

CAPE OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Cape Centre of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa

August 2011

What's up
in August

Wednesday 3

Bernard talks to us
about "Disks in
Space".

Wednesday 10

Formal night: AGM

Saturday 13

Open Night at SAAO
(CT), including talk "At
last, science with SALT"
presented by Prof. Phil
Charles (SAAO).

Wednesday 17

TBA

Wednesday 24

Dark Sky Discussion.

Friday 26

Contributions for *July
Cape Observer* due.
See page 6 for more details.

Saturday 27

Open Night at SAAO
(CT). "Virtual
Observatories - The
cosmos from your
desktop" by Dr.
Sudhanshu Barway
(SAAO).

Dark sky outing.

Wednesday 31

Movie night.

Events to look out for:

The IAC is coming!

Read more on page 3 or
visit www.iac2011.com

**Southern Star Party -
Spring 2011**

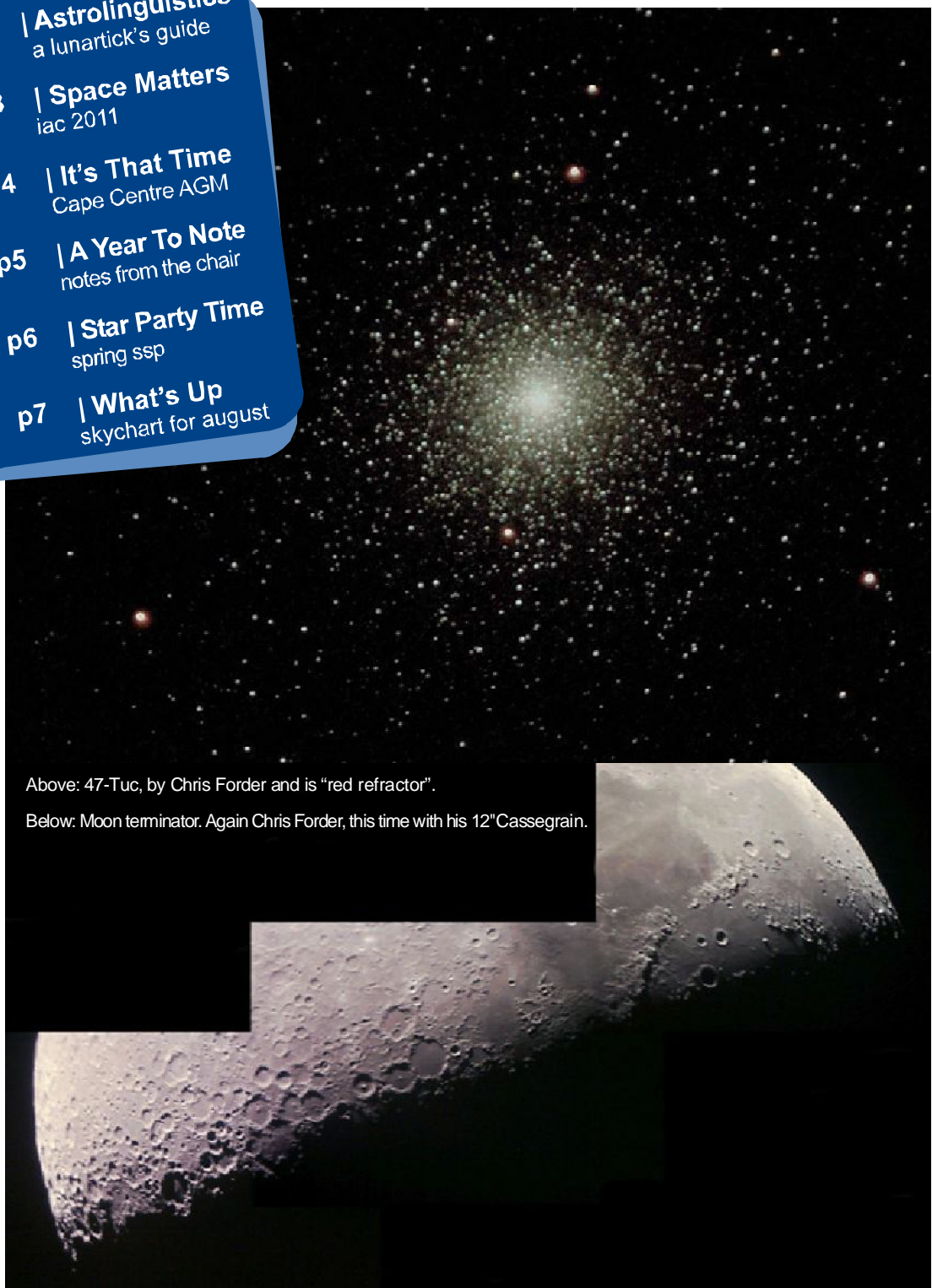
Bookings close end
August, see page 6 for
more info.

Meetings take place at 20:00
at the Auditorium of the SAAO,
in Observatory, Cape Town.
(Next to The River Club.)

Dark sky outings are at
Paardeberg, about an hour
from Cape Town.

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a lunartick's guide
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iac 2011
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Cape Centre AGM
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notes from the chair
- p6 | **Star Party Time**
spring ssp
- p7 | **What's Up**
skychart for august



Above: 47-Tuc, by Chris Forder and is "red refractor".

Below: Moon terminator. Again Chris Forder, this time with his 12" Cassegrain.

From Cederberg Observatory

The Lunar-tick's Introduction to: Astrolinguistics

Talking to Aliens: Prix Guzman

On 17 December 1900, the French Academie des Sciences offered a 100 000 franc prize to “the (first) person of whatever nation who will find the means within the next 10 years of communicating with a star and of receiving a response.”

This prize was in honour of Pierre Guzman, and was sponsored by his mother, Clara Gouget Guzman. Not much is known about Pierre Guzman, but we do know that he was interested in the work of Camille Flammarion.

Nicolas Camille Flammarion (26 February 1842 – 3 June 1925) was a French astronomer and author. In 1882, already well known for his astronomical work, he was offered a house and grounds at Juvisy-sur-Orge by an amateur astronomer, who, having reached advanced age, thought that Camille Flammarion could make better use of the property.

Flammarion subsequently maintained a private observatory on these premises.

The building was formerly a large inn where Louis XIV and Louis XV would stop on their journeys between Paris and Fontainebleau. It was also from Juvisy that Napoleon went to Fontainebleau to take farewell of his army.

In the same year he became the publisher of the magazine *L'Astronomie*.

Camille Flammarion did not believe that earth was the only planet inhabited by intelligent beings; and the discovery of canals on the surface of Mars seemed to reinforce his belief of intelligent life elsewhere in the Universe.

Although there was the possibility that the canals on Mars were purely natural features, their intrigue lay in the fact that not one trench started from ‘land’. Each one began and ended either in a ‘sea’, a ‘lake’, or another ‘canal’. He could thus not exclude the possibility that some form of intelligent life had either dug these trenches, or had at least had a hand in rectifying the natural canals.

The reason for the canals, Camille Flammarion concluded, was not so much to prevent the floods which he believed covered the plains of Mars each summer. It was rather an attempt to regulate the floodwaters in much the same way as early man regulated the annual rising of the Nile.

To support the hypothesis that intelligent life may have had a hand forming these trenches, Flammarion forwarded the following suppositions to demonstrate that Martian intelligence was as least equal to, if not superior to, that on Earth:

- Firstly, they could hardly be less intelligent than us, seeing that we spend three-quarters of our resources and run heavily into debt simply to keep up armies and Navies; and the e cannot even agree upon a universal calendar or meridian
- Secondly, Progress is an absolute, irresistible law. He felt that if the Martians have gone through a similar evolutionary process to ourselves, they should be several million years ahead of us, seeing that Mars is a much older planet
- Thirdly, Martians can overcome the impediment of matter far more easily than we can, as the density of anything on Mars is only seven-tenths of what it is here on earth.
- Fourthly, the Martian year is twice as long as that on earth, and the climatic conditions seem to be a good deal more agreeable.

Although these were mere suppositions, Flammarion cautioned people that nature was an inexhaustible mine of surprises: Oxygen, which was previously assumed necessary to support all forms of life, had subsequently been shown to be poisonous to some creatures.

Flammarion stated that would love to go to Mars, saying that it must be a very interesting place. He did admit that the floods covering the plains each summer would bother him at first, but that it was possible to get used to anything. He supposed that Martians were either amphibious or that they could fly, to overcome the problems associated with the annual flooding.

He went one step further and claimed that he believed that Martians had tried to communicate with us hundreds of thousands of years ago; and then again a few thousand years ago. When no response was received from Earth, he felt that the people of Mars concluded that either Earth was uninhabited, or that its denizens did not trouble themselves about the study of the universe or the search after eternal truths.

In claiming the Guzman Prize, communication with Mars was specifically exempted. Many people believed that Mars was inhabited at the time and communication with that planet would not be a difficult enough challenge.

In hindsight it is not surprising that no-one claimed the Prix Guzman, although, in 1937, Nikola Tesla did try to lay claim to the prize for his discovery relating to the interstellar transmission of energy.

The Guzman Prize was awarded to the crew of Apollo 11 in 1969.

Cape Centre AGM: August 2011

Invitation to the Annual General Meeting 2011 of the Cape Centre.

DATE: **10 August 2011**

TIME: **20:00**

VENUE: **Auditorium, SAAO, Observatory Road, Observatory**

AGENDA:

- 1. Welcome and attendance**
- 2. Presentation of Gill Medal to Darragh O' Donoghue**
- 3. Approval of agenda**
- 4. Minutes of the previous AGM**
- 5. Matters arising from the previous minutes**
- 6. Reports**
 - a. Chair**
 - b. Financial report of the Treasurer**
 - c. Membership report of the Secretary**
 - d. Instruments report of the Instruments Curator**
 - e. Dark Sky Report**
 - f. Librarian's report**
 - g. Report of the Cape Centre Trust**
- 7. Appointment of the Auditors for the current financial year**
- 8. Election of 2011/2012 Committee**
- 9. Address of the incoming Chair**
- 10. New constitution of the ASSA**
- 11. Travel fund**
- 12. Any other business**

Dark Sky Report 2010 - 2011

By Richard Ford: This year our dark sky outings were equally successful, although a few were cancelled on account of the weather. As dark sky facilitator of the Cape Centre this was a challenging year for me.

During this year as a dark sky facilitator I have been through so much frustration as a result that my holiday trip to Sutherland turned out to be a fiasco when my alternator packed up. This has created so much strain on me that I almost didn't make it for the Southern Star Party last March.

By the end of August I hope to be back on my feet again. On behalf of everyone who attended dark sky events at Perdeberg I would like to thank everyone. In the pipeline: Kechil, John and Gavin visited the site "Black Eagle Gorge" where they enjoyed a breathtaking evening under the night skies near Genadendal in the Overberg region.

This year for all of the visitors and observers in the Western Cape the Southern Star Party near Bonnievale was a resounding success for the Cape Centre. In August last year we attended the (much colder!) Karoo Star Party in Britstown where we enjoyed four clear nights under the southern stars, although there was a steady wind throughout the last night.

As far as dark skies are concerned we look forward to more astronomy outreaches in the near future.

Somewhere in the pipeline we are hoping to establish an observatory at "Black Eagle Gorge" at Genadendal. We as the Cape Centre look forward to visiting this site more often in the near future where we can spend the weekend under the southern stars. This site is much darker than Perdeberg.

The next star party event will take place on the 21st to the 23rd October where this great event (Southern Star Party) will be held again at the campsite, Night Sky near Bonnievale. More info: www.southernstarparty.org

Notes From The Chair

It's been an astronomical year, with plenty to be chuffed about at the Cape Centre. Rather than blether on, here's a touch of nostalgia for a great year. Massive thanks once again to the most superb committee I've ever had the pleasure of working with. I want to have you around me always in all endeavours - you are a great treat to work with and such darned efficient, creative, problem-solving and get-on-with it type of people.

Thanks also to the many other helpers who make it happen, to Karen for refreshments and all who contribute with her, to Christian Hettlage always at hand to sort out any IT or access issues, or anything else for that matter, to all the speakers, and those who freely extend their knowledge to anyone who needs it. The Cape Observer is a great achievement to be proud of, and as usual with Suki we get two, no three, soon to be four, for the price of one, with her husband Gavin playing a very active role in the running of the society. Garth is the best treasurer, John a solid back up and lynchpin, and Richard Ford ever keeping us on the starry track.

I'm bowing out as chair now - it's about time for someone else to have a go. But the reasons for surrendering are not to do with burn-out, far from it - I've just gotten too busy with other astronomy-related work.

I'm grateful to all members who help to make the Cape Centre what it is - a place where we enjoy and indulge in our hobby, and here's the evidence. On top of all these terrific events mentioned below were the external speakers and regular talks, which just get better and better.

Britstown National Star Party

A fabulous event, where we met with ASSA members from other clubs and indulged in night after night of impeccable star gazing, fun, and techno-lust as we inspected the devices of our colleagues. My first view of the triangle of zodiacal light, and the dark shadow of the Goddess of Love.



Southern Star Party

One I missed, hope to be there at the next one.

Gamkaberg

Not a Cape Centre event, but made possible by a member's sale of an 8" Dobsonian which I took to the Manager of the Cape Nature Reserve at Gamkaberg. What a wonderful place.



Black Eagle Gorge

My friends Rob and Gill Gimberg kindly allow us to visit their place on top of a hill near Genadendal, any time.

Dark Sky Nights



Star Walks

Star Walks went ballistic this year. Thanks in part to John Richard's PR. We had hundreds of people, and generally decent weather.



Big Moon on Signal Hill

John Richards and I decided Lion's Head was just too hectic. Back of Signal Hill was far better, and easier on the instruments too.

Yuri's Night Outreach



This was fun, let's do more ...

The Sessions' Lunar Eclipse session

This is real dedication, Heather and Richard Sessions don't miss a trick, chasing the June lunar eclipse half way up the N1.

Anysberg Nature Reserve

OVER THE
MOON

Chris de Coning and I formed *Over The Moon Tours* - www.overtheмоontours.co.za and we are introducing astronomy facilities to Anysberg Nature Reserve. We went there at just the right time for a stunning conjunction.

ASSA membership

I'm glad to say we're all members of the same organisation now. Live Long and Prosper, ASSA.

Clear Skies Everybody,
Kechil Kirkham
outgoing chair, Cape Centre

Spring SSP

From the website: www.southernstarparty.org

The Spring 2011 **Southern Star Party** will be held on the week-end of **October 21-23, 2011**, at Night Sky Caravan Park outside Bonnievale.

Who should attend?

Anyone with an interest in star gazing should attend this wonderful event. No prior knowledge of astronomy is necessary. All levels of expertise will be catered for (from beginner to advanced).

Speakers & Presenters

Christopher Middleton ("SKA" – key note speaker)
 Kos Coronaios (Astrophotography practicals)
 Martin Lyons ("Video Astrophotography")
 Hans van der Merwe ("Building Sumbandilasat")
 Evan Knox-Davies ("Engineering Considerations on KAT")
 Wim Filmlter (Outreach demonstrations)
 Ed Foster ("Fossils, Light and Time")
 Richard Ford (Deep sky demonstration)
 Auke Slotegraaf ("Basic Deep Sky Observing skills")

On-Site Accommodation

There are numerous caravan and tent stands (with and without electricity) available, but there are off-site accommodation in the form of guest houses and b&bs available as well.

What equipment do I need?

No special astronomical equipment is required. Of course, if you have binoculars and/or a telescope, it would be a great idea to bring them along :)

Registration

Please register early to avoid disappointment, as space is limited.
Booking closes on Wednesday, 2011 August 31.

To register for the star party:

- Step 1. Download the registration form
- Step 2. Fill it in.
- Step 3. E-mail it to info@southernstarparty.org
- Step 4. Invite everyone you know to join!

Once your completed registration form has been received, it will be processed and we will reply with confirmation and banking details.

For booking, payment, accommodation options and other details, as well as to download the registration form and programme, go to:

www.southernstarparty.org/spring-2011-ssp/



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Outgoing committee (2010/2011):

Kechil Kirkham
Chair

John Richards
Vice Chair
Media Relations and Cape Observer

Christian Hettlage
Secretary
In charge of membership database

Garth Hampshire
Treasurer

Richard Ford
Dark Sky
Librarian

Lia Labuschagne
Cape Centre Representative
on the ASSA council

Suki & Gavin Lock
Website
Cape Observer

Contributions wanted!

Send articles, reviews, letters, photos and events of interest to
Suki Lock: fusinghelium@gmail.com

Deadline for September 2011 submissions:
 Friday 26 July 2011.
We look forward to hearing from you.

All views expressed are those of the writers/contributors to Cape Observer in their independent capacity. Calendar correct at the time of publication.

Evening sky in August 2011

Courtesy Iziko (www.iziko.org.za) : During the first half of August a keen-eyed observer can look for comet P45/Honda-Mrkos-Pajdusakova near the bright star Achernar. To find Achernar, follow the line of the long axis of the Southern Cross down towards the south-eastern horizon.

The Southern Cross, or Crux, is still high in the southern sky. Crux is surrounded in part by Centaurus, a legendary half-man, half-horse from Greek mythology. Higher up is Antares, a red supergiant star in Scorpius. A pair of stars at the end of the tail indicates the sting of the scorpion. In Greek mythology the scorpion saved the animals of Earth by poisoning Orion, the Hunter (visible in summer). Sagittarius, the archer who is aiming his bow and arrow at the sting, is ready to avenge Orion. The doctor of the gods, Ophiuchus, is close by with a magic potion to heal Orion. Below him is another legendary figure, Hercules, the strong man.

The northern sky is dotted with the bright stars Arcturus in Boötes (the herdsman), Altair in the Eagle, and Vega in Lyra (the lyre).

Planet Saturn is in the constellation of Virgo. The Moon is in the evening sky from 2 August until 16 August.

The map shows the night sky visible above the Cape at 21:00 hours in the middle of the month. At different times of the evening, or different times of the month, objects above the eastern or western horizon may be slightly higher or lower.

The centre of the map is the overhead point, the edge is the horizon. To use the map, hold it up in front of you and rotate it to match the direction you are looking (e.g. hold it upside down when you are looking south). Do not lay it flat on a table or the points of the compass will be the wrong way round.

