



SVAS OBSERVER

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SACRAMENTO VALLEY ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
FOUNDED IN 1945

Totality Near Ningpo

One of the great ironies of the International Year of Astronomy (2009) is that there are few astronomical events happening this year – at least visible from Sacramento. One of these not-visible-here events was the total solar eclipse of July, 2009. The eclipse track started near Mumbai, India and ended somewhere out in the trackless waters of French Polynesia. It also crossed Myanmar and south China while going through the city of Shanghai. This is where I was.

This eclipse is the longest of this century and since we're only a few years into this century, I felt this was not an eclipse to miss. I'm also fond of Shanghai as it is a most beautiful city, with a huge number of skyscrapers (almost 1000!). In fact, it hosts the 3rd, 9th, 25th, and 50th tallest buildings on Earth. The joke is that if your hotel is in a tall building (which mine was), there will be one overlooking it next month. Although the eclipse passed through Shanghai, our group was setting up a ways south of Shanghai near Ningpo. The predicted time of totality was about 5 minutes and 40 seconds, the longest I have ever seen.

Unfortunately, the weather was not cooperative. Although it was clear and blisteringly hot several days before the eclipse, on the actual day of the eclipse it was raining. I don't mean drizzling wimpy rain. I mean monsoon-drenching rain. Folks that had all the equipment set up quickly broke it down as the rain intensified. This led to the second sucker punch, the sudden clearing that often happens right before the eclipse.

Our location was at a truck stop off a major highway, but it began to get dark even though we couldn't see the Sun.



About two or three minutes before totality, it began to clear (it was still raining some, though). The partially eclipsed Sun appeared and the thin crescent-shaped sliver continued to wane as the sky grew dark. By now, all the expensive equipment was safely stored away, so that only the easiest to use cameras were in action. Side by side with locals who happened by and groups from Finland and Poland, we saw an eclipse. The corona was visible even through the thinning clouds and although it came and went, we could see it. After totality passed, there was a brief view of the diamond ring, and then back to rain. It was quite strange.

Many things that are common in eclipses did not happen here. The bright "sunset ring" that brackets the horizon was lost in the thick clouds, and the normal distinctive temperature change was not in evidence due to the rain and normal high humidity of south China. The corona was faint from the cloud cover and came and went during totality. A few from our group flew to Wuhan and had no clouds – ironically I would be in Wuhan the next day but it was too late to help me! Not the greatest eclipse, but definitely the longest I'm likely to see for quite some time.

Liam McDaid

September Meeting

Michael "Mick" Connally received his BS in Physics from California State University, Sacramento in 1982. He received his MS in Electrical Engineering from the University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, in 1993. Since 1982, he has been employed at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena California. Mr. Connally is currently a Senior Telecommunications Systems Engineer in the JPL Communications, Tracking and Radar Division. He supported the Radio Science Experiment for the Voyager Uranus Encounter and, later, led the implementation of Radio Science experiments on Mars Observer and Mars Global Surveyor projects. Until recently he was the lead systems engineer for Science Services for NASA's Deep Space Network. Currently he is involved in negotiations for infrastructure communications and tracking support of the Constellation Program, improving radiometric range measurements for the BepiColombo Mission, and leading the development of a class on Systems Engineering in a Tracking and Communications Infrastructure.



Mr. Connally is also the son of SVAS members J. W. and Ruth Connally.

From the Editor:

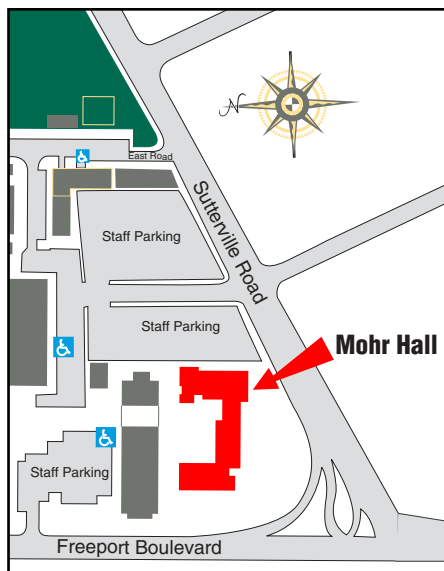
Please contribute to the newsletter. Send your observations, memories and stories (along with any photos) to Chris Hulbe at chulbe@comcast.net. Use "SVAS newsletter article" as the subject line. Microsoft Word format is preferred.

President's Perspective

Hi, everybody! StarBQ went very well thanks to the efforts of Board member Bob Lea and Past President Walt Heiges. Observatory Director Davin Enigl has been running the star parties at Blue Canyon very successfully for a few years now. We have limited resources compared to recent years, but we are still treading water according to our Treasurer, Kirk Alexander. As for other things, I will return to this but I want to address an important issue first.

There is some confusion over where we meet. This is understandable, given the situation with CSUS. To be clear: The physics department at Sac State has been extremely helpful and Heidi Yamazaki has gone above and beyond many times for us in the past. We get the room for free at CSUS. But that's not the problem. I've gone back and forth with the people in charge of parking at CSUS and they will **not** issue any more parking permits. This means that every time you come to a meeting, you have to pay \$6 for parking. Given the present economy, I find this unacceptable. As an organization, we can't afford to buy 30 – 50 parking permits per month at \$6 per person, it would be much cheaper to rent facilities elsewhere. Past President Walt Heiges has pointed out that no one has ever been ticketed. The problem is that I suspect that will change in the near future as CSUS chases after every dollar they can.

So what will we do? Well, in September we will be meeting in Mohr Hall at Sacramento City College on the normal date (September 18), and starting at 8:00pm (regardless of what the website says). Starting in October, there are two possibilities: we return to the Discovery Museum, or we remain at SCC. Advantages: Neither place will charge us for a room or for parking. Both are as close to a freeway as CSUS. Disadvantage: Both are farther away for people coming in from the east. Keep watching the website and the Yahoo groups for the final word on what will happen. There is one last good thing about being at SCC: after the meetings, members would be able to look through its 16" SCT at the lovely light-polluted Sacramento skies. In truth, you can see more than you might imagine. This will probably



*September general meeting location:
Sacramento City College,
Mohr Hall, Room 3
3835 Freeport Boulevard*

be a Good Thing for newer members.

About the website: it is functionally compromised (to use government-speak) in that it will do a lot of things, but our organization has no use for most of these things and the extra bells and whistles make the present site hard to navigate. We are fixing it and, hopefully, it will be done within the next month. Either way, where we meet will be announced there for sure.

I'd like to clarify something as well that some members are confused about. You may have run across announcements for a "telescope making workshop" or words to that effect. Such "workshops" are not run by the SVAS and have no connection with the SVAS, including access to our insurance for public events.

Finally, I mentioned that one of the things members were interested in was field trips. If there is interest in doing one to Lick Observatory this fall, let me know: mcdaidl@scc.losrios.edu. Clear skies to all.

Liam McDaid



Blue Canyon – It's Your Observatory

Lately, there have been some questions about Blue Canyon. Many of you already know that it is one of the most important membership benefits. It is one that **all** members have access to during the monthly star parties (see elsewhere in this newsletter for upcoming dates). There is a class of members who pay a bit more to have almost open access to the observatory after they have been trained and voted on by the Board. But all members can go up once a month to look through the Ritchey-Chretien 16" telescope in the SVAS' Henry Grieb Observatory, or bring their own telescopes. Many members in fact do bring their own telescopes for themselves and others so particularly during the warm months (hint, hint), there are many people with telescopes to look through during the monthly star parties.

Having said all that, HGO is overseen by the Observatory Director, Davin Enigl. It is maintained, however, by all of us. We need volunteers to help with keeping the observatory going. Please help out and ensure that HGO is for us, and not the rodents – as much as they may think they live there. If you are interested in helping out, please contact Davin at (916) 989-8264 or email him: davinenigl@comcast.net. He wants to get a group together **soon** to maintain HGO, so if you can help out, that would be outstanding!

Liam McDaid

SVAS Website
Our current website address
is www.svas.org

From the Editor:

Please contribute to the newsletter. Send your observations, memories and stories (along with any photos) to Chris Hulbe at chulbe@comcast.net. Use "SVAS newsletter article" as the subject line. Microsoft Word format is preferred.

Star BQ 2009

What a weekend we had at Blue Canyon. The crowd was a bit smaller than other times I can remember. With the economy taking a dive and the temperatures fast approaching the low 90's, we did okay. We did, however, collect \$634 in raffle tickets and even sold a few resource items. My deepest appreciation goes to Tom Fry for helping with the raffle. Even though his day was not going real good, he hung in there and lent me a hand. Then there was Bob Lea who was there every step of the way. Many thanks go to Bob for all of his help with organizing and set-up Star BQ 2009. I want to give a quick shout-out to all the volunteers who assisted with both set-up and teardown.

Here is the list kept by Tom as raffle prizes were claimed by those in attendance:

Chuck Ritchie – Celestron Telescope
Patrick Harrold – Hubble Book
Jason Gayman - Scope City Gift Certificate
(donated by Tom and Barbara Silver and augmented by Sam Sweiss)
Melanie Smith – Lumicon O3 Filter
Janel Merkel – Monopoly Game
Patrick Harrold – Parks Binoculars
Rick Cary – Aluminum Case
Bob Lea – Parks Binoculars
Rick Cary – Astro Cards
Dave Compton – Cleaning Kit
Tim Tingey – Hubble Book
Jace Peterson – Meade Scope
Melanie Smith – Deep Map 600
Tierney O'Donnell – Mini Binoculars
Patrick Harrold – Alphabet Birds
Jay Schudle – Solar System Book
Patrick Harrold – 3 Hrs. with Don Machholz
Alyssa Lopez – Mini Binoculars
Ralph Merletti – Book of 300 Objects
Steve Arnold – Screen Saver CD
Al Molton – Aluminum Case
Robert Speer – Star Charts
Patrick Harrold – Apollo Mission CD Set
Patrick Harrold – Milky Way Poster
Dave Ford – Messier Book
Dave Compton – Poster
Chuck Real – Epoch 2000
Jason Gayman – Star Charts
Patrick Harrold – Screen Saver CD
Melanie Smith – Alphabet Birds
Ian Bergett – SkyGazer 4.5
Patrick Harrold – Stargazer Binocular Book
Julianne Hamler – Sky Charts

Kit Somesen – Astronaut Commemorative Plate
Bill Hagbery – Lunar Map Pro
Chuck Real – Binocular Stargazer
Sasha Tkacheff – Poster
Dave Ford – Poster
Dave Compton – Poster
Teresa Roseberry – Poster
Patrick Harrold – Poster
Teresa Roseberry – Woman Astronomer (Book)
Janel Merkel – Poster
Tim Dingey – Poster
Al Molton – Lunar Map Pro
Al Molton – StarGazer 4.5
Janel Merkel – Poster
Kit Somesen – Framed Print
Al Molton – Framed Print
Janel Merkel – Moon Missions
Janel Merkel – Poster

You might notice how many items were claimed by Patrick Harrold. His biggest adversary was not present – Ross Gorman. Had Ross been there, who knows how much we might have collected. Patrick felt so bad that he gave his tickets to Janel Merkel. She passed on choosing the telescope when she had the chance because she wanted a younger person to win it. Patrick made sure she was well-compensated by giving her all of his tickets. Plus, we did our best to shame him into giving everyone else a chance to win.

My biggest thanks goes out to Sam Sweiss of Scope City for his generous donations that make our raffle happen. Sam is the backbone of amateur Astronomy in Northern California. He continues to support all the activities in over 22 Astronomical Association of Northern California astronomy groups. Without him whatever would we do? Support his generous efforts by visiting his store in San Francisco near Fisherman's Wharf. I make it a great Saturday daytrip. Go see Sam, buy some stuff and have a terrific meal on the Wharf. That is what I did a few weeks ago and we had a wonderful time and a great meal in San Francisco.

*Walt Heiges
Star-B-Q Chairman*

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October Meeting

Dr. Kevin Grazier holds the dual titles of Investigation Scientist and Science Planning Engineer for the Cassini/Huygens Mission to Saturn and Titan at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL) in Pasadena, CA. He earned B.S. degrees in computer science and geology from Purdue University, and a B.S. in physics from Oakland University. He earned his M.S. in physics from Purdue, and then went to UCLA for his doctoral research in planetary physics, performing long-term, large-scale computer simulations of early Solar System evolution. While in graduate school, he worked at the RAND Corporation, processing Viking imagery in support of the Mars Observer Mission. At JPL he has written mission planning and analysis software that won numerous JPL- and NASA-wide awards. Dr. Grazier still continues research involving computer simulations of Solar System dynamics, evolution, and chaos.



In addition to his JPL duties, Dr. Grazier is active in teaching the public about science and space. He teaches classes in stellar astronomy, planetary science, cosmology, and the search for extraterrestrial life at UCLA and Santa Monica College. He has served on several NASA educational product review panels. He is also a planetarium lecturer at LA's landmark Griffith Observatory.

Dr. Grazier also works in Hollywood, currently serving as the science advisor for the science fiction series Eureka, Battlestar Galactica, Virtuality, and the animated/educational series The Zula Patrol. He writes a monthly article on the science behind "Battlestar Galactica" for the Vancouver-based entertainment site Cinemaspy. He was also editor and contributing author for the books The Science of Dune, and The Science of Michael Crichton. He is also co-authoring the upcoming The Science of Battlestar Galactica.

In the Fall of 2001, Dr. Grazier was honored as the first-ever honorary Chairperson of Oakland University's "Week of Champions" (Homecoming) celebration. In what passes for spare time, he enjoys working out, martial arts, and SCUBA diving.

SVAS Calendar of Events

September

18 SVAS Board Meeting (7 pm) Sacramento City College, Mohr Hall, Room 3 (held just prior to the general meeting).

General Meeting (8 pm) Sacramento City College, Mohr Hall, Room 3. Speaker, Michael J. Connally (JPL), NASA's Deep Space Network & The BepiColombo Mission.

19 Member Star Party, HGO.

October

16 SVAS Board Meeting (7 pm) Location TBD (held just prior to the general meeting).

General Meeting (8 pm) Location TBD. Speaker, Dr. Kevin R. Grazier (JPL), Cassini/Huygens Mission to Saturn and Titan.

17 Member Star Party, HGO.

30 Community Star Party, Roseville 5:45 pm. Contact outreach@svas.org for more info or to volunteer.

November

14 Member Star Party, HGO.

20 SVAS Board Meeting (7 pm) Location TBD (held just prior to the general meeting).

General Meeting (8 pm) Location TBD. Speaker, TBD.

WHOM TO CALL

For more information: www.svas.org • (916) SVAS-111

2009 SVAS OFFICERS:

President

Liam McDaid (916-558-2005)

Vice President

Ross Gorman (916-543-7383)

Secretary

Charles Real (916-988-8443)

Treasurer

Kirk Alexander (530-753-4430)

Past President

Walt Heiges (916-684-3421)

DIRECTORS

Greg Alterton (916-396-8214)

Lynda Hall (916-712-6247)

Chris Hulbe (916-967-3794)

Bob Lea (530-367-5211)

Mike Mehrdadi (916-653-6150)

Margaret Minnick (916-834-0675)

Perry Porter (916-689-1581)

Tom Silver (916-988-0536)

Newsletter

Chris Hulbe (916-967-3794)

David Larzelere (916-457-7655)

Dave Buchla (530-273-9783)

Outreach Director

Vacant

Observatory Director

Davin Enigl (916-989-8264)

WHERE TO MEET

General meetings are held on the third Friday of each month.

Please see calendar for details.

Subscribe to the SVAS email list by going to the Yahoo group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/svas-members> and sending a request to join the group.

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Articles—Manuscripts and letters are welcome via email in Word or text format. Items may be e-mailed to Chris Hulbe at chulbe@comcast.net. Deadline for the following month's newsletter is the Wednesday following the SVAS General Meeting.

Advertising—Commercial non-personal advertising, business card through full page, is available. Contact Chris Hulbe at 967-3794 for information.

Classified advertising is free to members of SVAS. Submit ads to Chris Hulbe at 967-3794, chulbe@comcast.net.

Membership Renewal/ New Member Application

Yes! Please renew my membership, or make me a new member of the Sacramento Valley Astronomical Society.

1-year Renewal 1-year New Membership

General, \$35 — Enjoy monthly meetings, informative bi-monthly newsletters, and awe inspiring views of the universe at monthly star parties.

Student, \$20

Supporting, \$75

Contributing, \$150

Observatory, an additional \$40 — Enjoy all the benefits of a general membership plus use of the Henry Grieb Observatory (HGO). You must be a general member for 6 months or longer, and must be approved by the Board of Directors.

Additional Tax Deductible Donation: \$ _____

Tell us about yourself...

Name(s) _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Telephone (_____) _____

E-Mail Address _____

Please tell us where you obtained this form:

A star party at

A daytime event at

From a member.

Yes, I would like to be contacted about volunteering.

Yes, I would like to have my contact information listed on the SVAS Members Only Web Page.

No, I do not want the SVAS to contact me via email.

I wish to read the SVAS Newsletter on the web, and I opt out of receiving the printed newsletter.

I agree to abide by the terms and conditions* governing the use of the SVAS Special Use Permit Property and the SVAS constitution and bylaws. I understand that failure to abide can result in revocation of use privileges and SVAS membership.

Signed _____ Date _____

*A copy of the SVAS Rules of Operation and Regulations will be provided upon request to all new members. The rules are also available at www.svas.org



Enclose payment and mail to:

**Sacramento Valley
Astronomical Society**
2305 Goldberry Lane
Davis, CA 95616-2961