

TAURANGA ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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PATRON: Dr. Frank Bateson OBE FRAS FRASNZ

Website; www.tauranga-astro.150m.com

Correspondence to Secretary; 14 Hazel Terrace, Tauranga

Comet lands in Matua.....



February meeting – making comets



Mixing everything together – soy sauce for colour, cornflour for that 'organic' element, mud for texture & colour, and dry ice ; the main constituent and for special effects.....



Adding the reacting agent..water "Gosh, is it supposed to do that ?"

Maybe a rabbit will appear?



Ahhhh!!! It worked. A real, live, comet !

Thanks to Lew Lawson for vigorously bashing the dry ice to powder, and to Stuart Murray for lobbing the comet across the field in a superb overarm – must have been watching the cricket.....??

We saw the 'smoke' plume, and were amazed ! Thanks also to Jim Barrowclough as the photographer and Ursula for the demonstration.

February meeting – observing time...

At the Fergusson Park clubrooms, we were lucky to get a fairly clear night and this was my first chance to look through a "decent" telescope.

My only previous experience was a cheap 4" reflector around 1976 – interesting views of Saturn had whetted my appetite even then.

Ursula Macfarlane had set up her handbuilt 6" Newtonian on the western side of the clubrooms, and I was invited to peer out into space – the first time for 30 years!!

What can I say? It just took my breath away. I was astonished by the clarity of the image.

We started out on the Orion nebula and with high power we were able to see the Trapezium – four stars inside the nebula. I was pleased to be able to see the gas/dust clouds : after reading all those library books, finally I was looking at a real live nebula.

Next up, she swung the telescope round more to the southwest and zeroed in on the Large Magellanic Cloud – a huge cluster of deep sky objects, including the Tarantula nebula. From here we progressed in no particular order to view the open cluster near Vela - NGC 2516, the Jewel box in the Southern Cross,

the Beehive cluster near Saturn, 47 Tucanae a globular cluster, and omega centaurii another globular cluster.

We also looked at Saturn which was nicely tilted to display it's rings – I was pleased to see them so well defined - and a couple of moons as well.

As it was getting a bit chilly, the night's viewing ended around 10pm.

My previous experience of recent times has been limited to utilising my little pair of binoculars – a pair of Pentax 7x20 which are not at all suitable for astronomy due to their limited light gathering power. But through these I have spent many nights looking at Venus and especially the moon. I have also had a few attempts at photographing the moon using my Canon 6 megapixel digital camera with a 300mm lens mounted on a tripod.

Barry Raynel

(OK Barry – we'll put some of those images up in another newsletter eh??...U.)

The Kiwi Constellation.....



Photographs by Chris Picking . The larger image was a 6 minute exposure, and the smaller one a 4 minute exposure. A diffuse filter was used to help emphasise the brighter stars.

You can see more of Chris's images on his website at www.starrynightphotos.com

Observing at Te Puke

One of our members has moved out to Te Puke – east of Tauranga – and to a fabulous dark sky site. He very generously invited us out for a night's observing. It had been a warm day in Tauranga, but boy, did the temperature drop sharply while we were out there ! Janine gives us her story of our night out.....

With the Milky Way forming a bright band stretching from horizon to horizon, we had an excellent evening's viewing at Andrew's on Wednesday, March 1st. Barry, Shaun, and I loaded into Ursula's car and proceeded to Andrew's place, located just outside of Te Puke, Andrew has three homemade Dobsonians, the mirrors of which he hand ground himself.

Still figuring his latest creation, we had great views through his other telescopes, an f9 and an f4.5 , both of 6" aperture. Fine views of all the usual suspects were had: beautiful Saturn, the Jewel Box, Eta Carinae Nebula, 47 Tucanae, and Omega Centauri.

The double stars of Alpha Centauri resolved like two sparkling diamonds in the sky. The Tarantula Nebula (part of the Large Magellanic Cloud) was amazing, its dark tendrils radiating through misty patches of white. The Orion Nebula was fantastic, and, as Ursula said, looked like a bird, with beautiful outstretched wings; bringing many oohs and ahs.

Through her own 6" Dobsonian reflector, Ursula managed to resolve a cluster of galaxies in Leo; M95, M96, M105. And through Andrew's 'scope we saw a cigar shaped spiral galaxy, viewed edge on from the Earth.

The Coal Sack was easily visible against the brighter Milky Way and brought debates about the Emu and Kiwi shapes.

For me, the most interesting view was of a carbon star just below Beta Crucis in the Southern Cross. It was a deep orange colour--due to the high density of carbon in its atmosphere (Andrew said).

We finished the chilly night off inside with a cup of hot cocoa and chocolate bikkies. A perfect end to a great evening!

Janine Neustroski

Binocular Viewing Night

As a first for our Society an enthusiastic group turned up at Fergusson Park at the end of February with their binoculars and were shown how easy it is to find things in the sky provided they are shown how in the first place, so we were hoping that these people would be able to go home and find them themselves. To assist in this we were able to use a recently acquired Laser Beam which proved ideal for the purpose – this beam puts out a very powerful green beam of light which is great for pointing out various stars and for those not quite so familiar with the sky above it was a great tool for instruction. Concentrating at first on Orion it is easy to show the star at the left lower leg down to Aldebaran and again down to the Pleiades and just above is the red Mars. Then back to Orion and up to the sword hilt and in the middle is the Orion Nebula. These objects look really good in binoculars. The yellow object out to the right of Orion is plainly Saturn and a harder one to find was going from Sirius to Canopus and the same again and there is a very faint star and out again a little way is 47 Tucanae. With the city lights the Magellanic clouds don't show. Off from the Southern Cross one was able to identify the Jewel Box, Omega Centauri and Eta Carinae and as Les had brought the 10 inch telescope a beautiful view of Saturn was seen by all. We hope that this was of great benefit to a number of people to be able to identify these objects by themselves and with binoculars they are easy to lock on to. I know I have been helped in the past by people showing me 'you go from that star to that one and there it is'. We hope to have another similar night for those who couldn't make it the first time with such a very short notice, the weather being so changeable in just a few hours.

- Jim Barrowclough

Forthcoming Astronomical Events.....

Waharau Deep Sky observing weekend – 28-30 April – See Waharau link on

<http://www.astronomy.org.nz/aas/pub/home.asp>

Astrophotography weekend at Gisborne - 24-27 March

<http://www.star-mate.com/astrophoto2006/>

RASNZ conference - New Plymouth - June 2006 - David Levy is the invited speaker -

www.rasnz.org.nz

Further Society Information

Apologies to all our members for the lateness of the newsletter. The Christmas break was a little longer than usual, however we are looking forward to a great 2006 !

Also, good-bye to Toby Tobias, our president. Thank you Toby for your wisdom and enthusiasm in the driving-seat. We hope that everything works out well in the future.

TROG.....Tauranga Roaming Observers Group

This is a phone/email list which you can put your name down for if you are interested in 'spur of the moment' observing. This has normally been down at Fergusson Park in Matua, Tauranga, but other sites are being checked out constantly. Contact Ursula or Jim if you are interested in joining the observing group. Andrew Walker has agreed to help man this list too, so you could co-ordinate a time/place with him if you are keen to go out. Andrew's phone number is 573 8550.

NOTE: Public Meeting Visitors;

Casual visitors to public meeting nights will be able to come along free of charge for two public meetings or viewing nights, thereafter a charge of \$5 per meeting or viewing night if the person does not pay the annual subscription.

A big Thank You to all the contributors for this issue – keep it coming !