

ABOVE THE FOG

• BULLETIN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS •

Vol. 53, No. 2 – FEBRUARY 2005

FEBRUARY 16, 2005 – GENERAL MEETING

RANDALL MUSEUM
199 MUSEUM WAY
SAN FRANCISCO

7:00 PM DOORS OPEN
7:30 PM ANNOUNCEMENTS
8:00 PM SPEAKER

Don Machholz - "My Life As a Comet Hunter"



My talk will cover how I got into comet hunting, some of the things I've learned about observing during my 30 continuous years of comet hunting, and some of the 10 comets that I've discovered. I will also discuss my latest find, C/2004 Q2, and it's development over the past few months.

I was born in Portsmouth Virginia, Oct, 7, 1952 and became interested in astronomy at age 8. I received my first telescope on Oct. 7, 1965, a 2-inch refractor. Later I received a 6-inch Criterion Dynascope and found all the Messier Objects in one year (1968-9).

Then I spent some time with astrophotography (1972-4), having a few photos published in small astronomy magazines. I decided to attempt a comet hunting program, which I began on Jan. 1, 1975. I found my first comet on Sept. 12, 1978 after 1700 hours of searching. My second find took an additional 1742 hours. I have now spent 7055 hours comet hunting during which I've discovered a total of ten comets which bear my name.

In 1990 my wife, son and I moved from San Jose, CA. to Colfax, where we live on six acres. The main reason for this move was to transfer from two incomes to one so that my wife could stay home with our children. In August 1993 I built an observatory on our property. From here I conduct all my comet hunting, which continues at a rate of about 100 hours (70 nites) per year. I use mainly inexpensive, homemade equipment.

One of my joys has been in sharing the hobby with others. A dozen times a year I'll set up a few telescopes in Colfax, Auburn and in the Sierras and invite the public out to look at the planets and moon. Each year I hold astronomy classes at the Placer Nature Center. I also write articles for the local newspapers and radio stations for special astronomical events.

From 1978 until 2000 I wrote writing a monthly column called "Comet Comments". It was designed for astronomy club newsletters and interested individuals around the world. Between 1988 and 2000 I was the Comets Recorder for the Association of Lunar and Planetary Recorders.

I have two two-year college degrees. One is in general education (1976) and the other in Laser Technology (1989). I am employed both as an Research and Development technician in Auburn and as an independent real estate appraiser.

I've written and published several books. One, "A Decade of Comets", is a study of the visual comet discoveries between 1975 and 1984. The second covers the Messier Marathon and is based on my 16 years of helping to develop and run Messier Marathons. The third, published in early 1996, is a book about Comet Hale-Bopp. In 2002 my Messier Marathon book was re-written by me and published by Cambridge University Press.

2005 CLUB OFFICERS & CONTACTS

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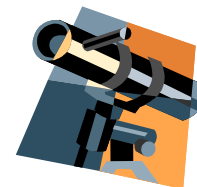
MEMBERSHIP DUES

The mailing label on the back of this issue shows the month and year through which your membership was paid. If the date has passed, your membership has expired. Members may receive no more than one bulletin after the expiration of membership.

Please renew soon if your membership is expiring.

CLUB TELESCOPES

The SFAA owns 4 club loaner telescopes, Dobsonian/Newtonian reflectors: 6" f/10, 8" f/7, and 10" f/8 and a Starblast. They 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 (<mailto:pg@lbin.com>) or phone (415-206-9867). Email communication is preferred and strongly recommended for a quick and accurate reply.



CLUB ASTRONOMY VIDEOS

The SFAA owns a series of astronomy videotapes featuring Alex Filippenko, a world-renowned professor of astronomy at UC Berkeley. The videotapes provide an introduction to astronomy and cover topics such as the Solar System, the lifecycles of stars, the nature of galaxies, and the birth of the Universe. The SFAA loans the tapes free to all members. If you are interested in viewing these tapes, you may check them out at any of the SFAA General Meetings. These tapes were kindly donated to the SFAA by Bert Katzung. Our librarian is Dan Christian.



For information on the course tapes themselves:

<http://www.teach12.com/tc/assets/courseDescriptions/180.asp>

ONLINE SERVICES FOR SFAA MEMBERS



The SFAA's Secretary's Web Site helps keep SFAA information together and accessible to members. The site URL is <http://www.whiteoaks.com/sfaa/>. At this site you can find such information as minutes from meetings of the Board of Directors, the SFAA official by-laws, and other information. SFAA also offers email lists to supplement the bulletin board offered at the SFAA's official web site. At present there are two email lists – an unmoderated list for use primarily for business and discussion by the Board of Directors (but open to all members), and a moderated announcement list for all SFAA members. If you would like to be added to the SFAA-announce email list, please contact the secretary (<mailto:secretary@sfaa-astronomy.org>) and let him know. You can also sign up for the list yourself at this URL: <http://www.whiteoaks.com/mailman/listinfo/sfaa-announce>

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 Phil Estrin at pestrin@dir.ca.gov.

FROM YOUR (NEW) PRESIDENT

John Dillon

When Michael Portuesi, our outgoing President, put out that urgent end-of-the-year call for volunteers to serve as Board members and officers of SFAA, there was a concern that the organization might otherwise have to disband. My reaction was simple and immediate (and the same as lots of other members as it turned out): I love exploring the night sky with my telescope. I have much more fun and I learn a lot more doing it with other like-minded folks – I need the SFAA! There's no way it can fold. I will do whatever it takes. Even (gulp) become President.

It soon became clear that the SFAA had plenty of committed members also willing to do whatever it takes to keep it going – we just needed a sign-up sheet and someone to stand in front of the curtain and reassure the audience that the show would go on. So SFAA now has a full slate of active Board members and here I am in front of the curtain reassuring you that the organization is healthy and active. The noise coming from backstage is being made by lots of others hammering and sawing (& e-mailing and faxing). It might take me several shuffle steps before I can make Michael Portuesi's big "shoes" move but there was never any doubt that the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers would continue.

It takes a community to raise an amateur astronomer – and the Show will go on!

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SFAA BOARD MEETINGS – NEW DATES

BOARD MEETINGS ARE NOW AT THE RANDALL MUSEUM ON THE FIRST
TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH
7:00 P.M. – 8:30 P.M.

Board meetings for the rest of the year are as follows –

March 1	August 2
April 5	September 6
May 3	October 4
June 7	November 1
July 5	December 6

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IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES

<p>BOARD MEETING</p> <p>MARCH 9 APRIL 13</p> <p>7:00-8:30 P.M.</p> <p>Randall Museum, 199 Museum Way (near 14th Street and Roosevelt)</p>	<p>SFAA GENERAL MEETING & LECTURE</p> <p>FEBRUARY 16 MARCH 16 APRIL 20</p> <p>7:00 P.M. DOORS OPEN 7:30 P.M. ANNOUNCEMENTS 8:00 P.M. SPEAKER</p> <p>Randall Museum, 199 Museum Way (near 14th Street and Roosevelt)</p>
<p>CITY STAR PARTY</p> <p>FEBRUARY 19 – 5:30 P.M. - TELESCOPE CLINIC 4:30 P.M. MARCH 19 – 6:00 P.M., - TELESCOPE CLINIC 5:00 P.M.</p> <p><i>Land's End</i> <i>San Francisco</i></p>	
<p>MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY</p> <p>APRIL 16 – 5:30 P.M. - TELESCOPE CLINIC 4:30 P.M.</p>	

SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMER'S SPECIAL USE PERMIT EVENT DATES

THESE ARE MEMBERS ONLY EVENTS AT OR NEAR NEW MOON
AND USUALLY THE WEEKEND BEFORE THE MOUNT TAM STAR PARTY

MONTH/DATE	LOCATION	PURPOSE/CIRCUMSTANCES
WEDNESDAY JANUARY 12TH	ROCK SPRINGS	SATURN OPPOSITION COMET MACHHOLTZ
SATURDAY FEBRUARY 5TH	ROCK SPRINGS	WINTER DSO GALAXIES/QSOs
SATURDAY MARCH 12TH	ROCK SPRINGS	MESSIER MARATHON & MERCURY G. ELONGATION 18[^]
FRIDAY APRIL 8TH	ROCK SPRINGS	ANNULAR SOLAR ECLIPSE
SATURDAY MAY 7TH	ROCK SPRINGS	CERES OPPOSITION/AQUARID METEOR
SATURDAY JUNE 4TH	ROCK SPRINGS	VIRGO SUPERCLUSTER
SATURDAY JULY 2ND	ROCK SPRINGS	VENUS N OR M44 OR MERCURY
SATURDAY AUGUST 6TH	ROCK SPRINGS	NEPTUNE OPPOSITION
SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 10TH	BOOTJACK/ ROCK SPRINGS	SFAA STAR-B-Q BOOTJACK AND OBSERVING AT ROCK SPRINGS
SATURDAY OCTOBER 1ST	ROCK SPRINGS	WILLIAM HERSCHEL'S BIRTHDAY
SATURDAY OCTOBER 29TH	ROCK SPRINGS	MARS CLOSEST APPROACH 21 ARC/SECONDS DIA.



MARCH 20
REQUEST FOR VOLUNTEERS

ANCIENT OBSERVATORIES: CHICHEN ITZA
LIVE WEBCAST FROM CHICHEN ITZA, MEXICO

On March 20, the Exploratorium will be hosting a live webcast from Chichen Itza, Mexico, as part of our ongoing Ancient Observatories project. Accompanying the webcast, presented in Spanish and English, will be an array of activities addressing Mayan astronomy and culture.

We hope to draw volunteers from the local astronomer community to help deepen public understanding in these fields. We had tremendous support from many of you during last year's highly successful Transit of Venus program.

Some areas of support that we're looking for are:

- Facilitation for a basic sundial making activity
- Amateur archaeoastronomers who have some knowledge about the Mayan calendar system and astronomy.
- Spanish bilingual astronomers who can help address questions from Spanish speakers

If you're interested, please e-mail me at julies@exploratorium.edu by January 22. I'd be happy to share more details with you.

Thank you, fellow astronomers! Please look out for a separate, official announcement about the webcast and activities.

JULIE SUH
PUBLIC PROGRAMS COORDINATOR

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SFAA 2005 CALENDAR

INCLUDING REVISED BOARD MEETING DATES
EFFECTIVE JANUARY 2005 AND DATES FOR
MEMBERS ONLY MOUNT TAM SPECIAL USE
PERMIT EVENTS)

JANUARY

- 12 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 15 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4 PM
- 15 CITY STAR PARTY 5 PM
- 22 SFAA ANNUAL DINNER 7 PM

FEBRUARY

- 1 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 5 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 16 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM
- 19 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4:30 PM
- 19 CITY STAR PARTY 5:30 PM

MARCH

- 1 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 12 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 16 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM
- 19 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 5 PM
- 19 CITY STAR PARTY 6 PM
- 19 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY

APRIL

- 5 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 8 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 16 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 16 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 20 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM

MAY

- 3 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 7 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 14 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 14 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 18 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM

JUNE

- 4 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 7 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 11 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 11 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 15 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM

JULY

- 2 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 5 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 9 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 9 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 20 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM

AUGUST

- 2 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 6 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 13 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 13 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 17 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM

SEPTEMBER

- 6 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 10 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 10 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 10 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 21 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM

OCTOBER

- 1 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT
- 4 MOUNT TAM TELESCOPE CLINIC
- 8 MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY
- 12 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 15 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 5:30 PM
- 15 CITY STAR PARTY 6:30 PM
- 19 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM
- 29 MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SUP* EVENT

NOVEMBER

- 1 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 12 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4 PM
- 12 CITY STAR PARTY 5 PM
- 16 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM

DECEMBER

- 6 BOARD MEETING 7 PM
- 10 CSP TELESCOPE CLINIC 4 PM
- 10 CITY STAR PARTY 5 PM
- 21 GENERAL MEETING –
ANNOUNCMENTS 7:30 PM
SPEAKER 8 PM

*MT TAM MEMBERS ONLY SPECIAL USE PERMIT EVENT

CURRENTLY UNSCHEDULED: YOSEMITE TRIP, ANNUAL
PICNIC

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, POB 15097, San Francisco CA 94115

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

- \$10 enclosed, youth/student membership
- \$25 enclosed, individual membership
- \$30 enclosed, family or foreign membership
- \$40 enclosed, institutional membership
- \$75 enclosed, supporting membership

Select one category:

Email address:

Address:

Name: Telephone:

San Francisco Amateur Astronomers Membership Application

San Francisco Amateur Astronomers
P.O. Box 15097
San Francisco, CA 94115



Information Hotline: (415) 289-6636

Web Page: www.sfaa-astronomy.org

Sharing the Wonders of the Universe

Has your membership expired? Your mailing label includes the month and year through which your membership is paid. If it is past, your membership has expired and this may be your last issue.