REFLECTIONS / REFRACTIONS

University Lowbrow Astronomers

June 2012

Volume 36 Issue 6

May 20, 2012 Solar Eclipse.

REMEMBER!!
Venus Transit
Tuesday, June 5
See back page for observing sites

From Cedar City, UT.

By Paul J. Etzler

Unlike you folks in Ann Arbor, I was located I was almost in the best spot to view the 'Ring of Fire' annular eclipse. I promised that I would take some photos to share the experience: here are several.

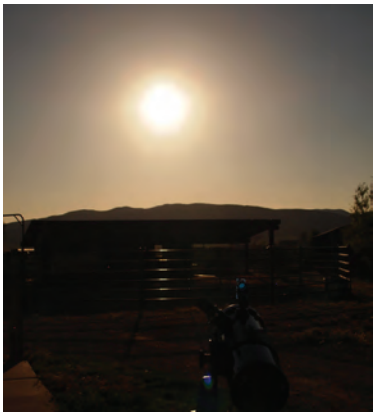
I observed the eclipse with my new Orion® Starblast with an Orion®, full-aperture, glass solar filter. The weather was great and observing the event was a great experience. The photos through the Starblast were taken with a autofocus camera held up to the 20mm expanse (22.5X) eyepiece. The autofocus was quite an adventure. It's not the best way, but it is the Lowbrow way.

Photos: Paul J. Etzler

Beginning of eclipse

Half-way covered

Ring of Fire: Full Annular Eclipse



Weird light at full annular eclipse

End of eclipse

Solar images from leaf pinholes

From the last weekend of April through the last weekend of May, Lowbrows locally, across the state, and as you've seen above, across the country, have been unusually active. This edition of the newsletter is dedicated to the articles the memebers have written about some of those activities.--Jim Forrester

Doug's Deep Sky Challenge: *An Egg Hunt in Cygnus*

by Doug Scobel

This article can be found at http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/reflections/2012/dscobel.38.html

CLEAR IV (Spring 2012)

Club Lowbrow's Excellent Atlanta Retreat!

By Mark S Deprest

With contributions from Doug Scobel, Yasu & Yumi Inugi, Nathan Murphy and Jim Forrester

Let me start by saying that those of you who did not make this trip, missed some of the best observing, skies and weather Northern Lower Michigan has to offer! Friday morning, May 18th, started out promising to be warm and clearing. As the day ended and we all arrived at Diane's farm the skies were clear and the evening was warm.

Doug Scobel had invited a friend who was up from Florida. Jim Leiter is working at Doug's place of employment and is a member of a local club in Florida. I brought up 'Gilda' my 8" dob for him to use and because Nathan Murphy was coming in to pick up 'Papa Smurf' (Doug's old 13" dob), I also had the tube assembly for that in my van. So, when I pulled up, unloaded and by the time we assemble the 3 scopes, Blondie, my 18"; Gilda, my 8"; and Papa Smurf, Nathan's 13"; to join Doug's 16" and Jim Forrester's 12.5" Yasu and Yumi showed up and set-up 'Big Red'. We were ready for a night of great observing!

Although, it seemed to take forever to get dark, by 23:00 Yasu was getting readings on his dark sky meter of 21.7 to 21.8 this equates to limiting magnitudes of 6.7 to 7.0. This is dark! These are readings that one gets out west, at altitudes 3 & 4 times what we were in Atlanta, MI.

We all spent the first part of the evening examining Mars, Venus and Saturn; none of which disappointed us. Then for me it was on to Arp galaxies and the occasional foray to some bright Messier eye candy. My scope was aligned and tracking very well and finding those faint fuzzies became much easier. But the highlight of the night was M51, which in my 18" showed detail that I thought could only be seen in long exposure images. Absolutely Stunning!

We observed until 04:00 Saturday morning and when we are crawled out of our sleeping bags some time before noon, we all looked forward to Saturday night which was promising to be just as good. At about 02:00 Saturday morning the wind began to pick up and it lasted throughout the day, but by sunset that wind had subsided and we looked forward to another great night.

Yumi & Yasu brought & cooked Saturday night's dinner of homemade steak Jambalaya … yummy! Then they broke out their Ukulele's and harmonica and serenaded us quite nicely … you two ROCK!!!

Our hostess, Diane had invited a couple of her friends for a look or two through our telescopes and they all seemed to have enjoyed themselves. Saturday night was not quite as dark as Friday but Yasu still got readings of 21.55 to 21.68 on his sky meter … still darker than almost anywhere in Lower Michigan.

As the night darkened I picked off Comet 2009 P1 Garradd and then onto my Arp Galaxies. M51 was still the most breathtaking sight and I pumped the power up over 250x to reveal structural details that I've never seen before. Besides a dozen Arp galaxies, I spent a great deal of time successfully looking for IC 1296 the small face-on barred spiral galaxy about 4 arc minutes northwest of M57, the Ring Nebula. At 14.3 magnitude this one was a real challenge, but dark skies can make all the difference. After finding the proper field and working a little averted vision I can log that one as seen!

Along about 02:30 the wind began to pick up again, but this didn't stop us and then Yasu staring asking questions about the infamous 'EGG Nebula' and the hunt was on … Doug Scobel finally star hopped his way to the correct star field and managed to pick it up first then we looked around for Yasu, who started this 45 minute search and he had crawled of to his sleeping bag! Thanks Yasu! By 04:00 with the first rays of morning beginning to brighten the eastern horizon, we all went off to our sleeping bags with the only regret that it was our last night up at CLEAR IV.

If Diane sells the farm we will have to find a different sight for CLEAR V in the fall, but we already have a possible sight picked out about 15 miles north east at Tomahawk Lake State Forest Campgrounds. Keep watching for details about this event in future emails
Special thanks to Diane Ives who graciously opened up her house for us to use and sleep in and to Yumi and Yasu for dinner and entertainment. Great Time was had by all!

And now a few comment from Doug Scobel:

Superlatives have become the norm up at our Atlanta retreat. The first has to be Diane Ives's hospitality – letting us use her house as a place to eat, sleep, and refresh (yes, those cold water showers are nothing if not refreshing!). Thanks again, Diane! Another is the superb skies. We were easily hitting mag 6.5 naked eye and better. Darks skies like that can make you think you've suddenly doubled the aperture of your scope. And of course I have to mention the camaraderie. I cannot imagine a more enjoyable group of folks with whom to observe. Lowbrows rock!
Speaking of folks, I brought with me a friend from work, Jim Leiter. He's doing some contract work for my employer, but he lives in Florida. He's an amateur astronomer, and was planning on hanging out in his hotel room that weekend. So it didn't take much arm twisting to talk him into coming up with us. Mark graciously brought an extra scope "Gilda", offered warm clothing, and I provided a sleeping bag and air mattress. Jim had an awesome time he told me later. He says that there is virtually no place in Florida with skies as dark as he saw in Atlanta. And he really enjoyed the group as well – he even joined the Lowbrows as an out-of-state member!
My last impression is somewhat bittersweet for me. My venerable workhorse from the past 28 years has moved on to a new owner. Papa Smurf is now in the capable hands of Nathan Murphy, who drove from Madison, Wisconsin to observe with us and to take delivery. While I'm somewhat saddened to see him go, I'm really happy that the old guy (Papa Smurf, not Nathan) is still with a Lowbrow. It just wouldn't seem right to have him go to a complete stranger! I'm sure that Nathan will get some good years of good views out of him. Thank you, Jim and Mark, for providing transport of the big scope for me.

Pictures:
https://picasaweb.google.com/djscobel/CLEARIV?authuser=0&authkey=Gv1sRgCMPrt-m7lrGPGQ&feat=directlink

INTRODUCING:

The Ann Arbor District Library Telescope Collection

By Amy Cantu

Why would a Library want to circulate a telescope?

It's a reasonable question. A telescope isn't something you'd ordinarily think you can check out at your local library; it's bulkier, more fragile, and likely more expensive than most other items in the collection. But telescopes and other such non-traditional items just may be the logical next step for public libraries.

With the decline in traditional reference services and the burgeoning advent of digital publishing, libraries have been expected to justify their reason d'être; the argument being that seemingly everything is available online, everyone has access, and Google has in most crucial respects replaced the reference librarian. But even if reference services are undergoing a technological transition - as well as books, music, and video - the need for good organization, stewardship, and free access to content has not changed. And far from diminishing its traditional mission, digital content has actually helped to clarify it: Your public library is still the go-to place for free access to the internet, computer training, and things you won't find elsewhere.

As we move beyond physical formats to downloads, however, things get a little more complicated in the circulation department. With the ubiquity of digital content and the decreasing need for the publisher as middleman, a threatened publishing industry is pushing on all the available surfaces and perceives libraries to be a hole in their business model. One unfortunate consequence of this perception is DRM (digital rights management), a clumsy technology that inhibits the use of digital content after sale with a cumbersome model of access and use limits antithetical to the longstanding lending policies of many libraries. As a result, patrons who are used to free, unlimited access to library materials, yet savvy enough to take advantage of an endless supply of free downloads online, must now stand in line for an e-book at their library - a seemingly nonsensical and unwelcome scenario poised to repeat as libraries move toward audio and video downloads.

The Ann Arbor District Library has been proactive on this particular front [PW article: http://bit.ly/HhqGTc], engaging in cutting-edge negotiations with progressive rights holders that bypass this publisher-as-middleman model. One such example is its recent agreement with Manatune [http://www.aadl.org/magnatune]. But whether circulating digital content becomes more or less complex in the future, we might as well continue to do what libraries have always done best: circulate physical items. And not just books, DVDs, and CDs. At AADL we're circulating a popular collection of unusual items [http://www.aadl.org/catalog/browse/unusual]. Starting with art prints many years back, we've moved on to include museum passes, bi-focal kits, energy meters, Science to Go kits…and now telescopes.

And one thing is certain: It'll be a long time before you can download a telescope.

The New Hampshire Astronomical Society Model

Telescopes were one of many items on our list of potential non-traditional items the Library was considering, but it didn't stand out as feasible until the University Lowbrow Astronomers came on as an enthusiastic partner. We'd also made some calls to some of the libraries around the country that are currently circulating telescopes, speaking with both administrators and on-desk staff to get a feel for how difficult a prospect it might be to maintain and circulate such a specific and relatively delicate instrument. Without exception all the libraries we spoke to had only positive comments about their telescope collections - from the (surprisingly) low rate of lost and missing parts to the glowing response from their patrons.

Along the way, we came upon the New Hampshire Astronomical Society's (NHAS) Telescope lending program [http://nhastro.com/ltp.php] which the Society had initiated as an outreach effort with small public libraries throughout New Hampshire. Each library circulates one or two Orion StarBlast 4.5 tabletop scopes that have been modified by the program's coordinator, Marc Stowbridge, to make them just a little more user-friendly and the parts a little less easy to lose. We also learned theirs was a full-blown model available to public libraries and included an entire set of documents available online, from a detailed guide to modifications and a user's manual to stickers, charts, and a list of recommended accessories. The program had been in operation in New Hampshire for a couple years, so it was tested, and it was easily transferrable with only slight alterations. So the New Hampshire model became our proposal.

There was genuine enthusiasm among the Lowbrows to sponsor the program, but we needed to find someone in the club who could take on the task of modifying the scopes. Belinda recommended Clay Kessler and he agreed. Clay has been wonderful to work with and we simply couldn't have done it without him. We bought the StarBlasts from Orion in February and Clay worked on modifying them over the course of the next couple months between his day job and his personal business. Meanwhile, Jody Harnish, the other AADL librarian working on this project, purchased the accessories and tried out several possible cases for the scope, ultimately settling on a euphonium case.

From February through early April, we also worked with several other Lowbrows, notably Jim Forrester, Charlie Nielsen, Douglas Scobel and Mark Deprest to modify New Hampshire's user's manual for AADL's purposes and to edit the Library's telescope page [http://www.aadl.org/telescopes] and subsidiary pages (tips for improving your viewing experience, [http://www.aadl.org/node/204658] and a list of objects you could see with the Starblast [http://www.aadl.org/node/204755] under dark skies). Furthermore, Charlie Nielsen, Dave Snyder, Jack Brisbin and Nancy Beltaire from the Ann Arbor Public Schools also created a Young Astronomer's page during this period [http://www.youngastronomer.org/]. Finally, the Library contracted with local comic artists Jerzy and Anne Drozd to create a quick-start comic guide for the scopes that would appeal to all ages. [http://comicsaregreat.com/images/dino_instructions.pdf

Launching the Collection at the Leslie Science and Nature Center

We launched the collection on Friday, April 27, at the Leslie Science and Nature Center, as a joint program between the Center, the Lowbrows, and the Library. AADL librarian Jody Harnish, who is connected with the Science Center, brought some nice touches to the event, including red paper lanterns to light the sidewalk and the use of a golf cart to escort people up from the parking area in the grass below to avoid the problem of headlights during viewing. He also made a fire in the Nature House fireplace and set up coffee, hot chocolate, and cookies.

Up in the Nature House, Charlie gave a brief but well-aimed talk to roughly 80 people about the proper use and handling of the Library's scopes, as well as what new users could expect to find in the night sky both in and outside of Ann Arbor. Library staff held a raffle for the first seven positions in the hold queue, as well as the Starry Night software that came with each of the seven scopes, then we encouraged everyone to step outside to the sidewalk where the StarBlasts sat on tables surrounded by the big scopes brought out by the several club members who attended. (To my embarrassment, I'd forgotten to add batteries to the Finderscopes and only learned later that Brian Ottum ran out to buy and install them at the last minute.)

Thanks to Jim Forrester for recommending the date for the launch: It turned out to be a beautiful, cool clear evening, with Venus, Mars and Saturn all making an appearance. The moon, as Master of Ceremonies, did what it always does best - impressing beginners and making even small scopes look cool. We even had an ISS flyover. Several folks helped man the tables with the StarBlasts and other club members brought their scopes. Thanks go to Jack Brisbin, Mark Deprest, Yazu and Yumi, Jim Forrester, Charlie Nielsen, Brian Ottum, Mike Radwick.

The next day, Saturday April 28, just happened to be Astronomy Day and the telescopes began officially circulating in the Library's system.

Since the launch (it's been about a month now) we've yet to discover any broken or missing parts. The weather hasn't been perfect, as it never is in Michigan, but that only proves a two-week circulation period was the right idea. Jack Brisbin reports that a couple brought one of the Library scopes to the May 19 open house and asked for pointers prior to taking the scope up north over Memorial Day weekend. The hold queue for the seven StarBlasts has grown steadily, so we'll likely add more telescopes to meet the demand. This time, however, in order to avoid burdening Clay Kessler with the scope modifications, the Library is planning to host a group build in July led by Clay. We hope to attract and train other interested Lowbrows along with a smattering of a2geeks. Stay tuned for more information this!

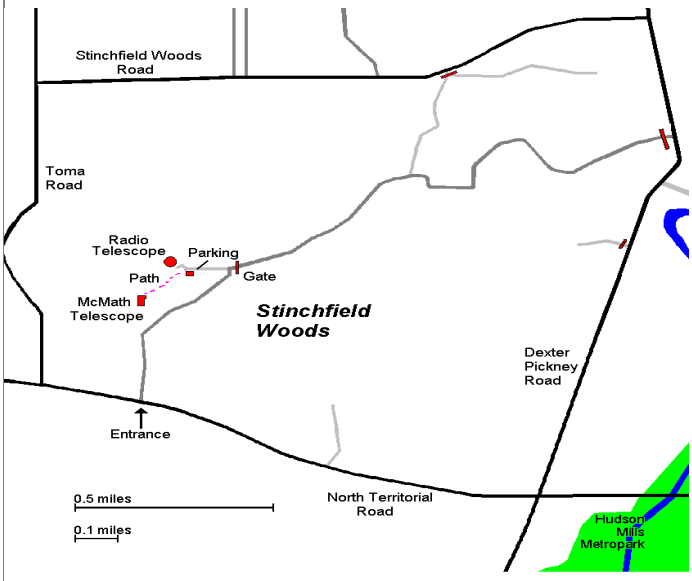
Thanks again to everyone who helped get the Library telescopes out the door.


Young Astronomer
CLICK TO ENTER
AND START OBSERVING
www.youngastronomer.org

Places & Times

Dennison Hall, also known as The University of Michigan's Physics & Astronomy building, is the site of the monthly meeting of the University Lowbrow Astronomers. Dennison Hall can be found on Church Street about one block north of South University Avenue in Ann Arbor, MI. The meetings are usually held in room 130, and on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7:30 pm. During the summer months and when weather permits, a club observing session at the Peach Mountain Observatory will follow the meeting.

Peach Mountain Observatory is the home of the University of Michigan's 25 meter radio telescope as well as the University's McMath 24" telescope which is maintained and operated by the Lowbrows. The observatory is located northwest of Dexter, MI; the entrance is on North Territorial Rd. 1.1 miles west of Dexter-Pinckney Rd. A small maize & blue sign on the north side of the road marks the gate. Follow the gravel road to the top of the hill and a parking area near the radio telescopes, then walk along the path between the two fenced in areas (about 300 feet) to reach the McMath telescope building.



Public Open House / Star Parties

Public Open Houses / Star Parties are generally held on the Saturdays before and after the New Moon at the Peach Mountain observatory, but are usually cancelled if the sky is cloudy at sunset or the temperature is below 10 degrees F. For the most up to date info on the Open House / Star Party status call: (734)332-9132. Many members bring their telescope to share with the public and visitors are welcome to do the same. Peach Mountain is home to millions of hungry mosquitoes, so apply bug repellent, and it can get rather cold at night, please dress accordingly.

Membership

Membership dues in the University Lowbrow Astronomers are $20 per year for individuals or families, $12 per year for students and seniors (age 55+) and $5 if you live outside of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

This entitles you to the access to our monthly Newsletters on-line at our website and use of the 24" McMath telescope (after some training).

A hard copy of the Newsletter can be obtained with an additional $12 annual fee to cover printing and postage.
(See the website
http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/theclub/
for more information on joining the club).

Membership in the Lowbrows can also get you a discount on these magazine subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope - $32.95 / year

Astronomy - $34.00 / year or $60.00 for 2 years

For more information contact the club Treasurer.

Newsletter Contributions

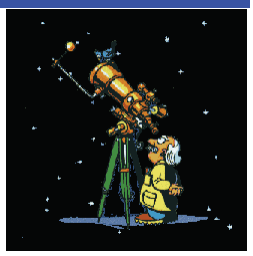
Members and (non-members) are encouraged to write about any astronomy related topic of interest.

Lowbrow's Home Page

http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/

University Lowbrow Astronomers

Reflections & Refractions



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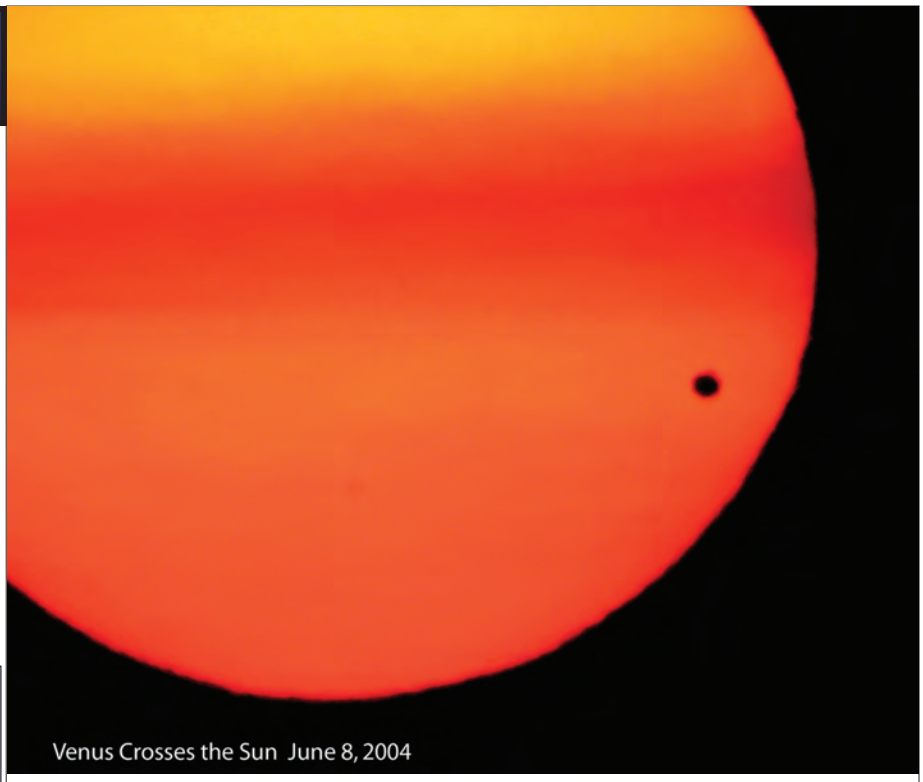

Photo: Brian Ottum

Transit Observing Sites: Ashley Street, Angell Hall, Detroit Observatory, Scherzer Hall (Ypailanti) and Kensington Metro Park. You may also find Lowbrows at Ann Arbor's Leslie Park.