

MACARTHUR ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY Inc.

Journal



# PRIME FOCUS

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## President's Report

### Welcome

It's great to welcome everyone back tonight. I hope your Christmas and New Year were happy and safe occasions for you and your families. I extend to all members and guests a big hello and hope you enjoy the evening.

Tonight we are going to have some of our hard working astro-photographers share their great results with us. We will also catch up the latest comings and goings of the club and if the weather and time permits might do a bit of viewing. Did anyone bring a telescope?

### Last Time We Met

According to many members last November's meeting was very well received. Well known astronomer and writer Chris Toohey was our special guest and gave a talk on heaps of things. In particular I thought his discussions around the discoveries of Galileo were enthralling. A very interesting night.

**Dr Fred Watson** from the Anglo-Australian Observatory is our special guest next month, so tell everyone to come along as he is a great speaker and this is a meeting not to be missed. However, we might be in a different room, see details at the end of my report.

At the meeting in November we paid special homage to Phil Ainsworth who started our society back in January 1996 and subsequently became our president for a number of years. I took the opportunity of reading Phil's Prime Focus report later during that week and I thank him for all his kind words.

I have also reflected back on our past endeavours and I am now scratching my head wondering how we ever managed to get by without a web site. Further adding to Phil's comments I wish to give thanks to all the fine efforts made in establishing the early versions of the site by quite a few members.

I know more recently Ian Cook and Leslie Southwell have worked very hard indeed on design concepts and the hosting arrangements for the site, with assistance from Dick Everett and Daniel Ross. Well done to you all. If I have missed anyone's major contributions then please accept my apologies.

The "Macastro" web site as you find it today is a result of the vision and hard work of Martin Ferlito. It was back in July last year when we were down at Magellan that some of us saw some the work Martin was doing on the site. It looked really great. Martin proceeded with our blessings and applied himself with great enthusiasm in updating the site to its current format. It's members like this that keep the ball rolling for our society, in fact many members help out in a vast variety of ways. To you all please accept our sincere appreciations.

### **Christmas party**

I thank all those members who turned out for our little get together just before the festivities really got under full swing. It's definitely a time of many commitments so it was great to catch up over a few beers and a wine or two. A highlight of the party for me was taking in some great views of that giant burning light in the sky, namely our sun which is called "Sol". The views of "Sol" from Lloyd's special solar telescope were very impressive indeed, the sun is very dynamic and in constant motion

Also dynamic and in constant motion is my daughter. At the get together we had some of our kids playing quite happily, that was until my lovely daughter decided to run away with my son's shoe. She tossed it high up onto the roof of one of the pavilions, way beyond my limited reach.

I thank Bob and Bruce for coming to the rescue. They reached up high and grabbed "Sol" for me. Lucky me, that's my second viewing for the day. My son was happy now as he had some "soles" on his feet. We would be certainly be lost without kind hearted (and tall) "souls" like Bruce and Bob.

### **To The Future**

We have our upcoming Annual General meeting in April. Please if you would like to nominate for any positions please feel free to take a nomination form, you will find some at the back of the attendance book here tonight.

### **The Dates**

21/01/06 STARGARD FIELD NIGHT (TBC)

28/01/06 THE FOREST OR

28/01/06 ASTROCAMP MAITLAND

20/02/06 GENERAL MEETING

25/02/06 THE FOREST

04/03/06 THE OAKS AIRFIELD

Please see Ian Cook or Dick Everett about the Astrocamp if you would like to attend. We are still running a Forest night as well if you are interested. If we schedule any other nights we will put it out as a Critical MAS email.

You can call John Rombi for details or email me on a bit later during the week at [astrosharpe@bigpond.com.au](mailto:astrosharpe@bigpond.com.au). Also my mobile is 0410 445 041 if needed Really Important

The Uni's booking department has advised me that this room is not available next month. It is planned at this stage that we will use ROOM 6 BUILDING 21, it still needs to be absolutely confirmed. The original room offered was just too small, especially when we have such a great guest speaker as Dr Fred Watson paying us a visit.

Noel Sharpe

President

## Deep Space Whine

The mission late last year was to grab a few days holiday down at our nation's capital, namely Canberra. I bundled my wife, kids x 2 and even my mother and headed off at warp factor 9 down the Hume.

On the radar was a visit to Questacon, The Zoo, the Canberra Space Dome and the War Memorial. Canberra has a lot to offer like Parliament House, lots of fancy government buildings, Lake Burley Griffin, the Telstra Tower, Mt Stromlo. The list is too long to mention but it's well worth the 2 hour drive down there.

We were making a good clip of it despite the never ending chorus from the back of the car "are we there yet dad?" No kids, we just got out of the driveway!

It was time to pull out the secret weapon, one very big sticky lollipop and a game boy. Peace at last.

Happily collapsing into bed on the first night I happened to glance upon the tourist type brochure that had a mention about something called the Canberra Deep Space Complex, only 35 clicks south of the city. So this was the famous Tidbinbilla. I have certainly heard of Tidbinbilla so with great expectations I headed out, with the troop in tow of course. The tracking station is part of NASA's deep space network. It's one of three facilities worldwide. Headquarters is at the Jet Propulsion Lab, JPL in Pasadena California. The other tracking stations are in Goldstone California and Madrid Spain.

The worldwide network of antennas provides two way communication with the un-manned

interplanetary spacecraft. They even are still tracking the voyagers. This is a very impressive facility. The main dish is a whopper, larger than the Parkes Radio Telescope. Called DSS it measures 70 meters in diameter and is the largest of its type in the southern hemisphere. It looked great but unfortunately I couldn't tow it back to Harrington Park.

The displays inside were fantastic. They even had a spacesuit donated by Andy Thomas. They show movies and have a full scale replica of one of the Martian rovers. Well time to go as the chorus of the kids, "I'm bored, I want to go home" got into full swing. Not even explaining to them about the 3.8 billion year old moon rocks could tempt them to stay. Just a bag of old rocks dad.

We made our way back to Canberra and I had only one thought on my mind - the Canberra Space Dome, a cold beer with a juicy steak and maybe a glass of red (that's 3 thoughts Noel - Ed.). It was a few years back when I first paid a visit to the Centre. What made it a very memorable night was the fact that the Space Dome and Planetarium were attached to a Trade Services Club. They had a great Bistro and really cold beer.

We made it just in time. We could view Mars in crystal clear skies with the 7 inch Astro-Physics Starfire refractor, with perfect timing we needed to wait about 50 minutes to show time. Excellent, as we were all very hungry and I wanted steak, beer and maybe a class or two of wine. Well I was on holidays you know. I proudly escorted my family through the corridor to go to the club. WHAT! no club, where is it? Its gone, this is completely unacceptable. I went back into the dome and

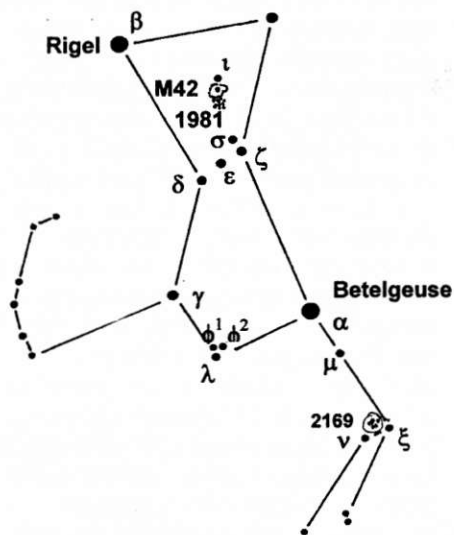
with quite a tone in my voice asked, "What have you done with the club?"

Oh, it closed about 4 years ago sir, didn't you know that? Reeking with disappointment I ushered my family to wherever we could find to eat, Mars gone, beer and steak gone. To top it off I got a parking ticket just to round things off. I even missed out on my whine!

A disappointed Noel ■

### A Prime Number – 37

I recently came across a fascinating object that is easily viewable to the most humble telescope. It is **NGC2169** in the constellation Orion. For reasons that will become obvious, it is also known as the "37 Cluster". To find it, refer to the map below. It's located about 10° below Betelgeuse.



The simplest way to find it is to hop from Betelgeuse, down to  $\mu$  Orionis immediately below it, then further down to the two adjacent stars  $\nu$  and  $\xi$ . Perched just above their midway point is NGC2169.

Though visible as a small blurry patch in binoculars, it is best appreciated in a telescope with modest magnification. I recently viewed it in my 10" dob, with around 70x magnification. This seemed to bring out the secondary stars of the cluster not obviously viewable with lower power and helped complete its peculiar shape. See the image blow (not mine.)



It doesn't take a lot of imagination to see the asterism in this cluster as the number 37.

The cluster spans approx. 7 light years (it's only a tiddler as open clusters go) and about 3,600 light years away. Check it out and show the family. It's also a good one to show the public at our Open Nights. RB