TAAA Desert Skies Bulletin

Observing Our Desert Skies Since 1954

April 2026

www.tucsonastronomy.org

Membership Meeting

Friday, April 3, 2026 6:30PM

TAAA's next general member meeting will be held on **Friday, April 3, 2026**. The Main Presentation will start at 6:30 PM. This will be a hybrid meeting (both in person and on social media). TAAA members will receive a Zoom link should they wish to attend remotely. The public may attend in person at the **Steward Observatory Lecture Hall (Rm N210), 933 N Cherry Ave, Tucson,** or stream from the TAAA YouTube page.

Inside this issue:

Main Presentation at 6:30PM AZT

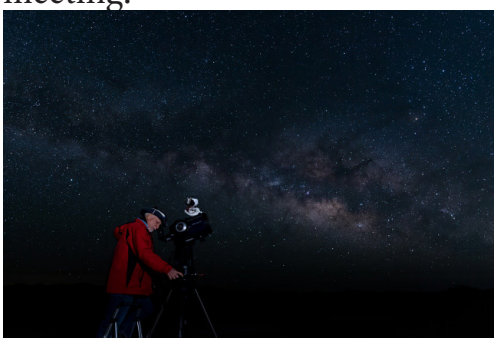
Title: **TAAA Dark Sky Sites - A Great Club Perk!**

Main Presentation: TAAA Members Jim Knoll, Bill Lofquist, and Stephen Ferris will speak about the exciting opportunities for dark site viewing available for TAAA members at TIMPA (which stands for Tucson International Modelplex Park Association) and at CAC (Chiricahua Astronomy Complex)

TIMPA is just 25 miles west of the center of Tucson. TAAA has used the site for almost 30 years. It includes restrooms, 6 user pads, and the club's original big telescope, the 14" Gila Monster observatory. TIMPA Director Stephen Ferris reports that "in the last two years, we've also added a second permanently mounted big telescope, the TIMPA Meade 16" SCT. Late last year, we also acquired a Losmandy G11 mount which we are matching with two high quality refractors and an ASIAir control unit." TIMPA now can welcome smartscopes of all types. Smartscopes are a great new tool for both beginning and experienced astronomers. TIMPA is planning multiple events for smartscopes in the next few months. This close-in site opens at sunset, and members can stay until dawn.

Jim Knoll and Bill Lofquist will give the latest information about TAAA's very own 16-acre CAC observing site. CAC is two hours SE of Tucson near the Chiricahua Mountains. From here you can easily see the Milky Way and many astronomy objects with just your eyes. Telescopes at the site include a 40-inch, 32-inch, 25-inch, 18-inch, several 14-inch scopes, a 9-inch refractor and many more. CAC has 10 sleeping rooms, 7 RV sites, a large tent camping area, and a classroom.

Learn about the history and current availability of both observing sites at the April TAAA meeting.



Jim Knoll observing at CAC, with Milky Way in background

Photo credit: Kevin Cook

Second Presentation: Our popular **Seasonal Sky Report** by **Mary Turner.**

Notes From The President

April 2026

by Ed Foley

The last weekend in February a group of TAAA leaders met at the Ward 6 office for two days, six hours each day, to discuss the future of TAAA. We had feedback from the organization in the form of surveys of the members and of the leadership, as well as our own experiences and speaking directly with members. Over the course of those two days we worked to distill what we had heard, to organize the feedback into categories, and to come away with priorities, objectives, and assignments of those who would lead the efforts. In the end, we identified five priorities and within those priorities, twelve initiatives.

Those priorities were: 1) to focus on **Member Engagement** and their sense of community; to include more social events and develop a lecture series for beginner astronomers we are calling *Astronomy Gems*; 2) Work on our capacity for **Volunteerism**, develop a leader pipeline for our key leader positions, and put in place a process to introduce members to ways they can volunteer; 3) **Facilitate the 'Wow'** members feel when exploring the sky by embracing new technology like the smart telescope and engage young enthusiasts with mentorships; 4) **Communications** - develop a comprehensive plan to communicate with members and the community and increase focus on social media; 5) **Financial Plans** that lead to *organizational sustainability* including member education of the organization's financial position and describing the *legacy giving* TAAA needs to ensure the long term quality of programs and facilities.

You will hear more about these initiatives over the coming months as those leading each of the initiatives moves forward and reports to us on their progress.

Ed

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past-president@tucsonastronomy.org

TAAA Board: taaabod@tucsonastronomy.org

The TAAA Board of Directors meets the second Wednesday of every month at 6:30pm. Members are welcome to attend Board meetings. If you would like to attend, you may email Ed Foley to receive a Zoom link for that meeting. Please send your email to Ed by the Monday prior to the meeting (by 5:00pm) and you will receive an email with the link on either Tuesday evening or Wednesday. ALL MEMBERS ARE WELCOME.

Desert Skies Bulletin
Contributions to Editor: David Rossetter by the 24th.
Astro-Images to our Image Editor: Gregg Ruppel
Proofreaders: Terri Lappin, Jeff Rothstein, Jim Knoll

The TAAA Leadership Election will be conducted online this year, **from early evening on April 24th to 7:00 pm May 1st.** Offices to be decided include ***Treasurer, Secretary, two Board of Directors Members-At-Large (MAL), and two members of the Nomination and Volunteer Resource Committee.*** The NVRC will provide a presentation of candidates at the April member meeting. If you miss the regular deadline at the end of March for nominations, you can still nominate yourself (or nominate someone else with their permission) as a "write-in" candidate up to one week before the election begins for any office. The nominee's name will be put on the ballot.

We will be using an online service, OpaVote, to conduct the election as we have done for the past five elections. Voting will be all electronic over the Internet. The voting procedure details will be provided again in the May newsletter.

The club continues its search to fill the following volunteer leader positions: *Recognition Committee Chair and Club Publicist.*

Members may review the position descriptions for both elected and appointed leader positions through their Member Planet accounts – from the main Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association webpage, select "Members Only" from the tabs located near the top just below the main search bar; then login with your email/username and password; then scroll down to the 6th item "TAAA Docs and Videos"; select/click, from the "MEMBER ONLY INDEX" page, scroll down and select/click on the 6th item HANDBOOKS and REFERENCE MATERIALS; then finally, click or select on a specific "Job Position Descriptions – TAAA Board" or immediately below, "TAAA Position Descriptions – Leader Descriptions", which are the non-elected volunteer opportunities.

Please contact the NVRC Chair for additional information or if you have questions pertaining to a particular position.

The NVRC encourages **all members to update their MemberPlanet profile** particularly with respect to volunteer positions or activities they may be interested or seek to participate in.

NVRC - Pete Hermes (Chair), John Christensen, Dave Pass, and Connor Justice

2026 March Astronomy Camp

We have started our Astronomy Camp season with a well engaged group of twelve students from Pusch Ridge Christian School. They were led by teacher Lisa Wood assisted by Kimberly Cock. Ms. Wood has experience with these observing events and it shows in her planning for the observations. Once they completed the safety briefing and were introduced to the facility, the night's plans were introduced to the students. They were informed of the overall plan for the night and then introduced to the planisphere by Ken Graun. This would be a key observing tool. The twelve were

Building the Galileo Telescope

Observing with the 32"

divided into four groups and each group assigned to start at a different telescope station - the 32-inch operated by Bob Rose, a 14-inch Dobsonian operated by Gary Wells, the 9-inch refractor operated by Conrad Stolarski, or the 40-inch Dobsonian operated by Joe Jakoby and Ken Graun. The first observation was of Jupiter, to observe and report on position of its moons. Io happened

to be transiting, and its shadow became a point of conversation and speculating about what a Jovian observer would see if the shadow passed over the observer.

The next exercise was to observe the eight brightest stars visible, find them on the planisphere, report their name, constellation, color and magnitude. This exercise was the first use of a planisphere by most of the students, and this old technology was a hit. These students were well into their astronomy segment this winter and ready to take on a challenge. The teacher gave them a list of Messier objects by number – M1, M79, M42, M76, M82, M45, M46, M95. Each telescope station had two objects they could observe. The students had to identify the type of deep space object they were seeing.

The next event was just a fun tour of Orion, highlighting the nebula, newly born stars, double star and Bok globules visible in this one area of the sky. They were also introduced to electronically aided observing of Orion with a Seestar 50 smartscope. The Horsehead was displayed beautifully in the Seestar and the benefits of its technology were clear.

Their final observation for the evening was an observation of the king of the planets and its moons. Io in just 3 hours had moved from the face of the planet to more than a planet's width away from Jupiter. The moons had clearly moved significantly creating oos and ahhs from each student group.

Observing ended the next morning after breakfast with a series of solar observations. Bernie Stinger fascinated them with in introductory talk about this star they were going to observe and the features they could see. They observed sunspots and flares with Bernie's 152mm Lunt, Gary's 8-inch Schmidt Cassegrain, and again with the Seestar, comparing the various images and feature available with each instrument.

The dark CAC skies never fail to impress any observer. It's especially gratifying to see the site allow young minds to soak up the real-life examples of the objects they have mostly seen in books.

TAAA – GILA Community College Collaboration

Gila Community College AST 231 **Advanced Astronomy Research Seminar** Section 80187
In-person **Apr 5-9, 2026**, Chiricahua Astronomy Complex (CAC), Southeast Arizona

Gila Community College AST 231 **Advanced Astronomy Research Seminar** Section 80192
Four online Zoom sessions, every Wed 7:00 PM MST Apr 15-May 6
In-person **Fri-Sun, Apr 17-19, 2026**, Tucson, Arizona

These two seminars are available to TAAA members at low or no cost. Gila Community College (GCC) features low tuition rates. Tuition for these two-credit classes for Arizona residents is $196 for attendees younger than 55 years of age, and $0 for attendees 55 and older.

Short Summary: Gila Community College is offering two late-spring Binary Discovery Research Seminars. You can enroll in either one or both seminars.

The first seminar, all in-person, will observe dozens of Gaia two-parameter (G2P) stars, most of which will turn out to be new binary star discoveries. These observations will be made on the 0.8-meter DFM Engineering research telescope at the Chiricahua Astronomy Complex (CAC) in southeast Arizona. The second, hybrid seminar will reduce and analyze the observations from the first seminar and write them up in a draft paper.

The second seminar consists of four Zoom sessions and a three-day in-person session in Tucson that will feature a tour of the Caris Mirror Lab at the University of Arizona, lectures and work on the paper at the El Conquistador, a daytime insider-tour of the telescopes at Kitt Peak National Observatory (KPNO), and evening telescope observations at KPNO.

Seminar participants will be a mix of new and seasoned researchers. The seminar will be conducted within a larger community of practice, follow the normal rules of scientific research, and stress teamwork to produce a peer-reviewed paper.

Registration for the Seminars: Gila Community College has an open registration policy, so anyone 18 or over can register for the seminars. Please email the GCC Instructor, Russell Genet, and let him know that you would like to attend the seminar. He will ask the GCC Registrar to place you on the instructor-approved list.

For more information about the seminars see the details at this link

TAAA Ladies' Night Out

by Susan O'Connor

Ladies' Night Out is a social interest group for women members of the club. The group meets once a month at a local restaurant for fellowship and conversation.

Thursday, April 16, 6:30pm

Chef Alisah's

5931 N Oracle
(W side of Oracle S of Rudasill)

Preview the menu at
https://www.alisahrestaurant.com/Menu/Menu.pdf

RSVP Susan 520-780-0136

Astronomy Classes (Free!)

by Doug Smith

Learn how to Record Observations and Sketch Objects Workshop

Enrollment Open

Place: TIMPA; *Date:* Thursday, April 16, 2026; *Time:* 6:00 PM until completed

Synopsis: This is a workshop in the Practical Hands-on Astronomy Workshop series. Students will learn how to record observations and how to sketch objects. They will be taught proper recording techniques, what information to record, what sort of forms to use, etc. In addition, students will be taught techniques for sketching objects. They will view, using a telescope, several different types of objects and perform recording activities and sketch different objects.

PLEASE NOTE: due to equipment limitations there is a limit of 20 students for this workshop.

To enroll (or questions), contact the instructor: Douglas Smith
alcor@tucsonastronomy.org 520-396-3233

Smartscope Class & Events

So, I Bought a SeeStar!: Basic Skills for the ZWO SeeStar S30 and S50

Open for Enrollment - Stephen Ferris, Instructor

Place: TIMPA *Date:* Thursday, May 7, 2026 *Time:* 7:00pm until completed

Synopsis: ZWO SeeStars are a hot item for amateur astronomers both new and experienced. They combine good optics, a lot of automation and a user-friendly interface with entry level prices. This workshop will cover the basic use of both the SeeStar S50 and the SeeStar S30. It is open to both current SeeStar owners and those who are considering buying a SeeStar. If you have a SeeStar of either design, please bring it with you, fully charged. The instructor will walk you through basic procedures for using your equipment. Don't forget to bring your phone or the tablet that you use to control it!

This training is ZWO Seestar-specific. If you are interested in a workshop for another kind of SmartScope, please contact Stephen at the email address or number below.

If you are interested in joining us, please contact the instructor, Stephen Ferris: email, Text: 520-661-5355

Smartscopes and Snacks!

Pot Luck and Meet and Greet for All Smartscope Users at TIMPA!

Place: TIMPA *Date:* Saturday, May 9, 2026 *Time:* 7:00 PM until whenever

This TIMPA event is open to all SmartScope users of all levels of experience, plus anyone who might be interested in getting a SmartScope. We'll get started with a pot luck dinner social around 7:00 pm. (The sun sets late. Expect warm temperatures.) Bring some images and techniques to share with the group! We would love to hear about any use of any SmartScopes that you might have. Then, if weather permits, we'll do some viewing after it gets dark until whenever.

I will provide water, sodas, basic paper plates and plastic utensils. You are not at all required to bring food, but if you do, we expect about 10-12 people. I will notify everyone if we get more!

Please RSVP to Stephen Ferris, TIMPA Director, at email Text: 520-661-5355 by May 1.

If SmartScopes are at all of interest to you (or even if they are not), we would love to have you come out and join us!

Proposed Binocular Special Interest Group

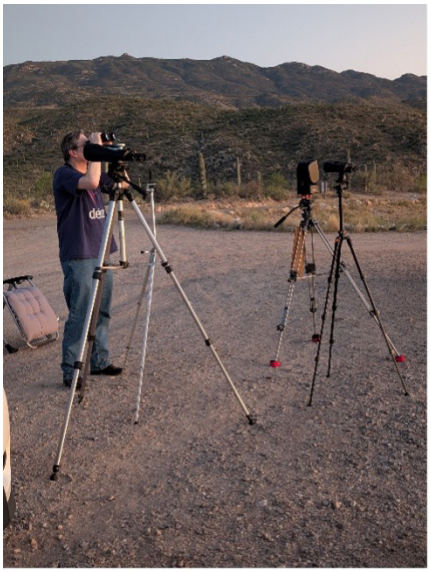
by Jim Long

I was approached by a TAAA member at the Pima Community College East star party in February 2026. She asked if we knew anything about a binocular special interest group. I knew nothing about it, but it was a great idea. I enjoy viewing through binoculars, and Jeff Johnston, who was nearby, was interested too. So, we decided to pursue it.

We have (5) objectives before this gets to the level of a SIG:

1. Gauge interest.
2. Meet with interested members on Zoom to discuss binoculars, potential subjects, etc.
3. Try to get as many people as possible working toward completing one or more of the Astronomical League Binocular Programs, which include (of 12 AL programs), from easiest to hardest:
   - Binocular Double Star Observing Program (There are 140 good targets, one needs to log 50.)
   - Binocular Messier Observing Program (50 out of 110 is what one needs.)
   - Binocular Variable Star Observing Program (The program uses the AAVSO Binocular program.)
4. Organize a Star Party near Tucson and later at TIMPA. Beyond group observing, goals include learning constellation identification and/or star hopping.
5. Involve as many club resources as possible to network across SIGs and involve knowledgeable leaders and members from around the club.

On March 20th at the Chiricahua star party, Jeff Johnston and I broke out our binoculars and shared them with the public in front of Far-away Ranch. Venus and the moon were excellent targets at sunset.



On March 21st we scouted out a location for an impromptu star party in Redington Pass. This site is beyond ideal and especially a wonderful spot to view the western sky and sunsets.

Anyone interested should reach out to either me, Jim Long (email) or Jeff Johnston (email).

Observing Sites

TIMPA

by TIMPA Planning Group

TIMPA (Tucson International Modelplex Park Association) is TAAA's dark sky site west of the Tucson Mountains.

Location: The TIMPA observing site is located a few miles beyond the Desert Museum (3250 N. Reservation Road, Tucson, AZ 85743).

TIMPA Star Party Dates this month

April 10-11
April 17-18

The TIMPA Planning Group will be offering assistance with telescope usage and observing during the monthly TIMPA Star Parties. You are invited to bring your equipment and questions to TIMPA on Star Party dates for assistance. Be sure to register using the link below.

The TIMPA site is only partially improved. There are no inside buildings provided other than restrooms. TAAA provides very limited seating (members are welcome to bring folding chairs). Please note that members visiting the TIMPA site may encounter things commonly found in partially improved desert areas such as desert creatures and/or their remnants (such as rodent holes or ant hills), uneven terrain, weeds, and desert pollens. Members using the site are encouraged to bring red lights and to move cautiously taking appropriate safety measures. The site does not have potable water, so bring your own non-alcoholic drinks.

Reservations for the TIMPA Site are made on the TAAA website at TIMPA DARK SITE RESERVATIONS. Please fill out the form completely and be sure to indicate the date you desire to visit TIMPA.

Questions? Contact the TIMPA Director: Stephen Ferris

Observing Sites' Upcoming Star Party Dates

TIMPA	New Moon	CAC
April 10-11; 17-18	April 17	April 17-18; *EUtS* April 11*
May 8-9; 15-16	May 16	May 15-16
June 5-6; 12-13	June 14	June 12-13
July 10-11; 17-18	July 14	July 10-11
August 7-8; 14-15	August 12	August 14-15
September 4-5; 11-12	September 10	September 11-12

*Evening Under the Stars (public)

by Jim Knoll

Upcoming CAC Weekend Dates (Friday - Saturday)

April 17-18 (New Moon April 17)

WOW! We had a great turnout during the March CAC weekend. Amazing weather provided an exceptional observing opportunity from our Bortle 2 complex. We had around 20 Members Friday evening and almost 30 members attending Saturday evening observing, with all 10 sleeping rooms and most of the RV spots filled. Most of the observing pads were filled as well. Some even tackled a Messier Marathon. A great time was had by all.

If you have not yet made it to CAC for a session, consider coming out with or without a telescope. The April CAC weekend (17-18) should be another awesome opportunity. We typically have our large telescopes operating Saturday evening (pending operator availability). We will also be having our semi-annual ***Evening Under the Stars*** April 11th where we open CAC to the public to introduce them to the site and observe through our many telescopes. See the TAAA Website Homepage Tile (https://tucsonastronomy.org/) or Calendar of Events for additional details.

You can be trained to operate most of the CAC telescopes. To request training, please complete the request form here. We also have ten sleeping rooms with heat and air conditioning, a Learning Center/Classroom, seven RV sites with electricity, and a large tent camping area.

If you would like to observe, you must make a reservation on the CAC Web page at CAC Reservations.

CAC Director: Jim Knoll CAC on the Web

by Bernie Stinger

April 2026 Star Party Volunteer List

Thank you for volunteering your time and talents for our extremely important outreach mission. **Below is the current status of the Public/School Star Party list for April 2026.**

Please let me know by email if you are interested in volunteering for any of the events listed below. First come – first served. I will let you know in return if you are on it or that it was already filled. Some events go fast!.

If you are new to Star Party outreach, let me know and we'll be sure to help you get started. It is important you sign up for star parties if you plan to attend, whether you bring a scope or help in other ways, so I can manage who from TAAA will be on-site and for you to be included in any reminder or weather emails.

The PUBLIC Astronomy Events are also listed on the TAAA (tucsonastronomy.org) and Night Sky Network (NSN) (nightsky.jpl.nasa.gov) calendars. Also, all PUBLIC star parties will be listed on the TAAA Facebook events page and will be updated based on weather, etc. in real-time. You can follow any of these events and get a notification when I update each event but this is only for PUBLIC star parties listed on Facebook.

The requests have been updated as of March 24th. **The first section, in RED, is a list of events where we still need volunteers.** If you can help out please contact me at: astronomy-events@tucsonastronomy.org

Thank you,
Bernie Stinger

April Events still in need of Volunteers

Wednesday – April 8 -- UofA TUCSON
University of Arizona: COCOCHAVA Event
On the UofA Mall
Cherry & University Blvd
Age/Grade Level: Mostly UofA Students
Participants: 350 – 375
1 additional scope needed (Dobs or Alt/Az preferred to show planets b4 dark)
Setup Time: 6:30 pm Start Time: 7:00 pm
End Time: 9:00 pm.

Friday – April 10 -- TUMACACORI AZ
Tumacacori National Historical Park
1891 E Frontage Rd, Tumacacori, AZ
Age/Grade Level: All Ages.
Participants: 125
3 – 4 additional Scopes Needed
Setup Time: 6:30-7:00 pm.
Start Time: 7:30 pm.
End Time: 9:30 pm.

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Friday – April 10 -- WEST TUCSON
Cooper Center for Environmental Learning
5403 W Trails End Rd
Age/Grade Level: Grade 8
Participants: 60
1 Additional Scope Needed
Setup Time: 7:00 pm. Start Time: 7:30 pm.
End Time: 9:00 pm.

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Friday – April 17 -- NW TUCSON -- CATALINA
Catalina State Park
11570 N Oracle Road
Age/Grade Level: All Ages.
Participants: 100+
3 Additional Scopes Needed
Setup Time: 6:30 – 7 pm.
Start Time: 7:30 pm. End Time: 9:30 pm.

Saturday – April 11 – EAST TUCSON – SOLAR
Radio Society of Tucson @ Calvary Tucson Church parking lot
8711 East Speedway
Age Level: Adults
Participants: 50
1 Solar Scope Needed – White light or H-alpha
Setup Time: 7:30 am. Start Time: 8:00 am.
End Time: 10:30 am.

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Tuesday – April 21 -- WEST TUCSON
Cooper Center for Environmental Learning
5403 W Trails End Rd
Age/Grade Level: Grade 8
Participants: 25
2 Scopes Needed
Setup Time: 7:00 pm. Start Time: 7:30 pm.
End Time: 9:00 pm.

April Events Filled—No Volunteers Needed

Saturday – April 4 — ORACLE AZ
Oracle State Park
3820 E Wildlife Dr, Oracle AZ
Age/Grade Level: All Ages
Participants: 125 – 150
0 Scopes needed
Setup Time: 7:00 pm. Start Time: 7:30 pm.
End Time: 9:30 pm.

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Saturday – April 11 -- MARANA AZ
Ora Mae Park – Town of Marana Parks & Recreation
13250 N Lon Adams Rd, Marana, AZ
Age Group: All Ages (Camping under the Stars)
Estimated # Participants: 150
0 Scopes needed
Setup Time: 7:00 pm Start Time: 7:30 pm
End Time: 9:30 pm

Sunday – April 5 -- EAST TUCSON – SOLAR
Saguaro National Park – EAST
Saguaro EAST is located at 3693 S Old Spanish Trail.
Age Group: All Ages
Estimated # Participants: 50
0 Solar telescopes needed
Setup Time: 12:30 pm Start Time: 1:00 pm
End Time: 3:00 pm

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Friday – April 17 -- EAST TUCSON
Desert Christian Elementary School
9415 E Wrightstown Rd
Age/Grade Level: 2nd Grade
Participants: 50 – 75
0 Scopes Needed
Setup Time: 7:00 pm. Start Time: 7:30 pm.
End Time: 9:30 pm.

Saturday – April 18 -- NORTHEAST TUCSON
Pima County Conservation Lands and Resources (CLR) @ Agua Caliente Park
Agua Caliente Park is located at 12325 E Roger Rd.
Age Group: All Ages
Estimated # Participants: 75 – 100
0 Scopes needed
Setup Time: 6:30–7:00 pm
Start Time: 7:30 pm End Time: 9:30 pm

Tuesday – April 21 -- NORTHEAST TUCSON
Mesa Academy (Phoenix) @ Agua Caliente Park
Agua Caliente Park is located at 12325 E Roger Rd.
Age Group: 5th Grade
Estimated # Participants: 90
0 Scopes needed
Setup Time: 6:30–7:00 pm
Start Time: 7:15 pm End Time: 9:00 pm

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Friday – April 24 -- PICACHO AZ
Picacho Peak State Park
15520 Picacho Peak Rd, Picacho, AZ
Age Group: All Ages
Estimated # Participants: 100+
0 Scopes needed
Setup Time: 7:00 pm Start Time: 7:30 pm
End Time: 9:30 pm

Special Interest Groups

Starry Messengers Special Interest Group

Opening Minds to the Universe

The Starry Messengers group contributes to the TAAA outreach program by providing age-appropriate hands-on activities at school star parties and community events. We differ from the TAAA Star Party outreach program in that most of our activities can be performed indoors, and most don't require telescopes or clear skies.

Our April 13th meeting will be held at 7pm by Zoom. An email will be emailed to all TAAA members near the date of the meeting. At this meeting, we'll begin working on this Fall's Tucson Astronomy Festival.

March was an amazing month for astronomy outreach! In addition to the normal STEM events that we support each month, we also gave awards at the local science fair organized by SARSEF. Three TAAA members (Terri Lappin, Todd Hansen, and Mae Smith) interviewed four high school students with astronomy-related projects and reviewed many astronomy projects at the elementary and middle school levels. The following projects were rewarded:

- Elementary Level, $100 cash award – 5th grade project "Space Rocks and Shockwaves – What makes a Bigger Boom?"
- Middle School Level, $150 cash award – 7th grade project "Mars: Guarding or Watching – A 10,000-year Orbital Study Test"
- High School Level, $200 cash award and one year TAAA membership – "A Study of Meteorites and Their Impact on the Moon"

The other big outreach event in March was our Science City exhibit at the Tucson Festival of Books. Our exhibit theme was "Life in the Universe", and we utilized many projects from the Night Sky Network toolkit of the same name. We also had telescopes for solar viewing, though this year it was a bit cloudy most of the time. Solar views were less than ideal. A total of 20 volunteers (14 at the exhibit and 6 with scopes) helped to make it a success. Combined, they put in 127.5 hours of volunteer service and collectively had 3500 interactions with the public. Here are the foks who volunteered: Ed Foley, Pete Hermes, Ardis Herrold, Jim Knoll, Susan Knoll, Terri Lappin, Kay Lehman, Karen Liptak, Jim Long, Royce Marion, Jim O'Connor, Susan O'Connor, Tom Sarko, Keith Schlottman, Keith Steinlein, Bernie Stinger, Mason Sugarman, Vance Tanner, Vanessa Thomas, and Gary Wells. We believe we inspired a few people to join the TAAA.

Upcoming non-telescope outreach events are listed below. These events already have volunteers signed up, but if you've thought about getting involved in this type of non-telescope astronomy outreach, this is your opportunity to learn from the experts! Choose an event that fits your schedule and contact Terri Lappin to get added to the volunteer list.

- 4/8/2026 (Wed) 5:30 PM - 7:30 PM St Mark's United Methodist (La Canada/Magee), Space Rocks, 150 expected. Volunteers: Terri Lappin, Tom Sarko
- 4/8/2026 (Wed) 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM Pueblo High School (I-19/Ajo Way), Life in the Universe, 150 expected. Volunteers: Susan O'Connor, Vincent Verna
- 4/10/2026 (Fri) 5:00 PM - 7:30 PM Leman Academy East (Golf Links/Houghton), Black Hole Survival Toolkit, 200 expected. Volunteers: Kay Lehman, Vincent Verna
- 4/23/2026 (Thu) 5:30 PM - 7:00 PM Donaldson Elementary (Ina/La Cholla), Space Rocks, 150 expected. Volunteers: Pete Hermes, Susan O'Connor
- 5/8/2026 (Fri) 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM NW Pima Community College (Shannon/Magee), Space Rocks, 100 expected. Volunteers: Tom Sarko, Vance Tanner

Questions about the Starry Messengers SIG and our hands-on outreach toolkits can be directed to Terri Lappin (email or 520-977-1290).

Sights from the Tucson Festival of Books - All photos by Terri Lappin

TAAA Information was highlighted at one table.

TAAA member Mason Sugarman showing NASA lithos to a visitor. We gave out hundreds of NASA lithos over the weekend.

Our youth activity had young people making their own extremophiles out of foam clay. TAAA member Susan O'Connor assisted many kids with this activity that she spearheaded. The kids were so creative!

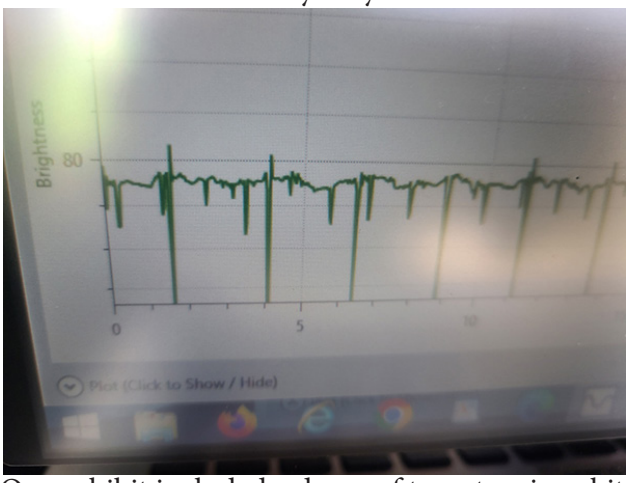
One of the extremophiles that was created.

Earth timeline. Visitors guessed when significant events in evolution took place on the Earth.

Voting results early on Saturday. By the end of the day, the Life is Common container had the most marbles, followed closely by "Life is Rare". There's a minority of people who feel we're alone in our Milky Way.

We asked visitors to vote with a marble whether they think intelligent life in the Milky Way is common, rare, or if we are alone. Keith Schlottman explains to one of the TFOB volunteers the three choices.

TAAA member Vance Tanner discussing extremophile environments with a visitor. Also pictured is TAAA member Susan O'Connor who designed this matching game for the exhibit.



Our exhibit included a demo of two stars in orbit around a star. Using a webcam and software on our laptop, we demonstrated the transit method for detecting planets. The graph showed the star's light curve showing two intensity dips when either the small planet or a large planet passed in front of the star. As can be seen in the graph, the smaller planet orbits faster than the larger planet.

Radio Astronomy SIG (RASIG)

by Sandy Nichols

The next RASIG meeting will be **Wednesday, April 15th** at 7:00 pm AZT via ZOOM.

Radio astronomy does not require cloudless skies. Discover another way to observe when the weather makes visual astronomy impossible.

Topics: **Review of cantenna design and dimensions** – Vince Baker

Email Sandy Nichols for the ZOOM if you do not already have it. RASIG on the Web

Astronomy Fundamentals SIG

by Connor Justice

Come join us for a presentation on the fundamentals of amateur astronomy. Learn your way around the night sky to add to your observing enjoyment. Meetings are on the second Thursday of each month.

The next AFSIG meeting is **Thursday, April 9, 6:30pm to 8:30pm.**
Topics to be determined. Contact Connor Justice for Zoom link and more information.

Access videos of previous meetings in the TAAA YouTube Channel AFSIG on the Web

Astro-Imaging SIG

by Gregg Ruppel

The next AISIG meeting will be **Monday, April 20, at 7:00 pm** via ZOOM.

Topics: **Beginners' Corner** - Ask A Question
Why I Like Newtonians - Randy Smith
If you are considering a Newtonian reflector for astro-imaging, this discussion will be of interest.
Image Sharing, Q/A

In addition, we are pleased to announce a special AISIG Meeting for ALL TAAA members: *Tips and Tricks for Using a Smart Scope*, Monday, March 30, 2026, 7 pm via Zoom.

Thinking about a smart scope? Looking for ways to get the most out of one that you have? Then join us for a panel discussion about the ins and outs of three leading smart scope brands, Dwarf, SeeStar and Unistellar, led by three experienced smart scope imagers: Teresa Bippert-Plymate, Rik Hill, and Matt Penn. We will reserve plenty of time for questions, so come prepared with yours! Please note that this session is not intended for basic training on smart scopes. For that, see the separate program on page 7 of this bulletin.

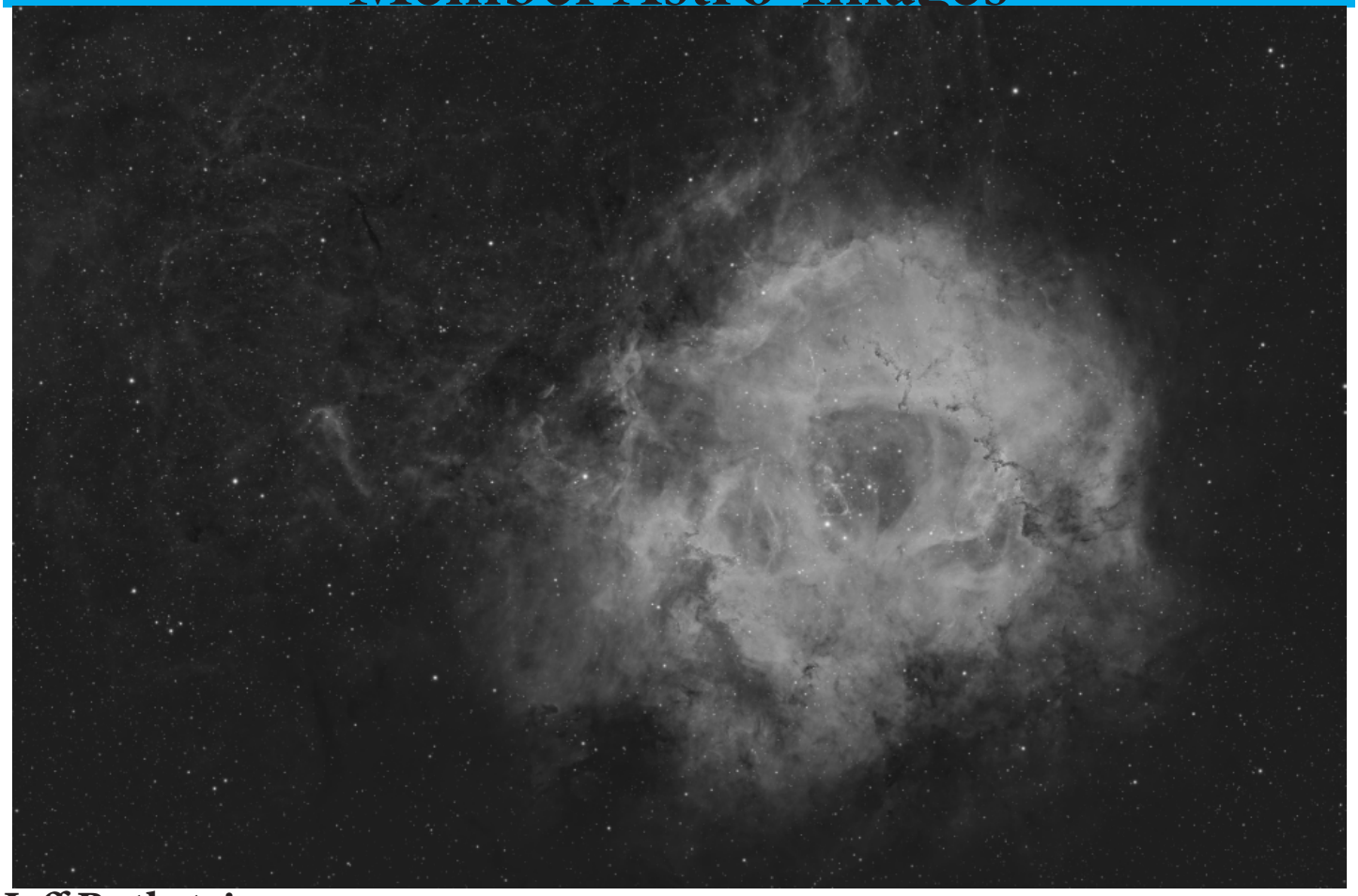
We will post Zoom details on the Forum before the meeting.

Email Gregg Ruppel for the ZOOM link or any other information. Gregg and the AISIG folks are very active on the TAAA groups.io forum. Check out all the helpful advice and amazing images there. For more information or instructions on how to join the forum, click here.

View previous AISIG meetings on the TAAA YouTube Channel.

We offer a mentoring program for beginning astro-imagers. For details, see the AISIG Web Pages.

Member Astro-Images



Jeff Rothstein - **Rosette Nebula;** Ha, 31 360s subs, taken with a 105mm f/6 refractor and full frame camera.

Matt Penn - **M 81;** Dwarf mini (30mm f/5) smart telescope, 180 exposures each of 90 sec tracking M81.

Matt Penn

Dwarf mini tracking the eclipse.

Steve Thornton

Nikon D7500 with
200mm-500mm Niikkor
zoom at 500mm,
20 seconds at f/8 at ISO400,
processed through Photoshop.

Lunar Eclipse
March 3, 2026

Bernie Stinger

Unistellar Odyssey Pro.

IC 443 Astrobin

David Stearn

IC 405 and 410 Astrobin

Leo Triplet

Astro-Tech 60ed f/6 doublet, 2.2 hour exposure, Nikon D810a DSLR set to iso 1000, 3-minute subs.

Tom Eby

NGC 4561 (Arp 189)

GSO RC 8” @f/8, ZWO 2600MM pro, CEM60ec mount, no filters, 5.8 hour exposure.

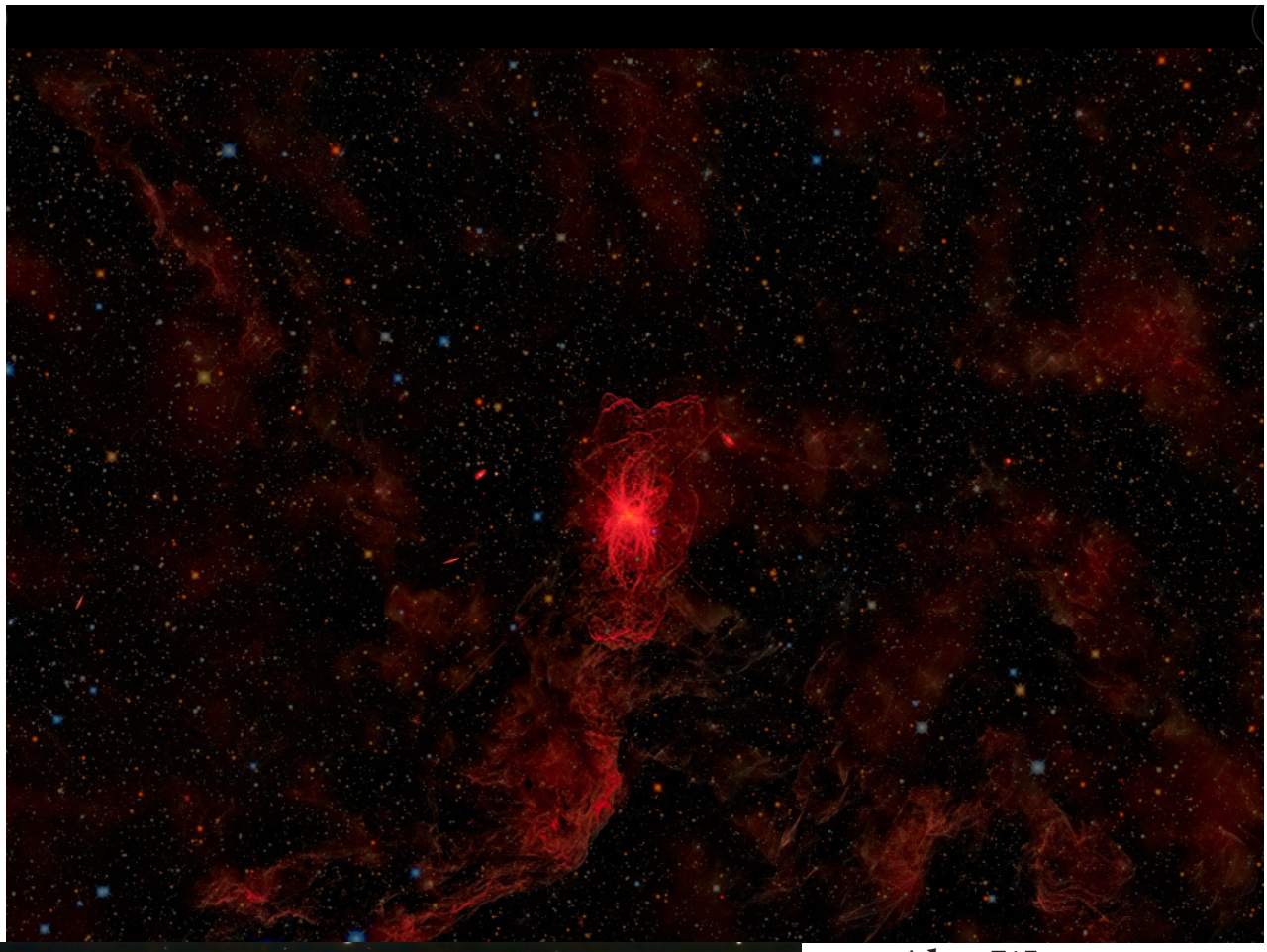
NGC 1499

Askar FMA180 and the ASI2600MC.
Astrobin

Allen Force

M106

Astrobin



Alex Woronow

IC 2220
Astrobin

David Gale

M51
C8, Starizona reducer, the 174mm mini and the askar OAG.

NGC 2903

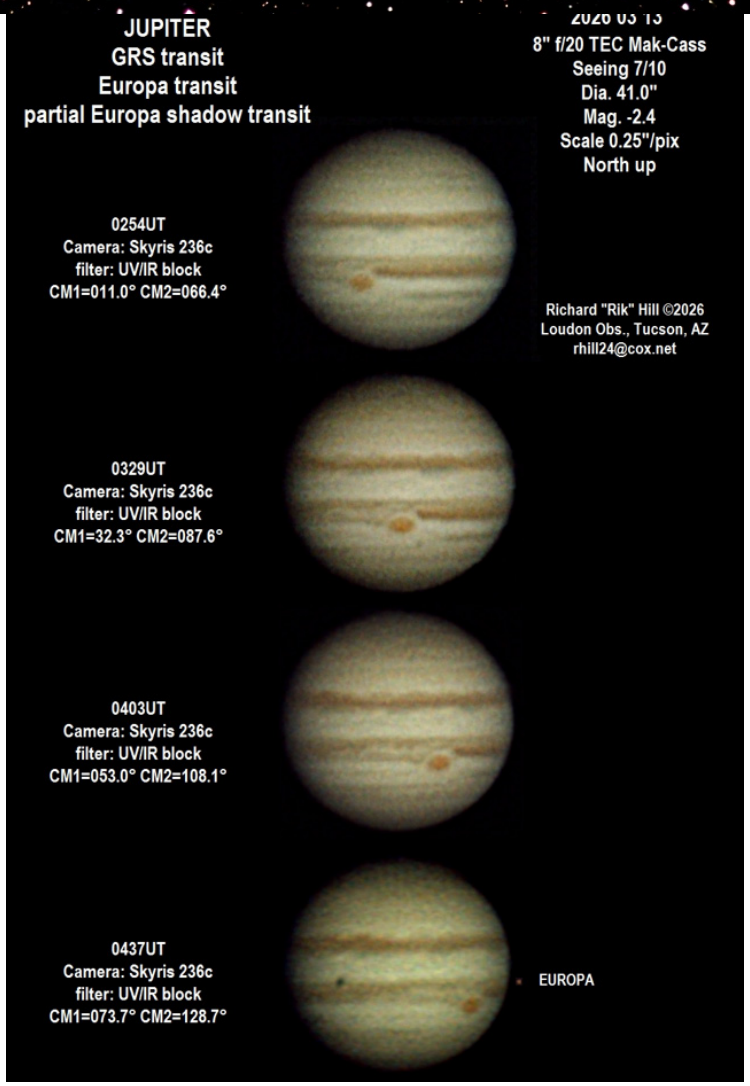
Skywatcher 250P 585MC L-Pro filter 503x90 seconds.

Randy Smith

NGC 2244

Sharpstar 13028HNT, 2600 MM, Antlia 3nm SHO filters, 105x120 seconds.

M1



Rik Hill

Jupiter and Europa

by Doug Smith

Observing Programs - What's Up in April and May 2026

Many of the Astronomical League observing programs can be done from our backyards. The following objects are visible in April and May for the common observing programs.

Constellation Hunter Program – The following constellations are well placed for observing in April and May: Cancer, Canes Venatici, Coma Berenices, Leo, Leo Minor, Sextans, Ursa Major

Messier Observing Program - The following Messier Objects are well placed for observation during April and May (listed in ascending RA): M81, M82, M95, M96, M105, M108, M97, M65, M66, M109

Lunar and Binocular Observing Program
Here is a list of dates for lunar phases in April and May:

New Moon: April 17, May 16
40 Hours waxing: April 19, May 18
72 hours waxing: April 20, May 19
4 days old: April 21, May 20
7 days old: April 24, May 23
10 days old: April 26, May 26
Full (14 days old): April 2, May 1, May 31
Gibbous: April 9, May 9
72 hours waning: April 14, May 13
40 hours waning: April 15, May 14

Solar System Observing Program
The following is a list of planets that can be observed during April and May:

Mercury is an early morning object during all of April and the first two weeks of May. On April 4 Mercury is 28 degrees West of the Sun. During the third week of April Mercury, Mars, Saturn and Neptune are all in close proximity to each other.
Venus is an early evening object during April and May. It sets a little later and gets a little brighter each day. On April 1 it sets around 1.5 hours after the Sun. On May 31 it sets around 2.5 hours after the Sun.
Mars is an early morning object during April and May. During April it's lost in the morning twilight. On April 1 it rises only 30 minutes before sunrise. By May 1 it rises about 1 hour before sunrise and on May 31 it is rising 90 minutes before sunrise.
Jupiter is still well placed for early evening observation during this period. On April 1 Jupiter is just transiting when the Sun sets and it sets around 1:30 AM. On May 31 it sets around 10:30 PM.
Saturn is now visible in the early morning sky, rising earlier each day. On April 1 it rises around about the same time as sunrise. By the end of May it is rising around 2 AM.
Uranus is setting earlier each day. On April 1 it sets around 10 PM. It goes behind the Sun mid-May, becoming an early morning object. On May 31 it rises about 30 minutes before sunrise.
Neptune is an early morning object in April and May. On April 1 it rises about 15 minutes before sunrise. By the end of May it rises around 1:30 AM.

During the third week of April Mercury, Mars, Saturn and Neptune are all in close proximity to each other.

Urban Observing Program
The following **deep sky objects** are well placed for observing during April and May:
M81, M82, NGC 3242
The following **Double Stars** are well placed for observation during March and April:
Gamma Leonis

TAAA Astronomy Equipment For Sale

TAAA has an assortment of astronomy-related equipment for sale. This equipment is available for members only at this time. We have suggested prices for all equipment and telescopes but prices are negotiable!

All the listed telescopes come with eyepieces, finders and other accessories.


Dobsonians – We have 2 large dobs
Homemade 13" and 12" Skywatcher

Celestron 6 w/ NexStar
This is a great starter scope!

Meade 5" ETX Maksutov with AutoStar
I have 2 of these

Celestron 11 with NexStar

Meade 10" LX200 w/ AutoStar

Celestron 8s with NexStar
We have two C8's.

TAAA Astronomy Equipment For Sale (continued)

Celestron 5”
Omni XLT

We have numerous **tripods**. Celestron, Meade and others. Heavy duty, light duty, etc. If interested please inquire. Flexible on price

Small camera tripods - $10

Several full aperture **white light solar filters**. Most are ‘film type’. We have one ‘glass type’. Various sizes. All checked out okay. If interested please inquire for available sizes and prices.

EYEPIECE CLEARANCE SALE!!!
50+ eyepieces and filters for sale at rock bottom prices! Mostly 1.25”. Inquire for availability and pricing

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We also have an assortment of other items available at this time including: Finders (various sizes), Finder rings, 7x50 Binoculars, focusers, some eyepieces, some eyepiece filters, telescope rings of various sizes, mirror blanks of many sizes, a 6 inch Newtonian mirror set mounted in mirror cells, several large mirrors and much more.

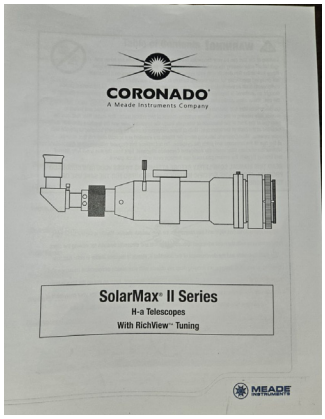
To make inquiries about what is available or to express a desire to purchase one of the items please contact: Douglas Smith at alcor@tucsonastronomy.org or call 520-396-3233

Member Equipment for Sale

- All advertisements are for member-owned equipment. Members may not place ads for non-members.
- Advertisements are for one month. If you would like to run the ad for a longer period you must resubmit the ad each month.
- If you would like to show the item as sold in a following issue, you must send the sold notice to the editor.
- Each member may submit up to two ads per month.
- There are no formal ad restrictions. Please keep them relatively brief. A small photo or two may be submitted. The editor has total discretion as to the formatting of the ads.

Buyers: The TAAA does not assume responsibility for the products sold or offered. It is the responsibility of individuals who posted the ad to reply to your message and confirm the legitimacy. There are risks which you assume when dealing with people who might be acting under false pretenses; all these risks are borne by you. The TAAA does not control the products offered by and to members. But please, let's all be honest with each other!

Solar Telescope For Sale



SolarMax II 90
Double Stack

Comes with:

- Precision RichView Tuning System
- <.5A Bandwidth
- 15mm Blocking Filter
- 800mm Focal Length, 90mm f/8.8 Refractor
- Includes Cemax Eyepieces, Travel Case, Sol Ranger Finder
- Clamshell mounting ring
- Original manual

Price: $3,000 (or best reasonable offer)
Local pickup ONLY

Contact: Joe Giannino 520-908-3393 or email

2005-ish Discovery 12.5" Truss Tube Dobsonian

Full motorized GOTO and tracking
ServoCAT Gen 2
Argo Navis
Stalk to hold Argo Navis and hand paddle
Mirror re-coated in 2016 by Ostahowski
Light Shroud

Lots of minor fixes and mods
Mechanically pretty good (but 20 years old)
Optically great!
Cosmetically a little rough

$950 Pick up in Tanque Verde
David Rossetter: Email 845-430-5191

Skyward

By Dr. David H. Levy

April 2026

Of Mario Motta, Jean Mueller, the late Russell Porter, a Lunar Eclipse, and me.

On the morning of 3 March 2026, a total eclipse of the Moon darkened the night sky over all of the world that was in night. The eclipse was fabulous. During its total phase, the Moon was not really its usual coppery red color but more of a greyish brown. On the Danjon luminosity scale, I gave it about a 1.5 on the scale of 0 to 5. I was lucky to view this eclipse during the inaugural session at the San Diego Astronomical Association's newest acquisition. I do not recall an eclipse that was more fun than this one. And I have viewed 104 eclipses ranging from penumbral lunar to total solar.

On 1 March of this year, Dr. Mario Motta, a nationally known cardiologist and an expert on the history of Stellafane and light pollution, and I, traveled to San Diego, in order to view the total lunar eclipse and to meet Jean Mueller. We wanted to see it from the American west coast, where we could view the entire predawn affair with the Moon well above the horizon. We were viewing it with Jean, world renowned as an observer at Palomar Mountain Observatory. She has discovered 15 comets, 13 asteroids, and 107 supernovae in far-off galaxies. The combined accomplishments of these two viewers of the night sky are truly spectacular. But what was even better were her stories about life at Palomar, her work there at the Samuel Oschin 48-inch on the Second Palomar Observatory Sky Survey, and later at the 200-inch. She spoke to a group that was unequivocally spellbound. Jean was delightful. Mario built and uses a wonderful 32-inch f/6 telescope which peeks far into the Universe from the sky above the eastern United States.

Mario is an accomplished deep-sky observer and has spent a lifetime learning about and living the history of his beloved Stellafane. In fact, during the drive westward we were also driving back in time and there was Russell Porter, sitting in the back seat, sharing tales and laughing with us.

As we waited for the first penumbral tinge of Earth shadow to touch the Moon, Mario admitted that he "hates" the Moon because it prevents him from more enjoyment of his cherished remote galaxies, clusters, and other deep sky objects. He and I enjoyed a verbal joust about the Moon right during the eclipse! I love the Moon, but he appeared to be winning until I offered a comeback. It was from Leslie Peltier's Starlight Nights, where Leslie introduced me to a nursery rhyme. We ended up turning this into a standing joke to which we laughed all the way back to my Arizona home.

"Lady Moon, Lady Moon, where are you roving?"
"Over the sea, over the sea."
"Lady Moon, Lady Moon, whom are you loving?"
"All that love me, all that love me."

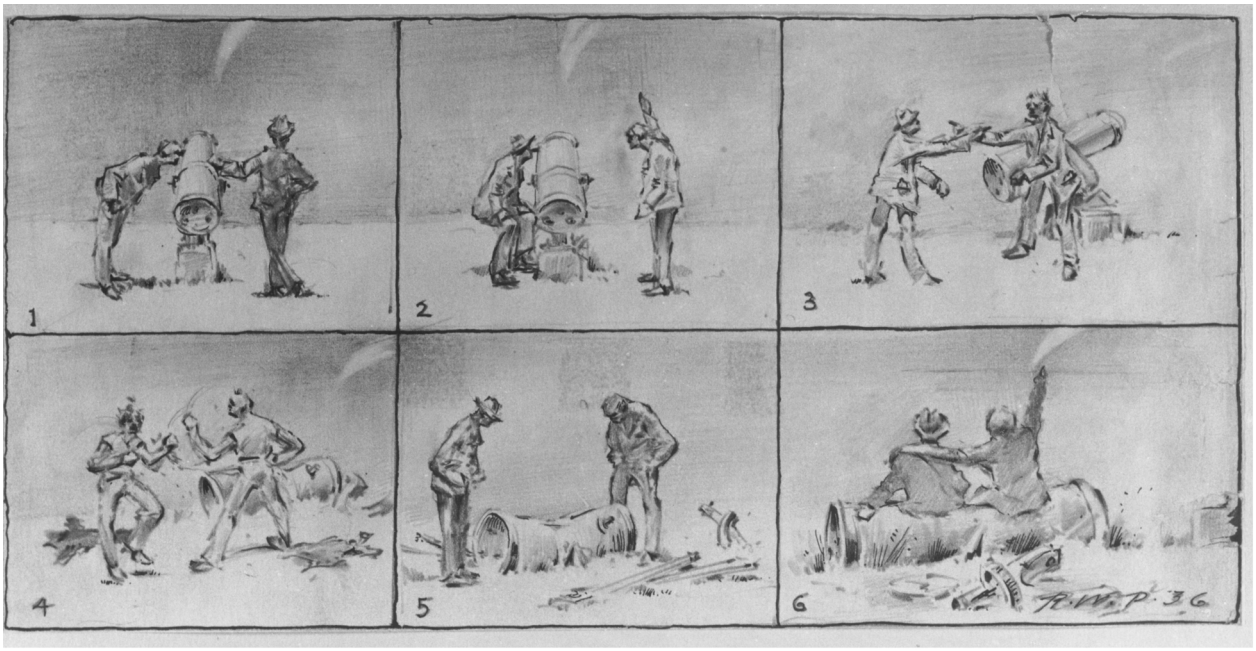
As joyous as the total eclipse was, our visit to Palomar the afternoon before the eclipse was truly magical. Again, Russell Porter was right with us. There, Jean recalled her many years there, first as an observer for the Second Palomar Observatory Sky Survey, then operating the mighty 200-inch telescope.

While there I finally got to complete a dream. In my 77 years I have delivered more than 3150 lectures. I like to imagine that the very first lecture was at the opening of the great telescope. Mueller, as versed in the history of Palomar as Motta is with Stellafane, told us that the telescope was dedicated on 3 June 1948. Was my first lecture (Lecture zero) delivered that day? I was twelve days old. On this day, 77 years later, I finally turned that into a reality. I gave a brief lecture near the wonderful 200-inch mirror, and another lecture at the visitor center near the 18-inch Schmidt camera which I used with Gene and Carolyn Shoemaker for seven wondrous years.

Enter Russell Porter, who seemed to accompany us throughout this visit. We got to have a really special visit with the person who designed the telescope and whose sketches are among the finest in the world. Even though Russell Porter died before Mario was born, and when I was but a year old, it felt as though he had been recalled to life for us. Had he been alive I would have asked him, "In Berton Willard's biography of your life, he explained how you accepted Hale's offer of a position designing the 200-inch telescope. How many seconds did it take you to accept this life-changing proposition?"

"Less than 3.14159 seconds," Porter might have replied with his trademark wide grin.

Porter's original sketched design needed revision. I envisage the meeting where that design was turned down, and what the other committee members said about it. "We reject this design, but we love your sketches; they are splendid, magnificent!" Porter's later design was accepted. In a stroke of genius, he took his now-famous design of a small garden telescope with its split-ring mounting, and upgraded it to the horseshoe mount we know and love.

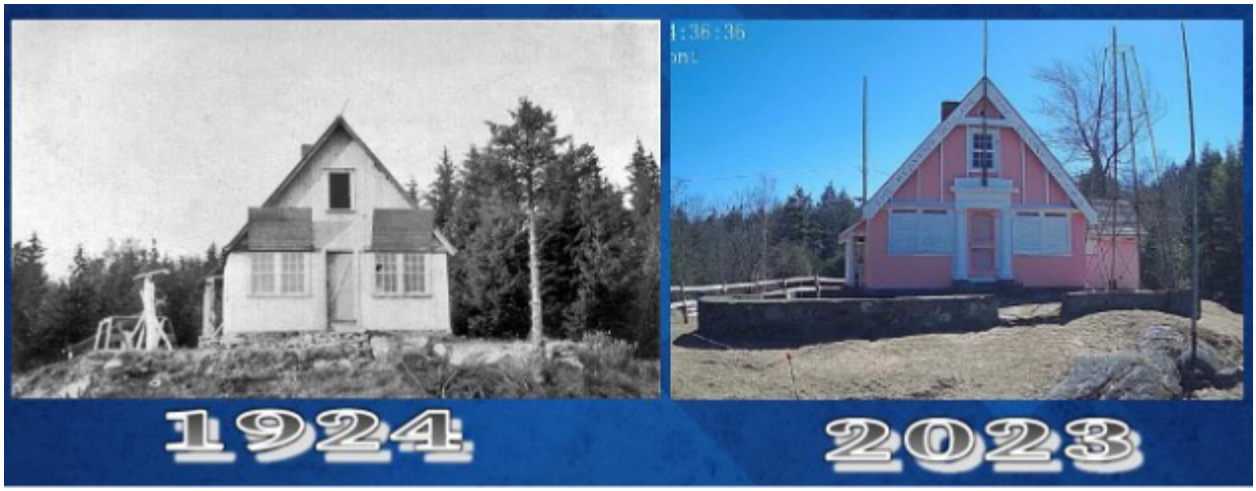


A Porter series of sketches about a fight over a comet. Notice the shape of the telescope in the fifth sketch. Pictures used with the kind permission of Dr. Mario Motta.

What might have surprised the Palomar engineers in Porter's time was the elegance of the 200-inch design. It was and still is simplicity itself. The split-ring of its design descends directly from the split-ring he used in his wonderful garden telescope; I love to think of the mighty 200-inch as being the largest Porter garden telescope ever built. Finally, in the hallway surrounding the telescope are mounted many of Porter's sketches, among the finest artistry I have ever seen. But according to Jean, Russell Porter did much more than design the Hale telescope. He also chose the locations of the buildings that dot the Palomar mountaintop, from observatories to the offices and the houses. This mountain belongs to Russell Porter.

The only negative aspect of Porter's move to Palomar was the possible loss of his close friends at Stellafane, the amateur telescope makers event he founded in 1925. But according to Mario, Porter managed to return to his cherished Stellafane every summer. In my lifetime, I have been privileged to visit Stellafane many times, and once a month for seven years, I considered Palomar my second home. On this visit, the place displayed its rich times past like a brilliant full Moon, after the eclipse, lighting up the sky. The precious words he inscribed on the front gables of Stellafane's pink clubhouse inspire us to this day and this night: From the first line of Psalm 19:

"The heavens declare the glory of God."



The Russell Porter-designed pink clubhouse with its inscription.

Dr. David H. Levy is a long-time member and former President of the TAAA. He is a well-known astronomy writer and discoverer of comets. He writes this monthly "Skyward" column for the Vail Voice and generously allows us to publish it here.