

★ ABOVE THE FOG

• BULLETIN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS •

VOL. 48, No. 4 – April 2000

San Francisco
Amateur Astronomers



Sharing the Wonders
of the Universe



Information Hotline
(415) 566-2357

Web Page
<http://www.zennla.com/sfaa>

A Letter from the President **Al Stern**

I am very happy to announce that two people have stepped forward to perform the function of Speaker Coordinator. Nancy Cox and Rita Nossardi will be working together to bring future speakers to the SFAA General Meetings. Thank you both for volunteering!

Our speaker for the April 19 General Meeting is yet to be determined.

Bob Berta will be our speaker at the May 17 General Meeting. He will be discussing “CCD imaging for Newbies” and demonstrating a CCD setup and software, illustrating the basics of obtaining great images.

The SFAA is announcing a Literary Award. We want to hear about your experiences in astronomy! Details are inside. All club members are encouraged to participate.

The first Mt. Tam Star Party was a huge success! The weather was beautiful, there were many telescopes, and a large crowd. Norm Sperling gave an interesting presentation with wonderful examples from historical texts. Our next Mt. Tam Star Party is May 6. Please plan to join the fun!

For close to twenty years Don Machholz has been providing comet information to the astronomical community. He has found many comets over the years. He has also been prolific in his writing and widely published, including his Comet Comments in Above the Fog. Sadly, Don is retiring after next month’s column. His April Comet Comment and a note about continuing comet resources are inside. We will miss his many contributions and wish him well.

SFAA Officers 2000

President Al Stern
(510) 728-1851

Vice-President Bill Stepka
(415) 928-2367

Secretary Renita Mock
(415) 566-2357

Treasurer Chelle Owens
(415) 479-5313

Honorary Director John Dobson

Board Members

Joe Amato
Lorrie Boen
Toney Burkhart
Nancy Cox
Mary Ann Levenson
Stacy Jo McDermott
Dennis Tye

Alt. Board Members

Randy Taylor
Jim Webster

Star Party Coordinator

Bill Stepka (415) 928-2367

Subscriptions & Membership

Chelle Owens (415) 479-5313

Bulletin Editor

Lorrie Boen (415) 921-1432

Telescope Loans

Ray Cash (415) 665-8666

SFAA Website Update

For those of you with online access, don't forget to visit the club's website. The bulletin board area especially is a great place to post info and ask questions. Go to <http://www.zennla.com/sfaa>.

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 last day of the prior month. Send your articles to Lorrie Boen at 765 Geary Street #302, San Francisco, CA 94109 or at LorrenLee@aol.com.

Club Telescopes



Long time member Ray Cash-LePennec has 3 loaner telescopes for club member use and is in charge of loaning them out. If you are interested in borrowing a club telescope, give Ray a call. There are many new members in the SFAA and they ask what kind of telescope to buy or use and this is a good way to get to know the Dobsonian type of scope and learn the sky as well.

CLUB DATES

Board Meeting

May 10 – 7:00 p.m. Western Addition Library – corner of Scott & Geary Sts. SF

SFAA Club Meeting

April 19 at 7:30 p.m.

May 17 at 7:30 p.m.

Morrison Planetarium, Golden Gate Park

City Star Party

April 15 at 7:30 p.m.

May 13 at 7:45 p.m.

Mt. Tam Star Party

May 6 at 8:30 p.m.

SFAA 2000 Literary Award

***The San Francisco Amateur Astronomers
announces the First Annual Literary Award***



sponsored by Orion Telescope Center



The Award is open to all SFAA members. Please submit articles about your experiences and adventures in astronomy.

Entries must be limited to 750 words and be received by August 31, 2000. All entries need to be submitted in print ready format, on a 3.5" diskette or zip disk, or as an attachment to an email. Please do not type your article in the body of the email, attach it as a Word (any version) document or in rich text format. All disks will be returned to the owners. Entries on disk can be mailed to Lorrie Boen at 765 Geary Street #302, San Francisco, CA 94109, or email entries can be sent to LorrenLee@aol.com.

All entries will be distributed to every member for judging after the closing date of August 31, 2000. The winners will be announced at the December 20 General Meeting and the awards will be presented at the SFAA Annual Awards Banquet in January 2001.

Any articles already printed in "Above the Fog" in 2000 can be submitted, provided it is within the 750-word limit. Authors may edit longer articles in order to enter them.

We want to hear about your experiences. Good luck to all!

Sponsored by our friends at



Additional information can be found at <http://www.seds.org/billa/sjaa/coe.html>.

Toilets: Yes
Stacy liked it: Yes

All in all, I enjoyed this site very much and am planning to include it in my summer itinerary. Overall for no particular reason, I give this site a six star rating. It's just one of those spots that you'll find something new and good that you can't quite put your finger on to keep you coming back.

Overall rating:



Dark Skies: Yes
Ease of Access: Yes

©2000 by Stacy Jo McDermott. No one is making me do this. My mom is not forcing me to stay home and write (though I bet she wished I was this diligent when it came to doing my homework in junior high school.) Usual disclaimer that SFAA, its members and board are in no way responsible for the prose that seems to pop out of my brain. Questions, comments, suggestions and complaints should be forwarded to Stacy directly at smcdermo@cmp.com or jostaznik@yahoo.com or astrofemfatale@yahoo.com. That's all until next month.

Morrison Planetarium's
Benjamin Dean Lecture Series
presents

Looking Back: A Historical Approach to Understanding Modern Astronomy

25 April

How Henry Norris Russell Changed Astronomy

Often considered America's most productive theoretical astrophysicist in the first half of this century, Dr. Russell greatly influenced our current understanding of stellar astronomy.

Dr. David DeVarkin, Smithsonian Institute

9 May

'A Spring of Water in a Dry and Thirsty Land':

William Huggins' Response to Kirchhoff's Great Discovery

Modern astrophysics arose in mid-nineteenth century Britain with the use of the spectroscope to analyze the light of celestial bodies. William Huggins was one of the principle founders of this "new science."

Dr. Barbara Becker, UC Irvine

DEAN LECTURE INFORMATION LINE at (415) 750-7141



Corrected Announcement:

THE NEW NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

a dissident physics and cosmology meeting • **moved to 12-14 May**
Berkeley, CA • Abstracts accepted until **28 April**

For details, write Natural Philosophy Alliance, P.O. Box 14014, San Luis Obispo, CA 93406;
or phone (805) 783-1177 (mornings best). Registration only \$20; less for NPA members.

Featured Speaker: **William Mitchell**, author of "The Cult of the Big Bang"

Special themes: COSMOLOGY • AETHER THEORY • REINTERPRETING THE DATA

The Sonoma State University Department of Physics and Astronomy

Present

What Physicists Do

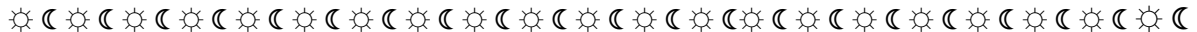
Physics is what physicists do late at night

Mondays at 4:00 p.m.

Darwin Hall Room 108

Coffee at 3:30 p.m.

- April 17 Electronic Paper: The Physics and The Human Issues
Nicholas Sheridon of Xerox Palo Alto Research Center will present the technology of the Gyricon and other approaches to electronic paper and will discuss the forthcoming impact on human culture.
- April 24 Cosmic Dark Matter and Optical Communication
Dr. J. Anthony Tyson of Lucent Bell Laboratories will show how opportunities in pure and applied physics are often related through new technologies.
- May 1 Go With the Microflow
Dr. Dawn Kataoka of Sandia National Laboratories will discuss recent developments in microfluidic devices and the trend toward smaller is better.
- May 8 Soap Bubbles, Raindrops and Inkjets
Dr. Lynn Orr of Stanford University will demonstrate some of the magical physics phenomena controlled by surface tension.



Orion Telescope Center – Job Opportunity

If you are interested in working for one of the best telescope shops in the Bay Area, Orion Telescope Center at 3609 Buchanan Street (in the Marina) is looking for an enthusiastic team member. Experience is a plus!
Please call Marshall Smith at (415) 931-9966 for further information.

Texas Star Party

April 30 – May 7

Registration information can be found at: <http://www.metronet.com/~tsp/>

COMET COMMENTS FOR APRIL 2000

By Don Machholz

Images from the solar-observing SOHO satellite have been searched for comets recently, yielding many comets. The LINEAR and the CATALINA programs found a few comets too. Meanwhile, Comet LINEAR (1999 S4) is at magnitude 13, if it stays on this magnitude curve it should reach the brightness of the Andromeda Galaxy in July.

SOHO images five comets during Feb. 3-9. Three more were found a few weeks later. Searching through the SOHO archives brought out ten more comets. These 18 comets were found by T. Lovejoy, D. Biesecker, M. Meyer, M. Oates, D. Lewis, K. Cernis, M. Boschet, T. Harincar, D. Lewis and K. Schenk. Discoverers who found these comets on these SOHO images do not get their name on the comets, nor are they eligible for the Wilson Comet award since they were not using amateur equipment.

The LINEAR and CATALINA search programs found four comets, all of them were first thought to be asteroids until further investigation found they were tiny comets. Three showed tails from 10 to 16 arcseconds. One was declared a comet based upon it showing a "soft" image, "slightly larger than star images" through a 72-inch telescope with a CCD. Many LINEAR comets are first thought to be asteroids.

COMET HUNTING NOTES: Unlike the LINEAR comets, visually-found comets show a definite size. The average comet found visually by amateurs is about three arcminutes in size. They range from two to ten arcminutes.

From Don Machholz

Greetings Cometeers:

This is to inform you that the next issue of Comet Comments, the one you will receive via this e-mail network around April 10, will be my last one. I am telling you this now so that all of you, especially newsletter editors, will have time to assemble your own way of reporting comet news and positions after CC is gone.

There are several reasons why I'm retiring after twenty-one years of writing a monthly column. About a year ago I began to show symptoms of a disorder which appears to be inherited; my brother has it too. It is not fatal and not contagious. Medication sometimes helps. But the lack of concentration, poor coordination and fatigue now makes it difficult to produce an accurate, interesting comet article in a timely manner.

There are other reasons too. I used to do the whole thing in three nights- research, write and

distribute. Then the Internet became involved in this. I can reach more people, but the Web page had difficulties and finally crashed (mine is now frozen on the Web, I cannot change or delete it), "fatal delivery" messages and re-sends, and writing/formatting two versions each month (electronic and paper)-all adds to the time the column now takes. Moreover, with the Internet, amateurs now have easy access to nearly all the information I publish. Finally, in the old days when amateurs found many of the comets, it was important to distribute the ephemerides information early because the comets were already bright enough to be seen in our telescopes. Now, when LNEAR finds a faint comet, it is months before the comet will be bright enough for the readers.

For the record: I got nearly all my news and orbital elements from the Smithsonian and use David Chandler's Deep Space program to generate the comet positions. Before I write each issue I visit Charles Morris' Web page to see if there is anything I'm missing. For the Comet Hunting

Y2K - Yosemite Star Party

We have been very fortunate to draw the June 30th, July 1st, and July 2nd weekend, for a full, three day weekend in Yosemite. **The moon will be a new moon on Saturday night.** This new moon weekend is the only new moon weekend during the entire Glacier Point Y2K summer program. Please join us for this very special astronomical event.

The rules to apply for this SFAA function are still very simple:

1. This trip is **open to SFAA members, their immediate families and their significant others, only**; friends, neighbors, relatives, etc. are specifically **not** invited. SFAA is providing service in astronomy to the rangers in return for free camping facilities with guaranteed reservations; it is not meant to be a free vacation for SFAA members or non-SFAA guests.

2. Each SFAA member must **bring at least one astronomical grade telescope to operate** and share with the general public on all three nights. The ranger's and the SFAA rules strictly prohibit tagging along without a telescope or bringing a telescope and not participating. Binoculars will not be accepted in lieu of this one telescope requirement, noted above.

3. 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**. This year, the SFAA will 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 name posted will have to secure their own site for camping.**

4. Cut off and **return the application stub below** with the correct fee to save your reservation. This is on first come - first served basis with a preference for those who have contributed to the trips in the past. A basic fee of \$5.00 is charged per adult (children 15 years and under are free). This fee is not refundable. The money will go into our Yosemite General Fund. Yosemite Park fees have been waived for us during our stay.

5. Remember, camping on **Glacier Point, in July, will have temperatures into the low 30's at night (3:00am / 4:00am)**. Prepare for this mountain environment. Since we can park our cars near our tents, bring plenty of warm clothing and sleepware; you may need it. Also, quiet hour at Yosemite begins at 10:00 pm, and we have to be at Glacier Point, with our telescopes ready at 7:30 pm. **Leave yourself time to unload your telescope and equipment at the turnaround and take your vehicle to the parking lot. There is no parking in the turnaround area. Due to this noise restriction, we will not be allowed to set up our tents or camp after the star party concludes. Please arrive at our campground in the early evening - early enough to set up camp before 7:00 pm or you will be required to sleep in your vehicle. There are no exceptions to these rules. The SFAA will strive to be good neighbors in Y2K.**

Cut here

.....

SFAA Member.....Telescope.....

No. of adults @ \$5.00 ea. =.....Total enclosed.....

Make checks payable to: **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers**

Send checks to: **Bob Levenson, Yosemite Trip Coordinator
237 Bellevue Avenue
Daly City, CA 94014**

Any questions?? Call Bob Levenson, Yosemite trip coordinator, **(415) 584-5756**

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:

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

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

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

- **SFAA Literary Award**
- **Mt. Tam Speakers**
- **Stargazing Getaway**
- **Comet Comments**
- **Yosemite Star Party**