camping or hiking to flying to the moon.

Checklists have to be built and tested in an iterative process. For the same reason it's hard to remember the fifty states, it's difficult to write a perfect checklist from scratch. Once you've made a start, keep your checklist handy and be ready to add to it as you test it.

I would love to be able to publish a generic observing session checklist, but there is a huge variety in astronomical equipment and comfort needs. Everyone's list will be different. Nevertheless, I think it would be useful to read other observer's checklists, just to be able to say, "Hey, that's a good idea!"

Here are some excerpts from our checklist. The full list can be at: <http://www.whiteoaks.com/mojo/obslist.html>

## Telescopes

17.5" Litebox

Mirror (incl. digital thermometer)

Body (incl. shroud)

Truss poles

Equipment box:

Telrad

Springs

Nut driver

Finder scope

Knob box

(incl. knobs, small and large collimation wrenches)

A-P Traveler

OTA case:

OTA with mount adapter

Telrad

2" Diagonal

Focus extender

Allen wrenches

GP mount case:

GP mount  
(incl. tripod, head,  
alignment scope covers)  
Hand controller  
Counterweight assembly

(incl. 12V plug)  
Polar scope light  
Anti-vibration pads  
12V Battery, charged

### Common accessories

Favorite eyepieces  
22 Panoptic  
16 Nagler  
[etc.]  
Collimation tools:

Laser collimator  
Cheshire eyepiece  
Red-filtered Mag-lite  
Filters:  
UHC  
O-III

### Documents

Jane's Box  
Night Sky Observer's Guide

Millenium Star Atlas  
Herald-Bobroff Atlas  
RASC Observer's Handbook

### Sketching supplies (incl. pad, pencils, sharpener, erasers, smudge tools)

Clipboard  
Planet satellite finders  
red spot schedule,  
Jupiter moon events  
Pencils  
Misc. project clippings  
Mojo's Box

Reading glasses  
Night Sky Observer's Guide  
Uranometria v. 1 & 2  
Edmund's Mag 6 Atlas  
RASC Observer's Handbook  
Steno pad observing log  
Dixon Sensematic pencils  
Satellite schedules  
Minor planet finders  
Warm boots  
Scarf

### Clothing

Jane  
Warm hat  
Gloves  
Coat  
Sweatshirt  
Thermal pants  
Thermal shirt

Mojo  
Thermal pants  
Turtle neck warm shirt  
Columbia jacket  
Warm soft hat  
Fingerless gloves

### Support Hardware

2 Skylite flashlights  
Yellow right-angle red light  
Misc. LED flashlights  
Batteries (mininum quantities):  
AA cells (20)  
C cells (6)  
9V cells (3)  
9x63 binoculars

7x50 binoculars  
2 tables  
Ladders for each telescope  
Folding chair for chart table  
Reclining chair for observing  
Ground mats for telescopes  
(e.g., carpet remnants)  
Pocket knives  
Adjustable observing chair

### Food & Medicine

Water  
Coffee thermos  
Non-spill coffee mugs  
Rodney Strong Cabernet Sauvignon  
Wine bottle opener  
Wine cups  
Nuts, crackers, cheese, peanut btr  
Spoons, forks

Bug repellent  
Sunscreen  
Band-aids  
Neosporin  
Pepcid AC & Tums  
Allegra or Claritin  
Ibuprofen  
Tylenol  
Aspirin

## SFAA 2001 Literary Award

*Time is running out...*

- 1,100 words (big words, small words, any size words)
- Postmarked or emailed by September 30, 2001
- In print ready format, on a 3.5" diskette or zip disk, or as an attachment to an email (disks will be returned)
- Email to [lorrenlee@aol.com](mailto:lorrenlee@aol.com). -- Mail to Lorrie Boen at 765 Geary Street #302, San Francisco, CA 94109
- Every club member will have the opportunity to read and vote on every article
- Winners announced at the December General Meeting
- Awards presented at the SFAA Annual Awards Banquet in January 2002
- Reprints of articles in "Above the Fog" in 2001 accepted

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## Observer of the Year Award

The Observer of the Year Award is given for noteworthy observing accomplishments during the year, such as qualifying for the Messier Award, the Herschel Club, observing all the planets, getting articles or photographs published, etc. Nominations will be accepted in October and November. Members may submit their own name or the names of anyone they feel is qualified. Candidates should prepare a list of their observing accomplishments in 2001 for judging by the December meeting.

## Astrophotography Award

Members are encouraged to submit astrophotographs (up to three entries per member) for judging in the astrophotograph award. Submissions are accepted October, November or at the December general meeting. All entries will be exhibited at the December meeting and voted upon by the general membership. Entries must have been taken this year (2001) and be of an astronomical theme. Size should be reasonable (11' x 14' or less), mounted or unmounted.

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## Y2K + 1 YOSEMITE STAR PARTY

We have been fortunate to draw the August 24th & 25th weekend in Yosemite. **The moon will be at a .431 phase on Friday night and will set at 23h 39m (11:39 PM).** The total amount of adults permitted in this group campsite is **strictly limited to 30**. Children 15 years and under are not counted towards the 30 maximum. Please, **no pets**. The SFAA may be required to present names of the participating astronomers, in advance, for posting at the entrances to the park. **Those who do not have their names posted may have to independently secure their own campsites for camping.** In the past, individuals who had "gate crashed" our campsite to join the star party, unfairly displaced our own SFAA members - these campsites do have camper limitations.

**There are only 4 slots left. If you would like to go, fill in a registration form (found in the last 2 issues or on the website) and mail it to the address on the form.**

Founded in September 1952, the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers (SFAA) is an association of people who share a common interest in astronomy and other related sciences. Our membership consists of people from all walks of life, educational backgrounds and ages. Many SFAA members own their own telescopes; some have been made by hand in local telescope-making classes and vary in size from 6 to 25 inches.

**Treasurer, SFAA, 13 Mabry Way, San Rafael, CA 94903**

make checks payable to **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers** and mail to:

- \$ 8 enclosed, youth membership (under 18)
- \$30 enclosed, institutional membership
- \$30 enclosed, family membership
- \$30 enclosed, foreign membership
- \$25 enclosed, individual membership

**Select one category:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Email address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name: Telephone:

## **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers Membership Application**

### **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers**

c/o Morrison Planetarium  
California Academy of Sciences  
Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, CA 94118

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#### **In This Issue of SFAA's Above the Fog**

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- **and more...**