

TAURANGA ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

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Comet Neat Q4

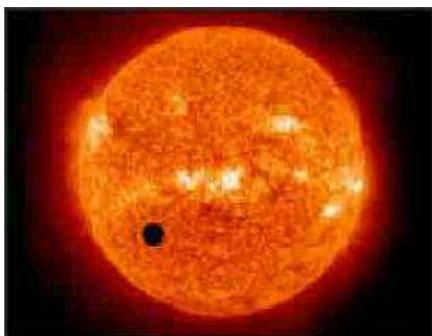


Imaged on Sunday 15th May by Gary Beal of Hamilton.

The open cluster in the frame is the Beehive, or M44, in the constellation of Cancer.

Astronomers the world over were following comets Linear (T7) and Neat (Q4) over the past few weeks. More inside.....

Transit of Venus



Another milestone event of some excitement, was the Transit of Venus.

Venus passed across the face of the Sun on Tuesday 8 June 2004.

The last transit of Venus was in 1882 - so no one currently alive had seen this rare event before. If you missed the transit this time around, there's another chance to see one in 2012

Photo: BBC Science & Nature website

President's Annual Report For 2003-2004

Progress during this past year has been continually hampered by a lack of finance so much effort has been taken up with applying for grants to enable the Society to implement both our short term requirements and also our long term goal to establish an astronomical observatory which we feel a city the size of Tauranga should possess.

Our liaison with Bethlehem College has been put on hold following some of our concerns about entering into a formal agreement with the college. The City Council has recently acquired land for a sports complex at Bethlehem between the river and the present township adjacent to SH N° 2. We have now requested council to consider a site on the crown of the ridge overlooking the main road and the river. They have indicated that they will try and meet our request although the development of the complex is not scheduled until sometime in the future but again this should help give us time to put in place some financial arrangement to allow for the construction and equipping of a permanent observatory. We consider this is the best possible site available for both the short and long term viability of the permanent observatory project

A Project Manager has recently been appointed by council for the proposed District Museum expected to be constructed during 2008. Council have agreed to the positioning of a planetarium as just another exhibit within the museum complex but on the latest information available the complex site has still not been agreed on. Costing and possible funding for the planetarium is still being proceeded with.

Our Fergusson Park public nights on the last Wednesday of each month have continued to attract members of the public with varying numbers attending. However the number of evenings suitable for viewing using the Society's recently acquired 8-inch scope has been very disappointing. Thank you to those who have attended and please if you have friends who are interested in astronomy they are most welcome also.

We intend firstly to construct a secure building to house telescopes and also a concrete pad to allow members and the public, providing we can arrange some better weather than what we have had in the past, to view our interesting Solar System and beyond. Also the recent public discussion on the future use of Fergusson Park and the amenities they would like to have could inhibit our plans for making viewing possible sooner rather than later.

Our proposal for establishing a site adjacent to the club rooms here have involved extended discussions with the Council and again finance for this project has needed applying for grants from different organisations and my thanks goes to Toby Tobias for his considerable effort in complying the applications. The Society has just recently received a grant as a result of

one of our requests. My thanks also goes to the members of the committee for their continuing support and efforts over the past year and this includes the outgoing Vice President, David Gordon who has had to deputise for me on several occasions.

The committee also thanks the generosity of the ladies who arrange and provide the suppers at our public evenings.

Finally I would like to personally thank a committee member, Jim Barrowclough who among other things reconstructed the Society's new telescope, has arranged several viewing evenings when the weather was suitable, arranges and edits our new newsletter which has proved to be a real plus and for opening and closing the meeting room and park for our public meetings, thanks Jim.

W. J. Simms Dated: 26th May 2004

COMET COMMENTARY

In May 2004 two bright comets were visible, at the same time, and astronomers worldwide were tracking these. Locally, there was a good network of astronomers keeping touch on the Internet and showing off some great photographs. Our knowledge base in New Zealand is extraordinary – there are some great minds out there ! We managed to see comet Q4 at the end of May at a public meeting; at last a clear night – the AGM was held up while we gazed through the telescope (Ursula's 6" dobsonian) at the comet, already on it's way out to the horizon. People were pleased that they finally got a chance to view one of these celestial objects, after all we kept talking about them but most of the local Tauranga Society members hadn't actually seen anything!



Comet C/2001 Q4 (NEAT) was discovered on August 28, 2001 by the Near Earth Asteroid Tracking (NEAT) program, as its name suggests. It brightened to around 2nd magnitude by late April and remained at this brightness until mid May.

NEAT is a southern hemisphere object until early May, being circumpolar for mid southern latitudes up to the end of April. It then moves fairly rapidly north and is lost to southern observers by the end of May. The comet was visible in binoculars throughout March and April at all times of night from the southern hemisphere. However in the last few days of April it was very low in the

morning sky while still remaining well placed in the evening sky.

Comet C/2002 T7 (LINEAR) was found by the Lincoln Laboratory Near Earth Asteroid Research (LINEAR) program and announced on October 29, 2002. This was also a naked eye object during May for those lucky enough to have a dark enough sky to view. It brightened to 3rd magnitude in mid May.

LINEAR started as a more northerly object and was close to the Sun throughout March. Surviving it's trip around the Sun, it first became observable in the southern hemisphere about mid April when it was in the morning sky rising before the Sun. In New Zealand the comet rose at least three hours before the Sun from late April until mid May. After that it rapidly disappeared from the morning sky.

Both comets could be seen in the sky together from late April and indeed passed through the same part of the sky two weeks apart.

After mid May, LINEAR disappeared from the morning sky in, to reappear in the evening sky. Indeed, observers in the southern hemisphere could to see the comet both in the morning and in the evening for a day or so round about May 15.

For recent comet observations try...

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CometObs/>

<http://encke.jpl.nasa.gov/RecentObs.html>

<http://cfa-www.harvard.edu/iau/icq/CometMags.html>

For photos of comets try...

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Comet-Images/>

<http://www.theastronomer.org/comets.html>

TRANSIT OF VENUS

Millions of people around the world tuned into one of the significant astronomical events of the century on June 8th. This was the transit of the planet Venus across the Sun's disc which took over six hours. The previous transit occurred in December 1882, that is 121.5 years ago. It was visible in its entirety from all of Asia except the south-east, all of Europe and Africa except the south-west. Australia, Indonesia, the Phillipines, Japan and south and east China saw the earlier stages of the transit before the Sun set. From South and West Africa and much of South and North America the later stages were visible after sunrise. For New Zealand the start was just after sunset apart from a the extreme north of the North Island and the coast of southern Fjordland, where the transit commenced just as the Sun was setting. No other part of the transit was visible. However the situation will reverse in June 2012 when the next transit occurs, and will be visible in its entirety from New Zealand.

If you search for 'Transit of Venus' through the search engine of your internet browser, you will come across lots of links – I won't write them all down here.

My favourite for images was from David Cortner at www.davidcortner.com/astro/vtransit/

Further Information

Upcoming Public Meetings of Tauranga Astronomical Society.....

28th July 2004
25th August 2004

Committee meetings;

7th July 2004
4th August 2004

Also.....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.

Tauranga Astronomical Society.....

Ours is a comparatively new Society which was formed a mere two years ago, but our numbers are increasing rapidly. We have sought Council permission to erect a smallish observatory in Fergusson Park in Tauranga and are seeking finance for this. At present we operate an 8 inch Schmidt Cassegrain telescope and are in the process of obtaining a 10 inch Reflector which would be mounted in the observatory.

A foundation member has very generously donated a dome, which is stored in the meantime, to be used in the observatory construction.

We have monthly meetings at Fergusson Park which always include a talk on a specific subject and a video to back up the lecture followed by a welcome cuppa and then telescope viewing if sky conditions permit. As sky conditions are not very often clear we do have a few extra nights to give members the opportunity to

view the sky above. Through the services of a newer member we've been able to go out to a dark sky site and look through a 23 inch Dobsonian which has been really great. In the more distant future we are hopeful of installing a planetarium in a 'to be built' museum in the heart of Tauranga.
Jim B.

We would also like to extend thanks to Toby Tobias, who is putting a lot of time and effort into tracking down funding for the Society's proposed observatory. Thanks Toby !

Contributions to newsletter most welcome !
email Ursula on ursa.minor@clear.net.nz