SJAA EPHEMERIS

The 6" Dob

Vivek Mohan

[Another in our continuing series of articles from borrowers of SJAA loaner scopes. Write about your experiences with an SJAA 'scope! Send your articles to ephemeris@sjaa.net. -- Ed.]

It was a clear Friday night, perfect for sky watching. The moon was in its last quarter, a mere silver crescent in the sky. Our family piled into our car and drove to Houge Park, enticed at the prospect of renting a telescope from the SJAA. Upon arriving at the star party, we gazed at the multitude of telescopes, from small 2" telescopes to gigantic 18" dobsonian monsters.

We strolled over to the end of the long line of scopes, and came upon the SJAA representative, who had been waiting for our family. We had reserved a 14" dob, and we saw the huge telescope, painted in a dark shade of brown. Immediately, we thought to ourselves, "No way that's going to fit in our car!" Luckily for us, there was another unreserved scope. It was a 6" dob, the most special of all the loaners the SJAA had. On the cardboard shell of the scope were hundreds of signatures in black marker. Volunteers at SJAA had built this telescope during a all-day telescope making session.

We brought the 6" Dob home, and immediately put it on our deck, searching for familiar stars such as Alberio,

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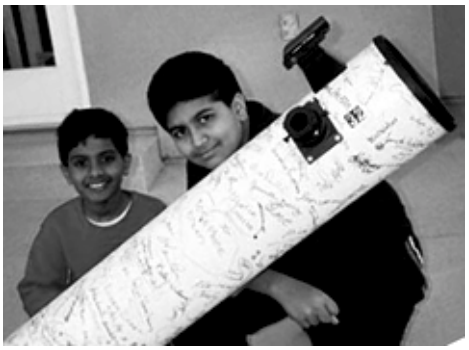
Loaner scope #32 being signed by one of the visitors to the SJAA event at The Tech Museum where it was constructed.



Vivek and his younger brother Vijay Mohan with their loaner scope.

SJAA Activities Calendar

Jim Van Nuland

March

2 Astronomy Class III, 7:30 p.m., hall, Houge Park, Planetary Observing
2 Houge Park star party Sunset 6:03 p.m., 51% moon sets 1:32 a.m.
10 8 p.m. Houge Park, General Meeting, Peggy Bernard will tell about the Vulcan Project.
16 Houge Park star party Sunset 6:16 p.m., 47% moon rises 1:55 a.m.
17 Fremont Peak star party Sunset 6:15 p.m., 38% moon rises 2:42 a.m.
24 Coe and Peak star party Sunset 6:02 p.m., 0% moon rises 6:44 a.m.
30 Astronomy Class IV, 7:30 p.m., hall, Houge Park, The Moon
30 Houge Park star party Sunset 6:29 p.m., 36% moon sets 0:30 a.m.

Auction and Swap Meet!
Sunday, April 8

April

1 DST start. Advance clock by 1 hour at 2 a.m. —> 3 a.m.
7 AANC Conference of Astronomy Clubs - Chabot Space and Science Center
8 General Meeting: Auction and Swap meet (Sunday)
13 Houge Park star party Sunset 7:41 p.m., 64% moon rises 1:39 a.m.
14 Fremont Peak star party Sunset 7:40 p.m., 55% moon rises 2:24 a.m.
16 Tax Day
21 Coe and Peak star party Sunset 7:47 p.m., 3% moon rises 6:14 a.m.
23 Easter Sunday (school vacations before/after)
27 Astronomy Class V, 7:30 p.m., hall, Houge Park, Types of Telescopes
27 Houge Park star party Sunset 7:54 p.m., 23% moon sets 0:27 a.m. (This is the SJAA official Astronomy Day event)
28 Astronomy Day

24 Hour News and Information Hotline: (408) 559-1221
www.sjaa.net

The 6" Dob

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Vega, and Deneb. We all were impressed with the telescope's ease of transportability as we expected moving it to be a pain. Over the following days, my family and I got acquainted with the Deep Sky 600 map, and my Mom could find the Andromeda Galaxy at will. As our house is situated on a hill, we had great, unobstructed views of Jupiter, of which we could make out the equatorial belts and the Galilean moons, Saturn, of which we could see the rings and various moons; and the Moon, of which craters, seas, and many other magnificent surface features were visible. My dad's favorite was the Orion Nebula, which we see as a luminous cloud lit up by the stars of the Trapezium.

As the weather grew progressively colder we stayed inside, and looked through the windows, occasionally spotting a cluster of interest and looking at it through the scope. The laser dot-scope (finder scope) made it amazingly easy to focus on objects, and the dob mount was fine to track them, as long as you moved it a fraction of an inch every 5 minutes. One of my favorite things to do was to track moving planes and satellites. My parents, however, preferred to stick with more stationary, astronomical objects. In the end, this scope was one of the best astronomy related things that ever happened to us.

Vivek Mohan and loaner scope #32 - dubbed "The Signature Scope". Vivek is in his observing stance, locating a celestial object through the scope.

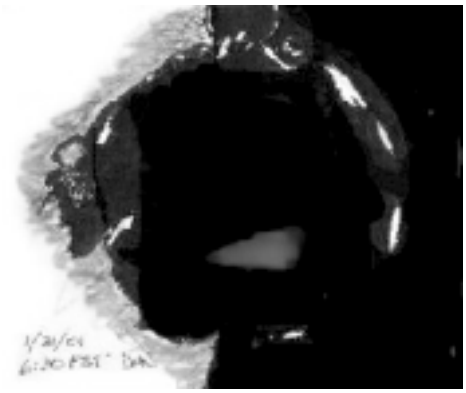
Mooning

Sunrise At Ptolemaeus

Dave North

On the last day of January, starting a bit before 6 p.m. PST, I noticed what seemed a very odd sunrise effect on the crater named for Ptolemy, a magnificent walled plain near the very center of the moon.

If this looks the same in the newsletter as on my screen, you'll see



a very faint dark gray smudge just below center — barely on the edge of visibility.

This seemed especially odd to me, since things on the moon are mostly supposed to be either bright or dark — there is no atmosphere to scatter light and create midtones.

How did this happen?

Note that all these drawings are digitally modified versions of the last (dated) image.

After about fifteen minutes passed, the smudge was both clearer and more easily seen.

Further, it was being joined by another smaller brightening above it. On the edge of visibility, I seemed to detect yet another area, perhaps two.

At this point I was sure this was some weird sunrise effect, but not one I'd noticed before.

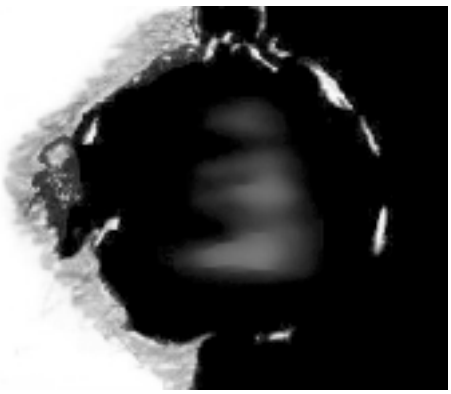
Normally, sunrise would start at the side closest the terminator and the shadows of the anti-terminatorward walls would be clearly seen.

Finally, about a half hour later, it was obvious what was happening: the domed shape of the huge crater was high enough to be lit long before the shadow shapes from the left walls were obvious, though at this point I assumed that must be what is causing the "comet shape" of the bright areas.

Okay, now I knew the why of "where," but the why of an increasing gray scale was still puzzling: why not just areas of brightness and darkness as you'd normally see in a crater at sunrise?

While I was watching this happen, I was also reporting the event to some friends via email.

One of them, Mark Taylor, suggested an explanation that I find completely satisfactory: The floor of Ptolemaeus is known to not be smooth, but slightly rough. Each of the high points in this rough surface, at the ideal oblique angle the light hits it, acts like a "pixel" on your monitor, lighting up just at the tip. As the light is able to



illuminate more and more of each dot, the seeming "grayscale" grows lighter.

It's not entirely clear to me why this would happen in Ptolemaeus and not with such effect elsewhere, but its size and placement near "our" center of view may play a part... nevertheless, this kind of weirdness is par for the course on the moon.

Why I haven't noticed this before, I don't know. I'd swear I've watched sunrise at Ptolemaeus before, even at

Continued on next page

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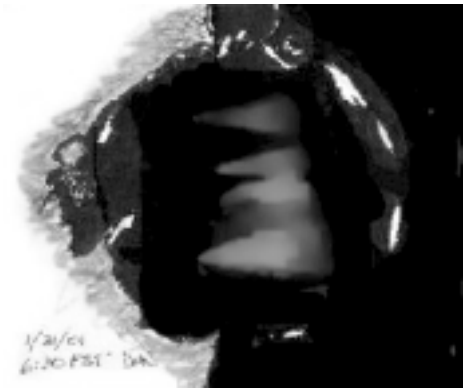
this stage. But maybe I just wasn't looking closely enough. I have no reason to believe this apparition in any way unique to this season — the same thing was seen by Bill Arnett of nineplanets.org last summer.

I quote: "This evening as I was showing off my observatory, I noticed



that the Sun was about to rise over Ptolemaeus. About midnight I checked again and still nothing but a spot of light on the far (western) rim. But as the Moon sank lower in my sky, the Sun rose on my target on the Moon and the race was on! At first I thought I could see a slight brightening in the middle of the floor. I went in for a while to see if anything would change. By a little before 1 a.m. there was a very neat quartet of bright streaks in the middle of the crater floor. I interpret these as the Sun shining through low valleys in the eastern rim onto a dome shaped floor (perhaps the dome shape is due to the spherical nature of the Moon?). As the Moon sank lower the rays got brighter and wider. By the time it disappeared below my neighbor's roof (only 4 degrees up :-) the rays had merged together and about half the crater floor was bright except for a long shadow from one of the easern rim peaks..."

So, if you want to watch for the sun to rise again on Ptolemy, there's every reason to believe you can see this too!

The Shallow Sky

Don't Forget the Planetary Observing Class!

Akkana Peck

The March installment of SJAA's observational astronomy class, on March 2 at Houge, will cover planetary observing. Bring a telescope if you have one (if not, come anyway and "shoulder surf!") and we'll introduce you to some of the wonderful features you can see on our neighboring planets, then we'll go out and take a look for ourselves and see what we can see.

The early evening sky is full of bright planets this month, with Jupiter, Saturn, and Venus all competing for our attention. Venus rules the sky, shining at its maximum magnitude -4.6 on the first, then declining slightly throughout the month as it races in its smaller orbit to catch up with the slower earth. A bit past half phase as the month begins, Venus will wane rapidly as the apparent size of its disk swells to nearly an arc minute in size, about twice the apparent size of Jupiter. This is big enough that the crescent shape might even be visible in binoculars, especially if they're held steady on a tripod or other mount. Try it — I'd be interested in hearing how small an aperture and magnification it takes to see Venus as a crescent. It may be easier to see Venus' shape before the sky is completely dark, or with a deep violet, neutral density or polarizing filter. Experiment! You can even observe Venus during broad daylight (when it's high in the sky), but be careful to avoid accidentally looking at the sun. Safest is to set up in the shade of a building; this not only protects you from accidentally pointing at the sun, but also helps shield your eye from glare.

Venus will wane rapidly as the apparent size of its disk swells ....

Venus will set earlier and earlier as it closes with the sun, and will become increasingly challenging to locate. The best approach is to try to spot it every few days, which will make it easier to remember exactly where to look. Near month's end, since its declination is somewhat north of the sun, Venus will remain visible in the sky for half an hour after sunset, but also rises before sunrise, giving observers a chance to see the same planet in both morning and evening skies. Since it's so far north of the sun, it should also be possible to watch the planet all the way through conjunction (which happens on the 30th).

Ambitious observers can also look for the famous "ashen light," lighting the unlit part of crescent Venus like earthshine on a crescent moon (but with no obvious explanation, and no definite proof that it actually exists), and for rare and elusive dark patches in Venus' thick cloud cover, the only detail one can hope to see on this planet.

Meanwhile, Jupiter continues to put on a wonderful show. This apparition has shown enormous activity

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Jay Freeman from the February Observational Astronomy Class. Binocular observing was the subject. Photo by Akkana Peck.

The Shallow Sky

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in the northern equatorial band (NEB), including several large rifts which opened and began to close over the course of a few months, a large spot in the NEB which rivals the Great Red Spot in size if not in contrast, and a pinker color to the GRS itself than we've seen in many years. There's still plenty of time to get good views of Jupiter in March, and see some of these features for yourself (even watch them change over the course of the month). And the moons are always fun to watch, in any size telescope or even in binoculars. For the best views, start observing right at sunset, when Jupiter is still high in the sky. Sometimes the air is steadier right around sunset, too, for reasons I don't yet understand.

Saturn, too, has put on a good show this year; the gaps in the wide-open rings are showing well, and the banding on the planet is much easier to see than last year.

Stay up late (or rise early in the morning), and get a preview of Mars, heading toward another opposition this summer. Mars' apparent size grows to 10" (a third of Jupiter, and over half of Saturn) by month's end, and brightens to magnitude zero. The early morning observer should be able to see some details on the disk now, but they're subtle, so look carefully! The red planet stands very near its ancient rival Antares (Ares being the Latin equivalent of the Greek god Mars, Ant-Ares literally means "Rival of Mars"), but I'm afraid the poor far-away first-magnitude star doesn't stand a chance against the bright planet. The two should make a pretty sight over the next several months.

Neptune and Uranus are still too close to the sun for good observing, but Mars, in Scorpius, is joined in nearby Ophiuchus by faint Pluto, now far enough away from the sun that it might be visible again to early morning planet hunters. The Hayden Planetarium in New York may have demoted Pluto from planetary status in their new displays, but the International Astronomical Union and most planetary scientists still say that Pluto is a planet, and I'm sure most of us agree.

Jacqueline Haggerty, age 8, was inspired to create this beautiful "observing report" after attending the January 5 Friday night Houge Park Star Party. Note the four moons of Jupiter, and three moons of Saturn in her picture. Thanks to Ed Greenberg for the inspiring view he showed Jacqueline through the eyepiece of his telescope.

You've Got Mail

Morris Jones

To some people, "too much of a good thing" is just enough. To others, a little moderation is called for.

In search of the perfect email list, SJAA is now offering two to choose from (really three), and new tools for managing your list options. The old sjaa@seds.org list is now sjaa-announce@sjaa.net. All of the existing subscriptions have been moved to that list. The new list is moderated to prevent spam and off-topic postings. The traffic on this list should be low — its charter is for timely announcements relating to SJAA business. We recommend that all SJAA members be members of this email list!

Now just for fun, we've added the sjaa-chat list, sjaa-chat@sjaa.net. Its charter is more wide-ranging and unmoderated. The chat list is intended for more social discussion related to SJAA activities. Joining the sjaa-chat list is not automatic — you can join by following links from our web page at www.sjaa.net, or go to this URL: http://www.sjaa.net/mailman/listinfo/sjaa-chat.

There's one more list that you might want to know about. The SJAA board of directors is currently making great use of email to discuss business and aid in setting the agenda and programs for the club. Interested SJAA members are welcome to join the list and collect the board's chatter, or just review the discussions on the list archive. To join, go here: http://www.sjaa.net/mailman/listinfo/sjaaboard, and to browse the archive, try http://www.sjaa.net/pipermail/sjaaboard. But be warned, the discussion can get pretty voluminous ("and boring," says an anonymous board member).

We hope these options will help everyone find exactly the right email service to enhance your SJAA membership experience.

Book Review

The Last Navigator

Akkana Peck

I stumbled across an interesting book recently: *The Last Navigator*, by Stephen D. Thomas. Though it would probably be filed under "anthropology" (where I found it) or perhaps "navigation," it holds quite a bit for the amateur astronomer who has interest in the history of astronomy or in the star lore of other cultures.

Thomas is a sailor and navigator living in Boston. Through a National Geographic documentary, he learns of the navigator Piailug, a resident of the Micronesian island of Satawal, in the Caroline island chain, and the last man to have been initiated as a palu (navigator) in the ancient pwo ceremony. Without compass, sextant or charts, Piailug, like his ancestors six thousand years ago, has navigated his outrigger sailing canoes from Satawal to islands as distant as Maui and Tahiti. But Piailug is in his fifties, and no younger islanders have been initiated in the pwo ceremony. Thomas determines to travel to Satawal and learn and document the navigational lore of the palu before it disappeared.

The Last Navigator details Thomas' journey to the Caroline islands, his relationship with the navigator Piailug and the chiefs of the islands, and what he learns about the art of Micronesian navigation. Lacking a compass, the Satawalese navigate primarily by paafu, literally "numbering the stars". Cardinal directions are defined by the rising and setting points of sixteen primary stars. The navigator initiate must learn the relative directions of each of these points, along with their reciprocal directions (since any particular star may not be visible at a particular time of night or year). For instance, to journey from the island of Lamotrek to the neighboring island of West Fayu, one would wish to travel toward Tan Egulig, or rising Cassiopeia. If Cassiopeia is not visible, one would instead travel away from the reciprocal direction, Tubula Mesaru, or setting Shaula.

Over the course of two years, Thomas learns the star names and positions necessary for paafu, as well as the art of estimating wind and current to correct the canoe's course during a journey. He learns the various rules of Etak, systems of determining one's relationship to nearby islands according to wave patterns and the movement of birds and other marine animals. He learns Morellifu, the "fighting of stars", in which the stars "fighting" in the morning sky, combined with the phase of the moon, determine the season and predict the weather under which the islanders must make their living. He learns legends of how the ancient navigators originally discovered the navigational arts, and how the knowledge has changed over the years. Finally, he meets and talks with some of the younger islanders, discussing their interest in navigation and why the knowledge is disappearing among their generation, a matter of much frustration to Piailug and the other navigators.

The book is filled with tables and examples detailing the star lore of paafu, and the kapesani serak, the "talk of sailing." The appendices and glossary are very detailed, and cover nearly everything Thomas learns about Micronesian navigation. Although the book spends a great deal of time dwelling on Thomas' motivations for the project, and his sometimes tempestuous relationship with Piailug and the other navigators of Satawal, it is still a fascinating read for someone interested in celestial navigation or in the astronomy of ancient Micronesia.

Kevin Zahnle shows a diagram of illumination and view angles from the Shoemaker-Levy 9 impact on Jupiter, and its resulting fireball, from the February general meeting. Photo by Akkana Peck

Andrah Foundation Gift

The Andrah Foundation has donated $750 to SJAA, to further the club's work in education and public awareness of astronomy. We thank the Foundation, and especially, we thank SJAA member Paul Summers for arranging for this gift.

The Andrah Foundation is a private charitable organization founded several years ago by Ruth S. Knoll and her husband Thomas Knoll. Paul and Ann Summers, are members of the foundation and are responsible for directing distributions from the west coast. They recommmend, but do not require, that the gift be focused on community activities that promote awareness and interest in astronomy, and the Telescope Loaner Program. Many thanks to the Andrah Foundation!

New Online Resources

The **Fremont Peak Observatory Association** has a new website at **http://www.fpoa.net**.

Chuck Grant has launched a discussion mailing list targeted to **Bay Area Astronomy** on the Yahoo mailing list service. You can join his list at **http://groups.yahoo.com/group/astronomy-sfbay.**

Help Wanted at Orion

Want to work at Orion Telescope Center? Fun, interesting part-time job with good discount on Orion products. Call Marshall Smith or Ken Sablinsky (408) 255-8770.

AANC Conference of Astronomy Clubs

Mark your calendars! April 7th is the date for the annual one day conference sponsored by the AANC, the Astronomical Association of Northern California. This year the event will be held at the new Chabot Space and Science Center in Oakland. The theme this year, The Northern California Astronomy Club Conference, will showcase the unique astronomy clubs and give everybody the opportunity to exchange ideas and get to know each other and see what their fellow astronomers look like during the daytime!

Features in development include:

• Northern California Astronomy Club Presentations — what's new, what's old, what's cool, what's hot!

• Presentation of annual AANC awards for amateur and professional astronomer of the year, Commercial and special awards too!.

• Tours and explanations about the restoration efforts of the Chabot Refractors, 20 inch Rachel, 8 inch Leah and the historic Transit Telescope.

• Observing through the telescopes in the evening, weather permitting.

• Lots of time to take in the wonders of the new Chabot. See a movie in the auditorium, watch a planetarium show, stroll through the historic telescope exhibit.

One special planned feature will be the first (annual?) Full Moon Daytime Indoor Messier Marathon, using the Ask Jeeves Planetarium Zeiss Universarium Mark VIII star-ball projector. Join the fun, and bring your binoculars!

Pre-registration by April 1 is $20 for adults, $10 for ages 10-18. Registration is available at the door for $25. More information is available online at http://www.aanc-astronomy.org.

For more information about Chabot Space and Science Center, including directions, please visit the website http://www.cosc.org/default.htm

Mars on Earth and Violent Universe

On Wednesday evening, March 7th, at 7 pm, Dr. Pascal Lee of the SETI Institute will give a multi-media talk on "Mars on Earth: Polar Research and the Human Exploration of Mars" in the Silicon Valley Astronomy Lecture Series, at Foothill College in Los Altos Hills. Admission is free and the public is invited. Call the series hotline at 650-949-7888 for more information.

Also, March 24th "Crashing Asteroids, Exploding Stars, and Cannibal Galaxies," a full day explaining "The Violent Universe," will be presented from 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the University of California, Berkeley. Led by astronomer and popular lecturer Andrew Fraknoi, the non-technical, multi-media program will focus on some of the most exciting (and destructive) phenomena in the cosmos. For more information or to register, see: http://www.learningsphere.org/astronomy.htm or call the UC Berkeley Extension at (510) 642-4111.

Loaner Notes

Mike Koop

Thanks to Rich Neuschaefer for the donation of an Orion aluminum tripod with slow motion controls and a TeleVue Upswing mount.

Thanks to Bob Mclaren of Santa Clara for the donation of a Jaegers 4" refractor assembly, equatorial mount, and a collection of Edmund eyepieces.

Look for a BIG announcement next month!

Celestial Calendar March 2001

Richard Stanton

Lunar Phases:		Date	Rise	Trans	Set
FQ	18:03 PST	02	09:57	17:55	00:51
FM	09:23 PST	09	17:43	00:44	07:04
LQ	12:45 PST	16	01:40	05:46	09:47
NM	17:21 PST	24	06:27	12:01	17:47

Nearer Planets:				R. A.	Dec.
Mercury, 1.02 A.U., Mag. -1.5					
07	05:19	10:36	15:52	23:11.4	-05:13
17	05:16	10:39	15:03	22:10.9	-12:52
27	05:15	10:53	16:32	23:03.9	-08:29
Venus, 0.30 A.U., Mag. -3.1					
07	07:14	13:59	20:45	00:54.5	+13:12
17	06:25	13:12	19:59	00:47.4	+13:49
27	05:33	12:14	18:54	00:28.4	+12:02
Mars, 1.04 A.U., Mag. 0.5					
07	00:48	05:42	10:35	16:34.9	-21:12
17	00:31	05:22	10:12	16:54.1	-21:57
27	00:11	05:00	09:48	17:11.8	-22:33
Jupiter, 5.34 A.U., Mag. -2.2					
07	10:02	17:13	00:27	04:07.9	+20:23
17	09:27	16:39	23:51	04:13.6	+20:40
27	08:53	16:07	23:20	04:20.2	+20:58
Saturn, 9.56 A.U., Mag. 0.9					
07	09:40	16:40	23:40	03:35.1	+17:19
17	09:03	16:04	23:04	03:38,2	+17:33
27	08:27	15:28	22:30	03:41.9	+17:47

SOL Star Type G2V Intelligent Life in System ?

Hours of Darkness

09:28	07	06:29	12:19	18:09	23:11.4	-05:13
09:03	17	06:14	12:16	18:18	23:48.2	-01:17
08:36	27	05:59	12:13	18:27	00:24.6	+02:40

Astronomical Twilight:

		Begin	End
JD 2,451,975	07	05:03	19:35
985	17	04:48	19:45
995	27	04:31	19:56

Sidereal Time:

Transit Right Ascension at Local Midnight

07	00:00 = 10:52
17	00:00 = 11:32
27	00:00 = 12:11

Darkest Saturday Night: 24 Mar 2001

Sunset	18:25
Twilight End	19:52
Moon Set	18:16
Dawn Begin	04:36
Hours Dark	08:44

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Publication Statement

SJAA Ephemeris, newsletter of the San Jose Astronomical Association, is published monthly, 12 times a year, January through December.

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SJAA Loaner Scope Status

All scopes are available to any SJAA member; contact Mike Koop by email (loaner@sjaa.net) or by phone at work (408) 473-6315 or home (408) 446-0310 (Leave Message).

Available Scopes

These are scopes that are available for immediate loan, stored at other SJAA members homes. If you are interested in borrowing one of these scopes, please contact Mike Koop for a scope pick up at any of the listed SJAA events.

# Scope	Description	Stored by
1	4.5" Newt/ P Mount	Tim Roberts
3	4" Quantum S/C	Bob Havner
16	Solar Scope	Jim Van Nuland
24	60mm Refractor	Al Kestler
30	7" f/9 Newt/Pipe Mount	Mike Koop
31	8" f/8 Dobson	Robert Morgan

Scope Loans

These are scopes that have been recently loaned out. If you are interested in borrowing one of these scopes, you will be placed on the waiting list until the scope becomes available after the due date.

# Scope	Description	Borrower	Due Date
6	8" Celestron S/C	Al Kestler	4/19/01
7	12.5" Dobson	Bruce Horton	5/10/01
10	Star Spectroscope	Steven Nelson	3/9/01
11	Orion XT6 Dob	David Findley	3/9/01
12	Orion XT8 Dob	Steve Sergeant	5/13/01
13	Orion XT6 Dob	Li Chung Ting	3/15/01
19	6" Newt/P Mount	Ilkka Kallio	3/15/01
23	6" Newt/P Mount	Dennis Hong	4/28/01
28	13" Dobson	Michael Dajewski	3/2/01
29	C8, Astrophotography	Doug Graham	3/18/01

Extended Scope Loans

These are scopes that have had their loan period extended. If you are interested in borrowing one of these scopes, we will contact the current borrower and try to work out a reasonable transfer time for both parties.

# Scope	Description	Borrower	Due Date
2	6" f/9 Dob	John Paul De Silva	?
8	14" Dobson	Andrew Pierce	4/6/01
9	C-11 Compustar	Paul Barton	Indefinite
15	8" Dobson	Daron Darr	3/7/01
21	10" Dobson	Ralph Seguin	Repair
26	11" Dobson	David Cameron	3/8/01
27	13" Dobson	Bill Maney	4/22/01
32	6" f/7 Dobson	Sandy Mohan	3/8/01

Waiting List

Jack D. Kellythore, 14" dobsonian; Gene Schmidt, 13" dobsonian; John Templeton, 8" f/8 dobsonian

Note: Do you have space to store a scope or two? Please contact me and let me know so that we can store scopes on short notice.

Submit

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Observational Astronomy Class
March 2, 7:30 p.m. and
March 30, 7:30 p.m.
General Meeting, Peggy Bernard
March 10, 8:00 p.m.
Auction and Swap Meet!
Sunday, April 8