



VBAS Highlights for March

Public Programs for March

Our next member’s meeting will be held on Friday, March 20th at 7 PM. The program this month will be a spring cleaning sale. Director of Facilities Terry Owens has cool stuff for sale, such as extra books, AV equipment, telescopes, parts, etc. needing new homes. VBAS Member Meetings are held on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7 PM; they’re open to the public and are free.

Regular planetarium programs are held on Saturdays at 7:30 PM. This month, we ask, *Where Are the Stars?*, with shows on March 7th, 14th, and 28th. On the 21st, we will give a seasonal sky tour. Admission to planetarium shows is free for VBAS Members, 5.00 for Adults, 3.00 for Students, and free for children under 6. Observation of the night sky through various telescopes normally follows each planetarium program, weather permitting.

It’s Time to Renew Your Membership

It’s that time again. VBAS membership dues are due in March every year. See page 5 for details.

We Want You... to be our new Membership Secretary

President John Young describes the job, and why we need a volunteer to fill it, on page 5.

Saturn Opposition and Retrograde Motion

Resident Astronomer Doug Horacek reports on Saturn’s motions for the next couple of months on page 3.

Dark Sky Notes

On page 6, VBAS Dark Sky Representative Richard Norman has the latest news, including how you can be a “Dark Ranger”.

2009 Messier Marathon Set for March 27

Je Delmas gives details about the upcoming “faint fuzzies” observing event on page 6.

Telescopes for Sale

A 14.5” Dob and an 8” Schmidt Cassegrain are ready to go to good homes. See page 7 for details and contact info.

Steve Sloan
 Via Stellaris Editor
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VBAS Calendar of Events

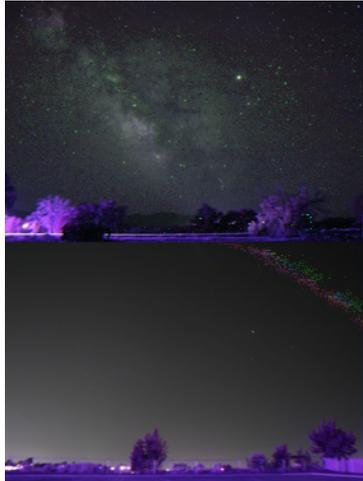
Saturday, March 7th, 14th, & 28th, 2009, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Where Are The Stars?

Location: VBAS

Join us for a family friendly program, as we celebrate the 400th anniversary of when Galileo became the first man to turn a telescope towards the heavens, and find out why we can't see as many stars as he did! We'll learn about the effects of light pollution, and what you can do to help while also saving energy! Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky afterwards through one of VBAS's powerful telescopes too.

Comparison showing the effects of light pollution on viewing the sky at night. The southern sky, featuring Sagittarius and Scorpius.



Top - Leamington, UT, population 217.

Bottom - Orem, UT, in a metropolitan area of about 400,000. (Credit: Jeremy Stanley)

Friday, March 20th, 2009, 6 PM

Youth Observers Evening

Location: VBAS

Presented by David Lofts

There will be a youth observers evening on the same evening as our member's meeting. The youth will be observing the stars in Orion after the meeting as part of the global Dark Skies event, and David will have a presentation in the planetarium before the members meeting. The kids can take part in the pizza and parents are welcome to take part in the Spring Cleaning Sale. Call David Lofts at 726 0275 or Doug Horacek at 772 6788 for more information.

Friday, March 20th, 2009, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

Location: VBAS

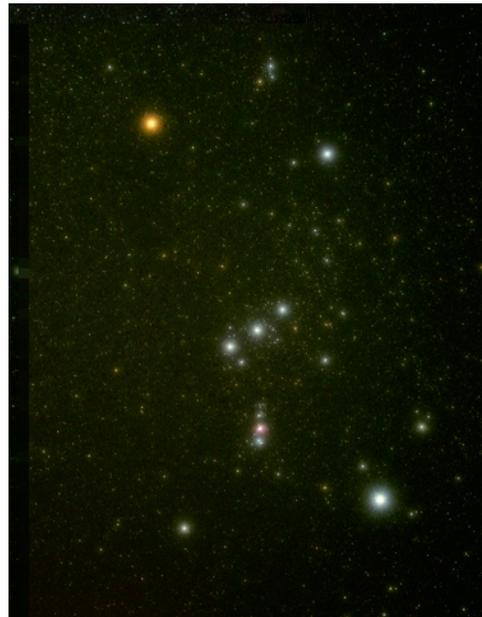
Our Director of Facilities Terry Owens, who is also the VBAS Librarian, is heading a "Spring Cleaning" sale at VBAS. We've got some cool stuff, such as extra books, AV equipment, telescopes, parts, etc. needing new homes. VBAS members can use this opportunity to sell some of their own astronomical related items as well. So, make plans to attend our "Spring Cleaning Sale" on March 20th.

Saturday, March 21st, 2009, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Seasonal Star Tour

Location: VBAS

Join us for a relaxing evening at VBAS. We'll show you which constellations are visible this time of year, and teach you how to find them. We'll also learn about the fascinating and beautiful deep sky objects that can be found, along with a mix of mythology. Weather permitting, we'll be viewing the night sky afterwards through one of VBAS's powerful telescopes, too.



Camera Orion (Credit & Copyright: John Gauvreau)

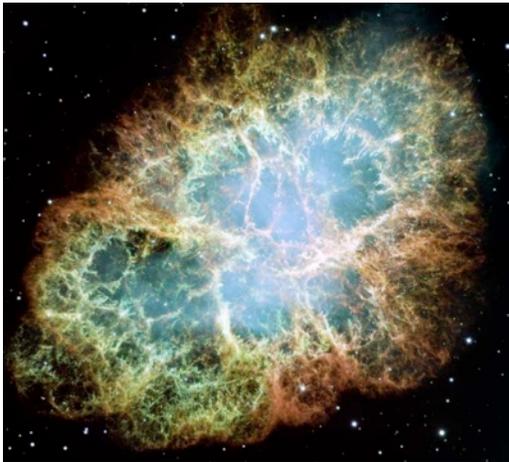
Friday, March 27th, 2008

(Rain date Saturday, March 28th)

Messier Marathon

Location: VBAS

“Messier Marathon” is a term to describe an effort to observe all 110 deep sky Messier objects in one night. This year’s Messier marathon has been set for Friday, March 27. Make your plans now to attend this event to rack up as many Messier objects in your log book as you can in one evening. This is a great opportunity for newer observers to learn more about the night sky and to learn observing techniques from more experienced members.

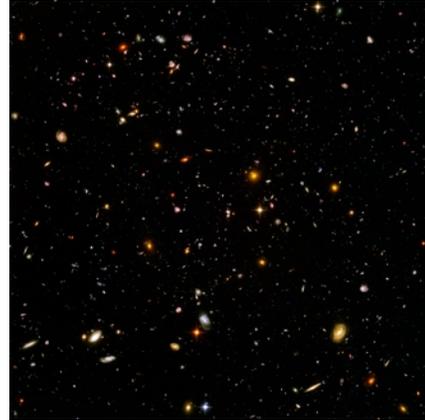


The Crab Nebula is cataloged as M1, the first object on Charles Messier's famous list of things which are not comets. (Image Credit: [NASA](#), [ESA](#), J. Hester, A. Loll)

Saturday, April 4th, 11th, & 25th, 2009, 7:30 PM

Planetarium Show: Galaxies and the Distant Universe

Location: VBAS



The Hubble Deep Field (HDF) is an image of a small region in the constellation Ursa Major. Almost all of the 3,000 objects in the image are galaxies, some of which are among the youngest and most distant known.

Friday, April 17th, 2009, 7 PM

Regular Monthly Meeting

Location: VBAS

After a short pizza social and marketplace swap meet we'll discuss pertinent society business before moving on to our program.

...And as always, for the most up to date information about VBAS events, be sure to check the web site at vbas.org.

Saturn Opposition and Continued Retrograde Motion

by Doug Horacek, Resident Astronomer

On 8 March 2009, Saturn will reach opposition. This means it will be at its closest approach to Earth for this year. Saturn will be highest in the sky at 12:00 A.M. CST or 1:00 A.M. CDT. Saturn will have a width of 19.8 seconds of arc at the equator of the main planet. The rings will have little more tilt.

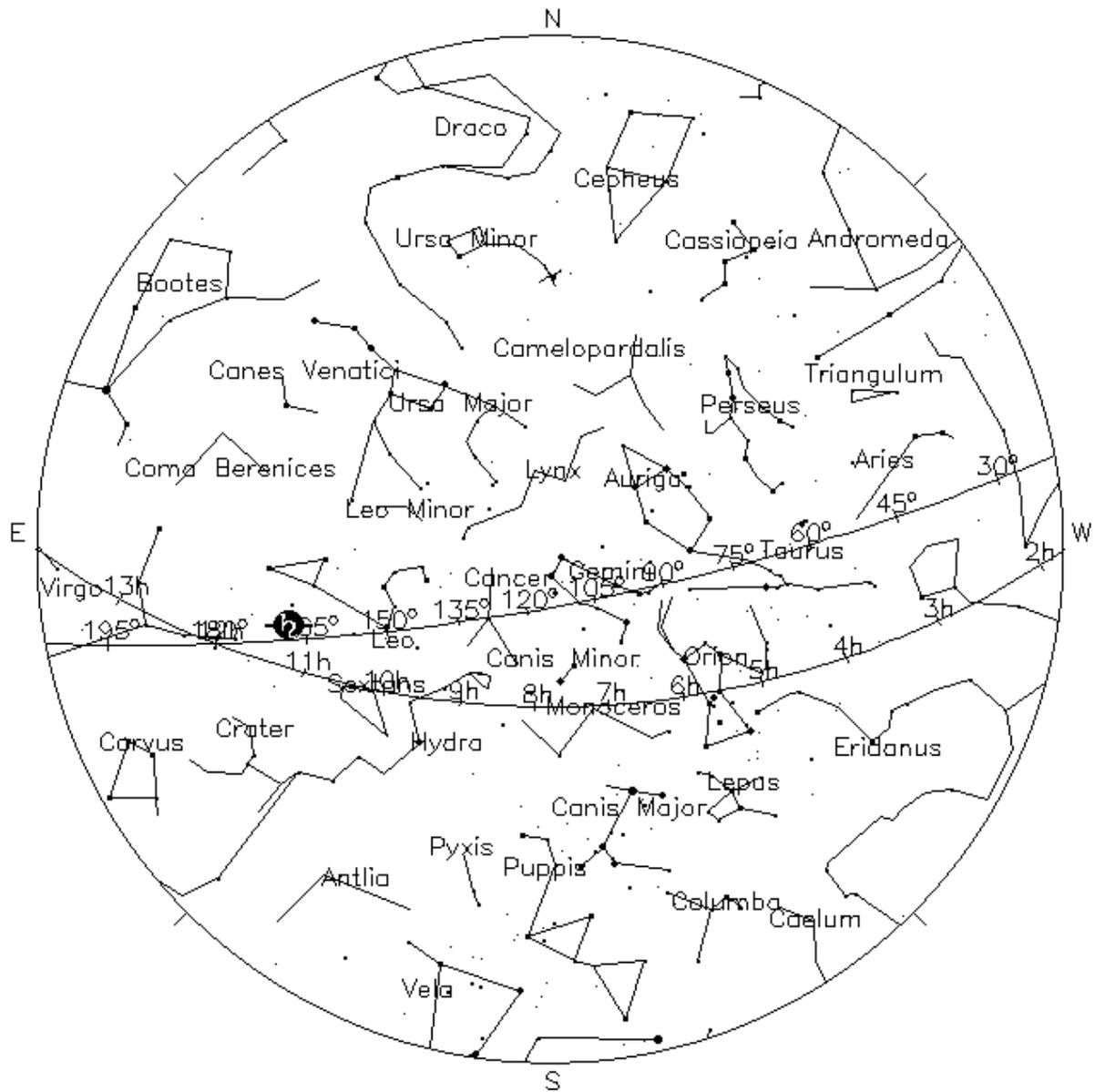
Saturn will be close to Sigma Leonis and will be moving further west to Chi Leonis on

the 17th of May. Saturn has been in retrograde motion since the 1st of January 2009. The reason we observe retrograde motion in the outer planets is the earth passes the planet in its orbit. This always happens around opposition time for the distant planets. After 17 May 2009, Saturn will move eastward again with respect to the stars and will be in the Constellation Virgo by later in the year.

The Night Sky for March, 2009

Here is the view at 9 PM in mid March, 2009, at 34° N Latitude, 86° W Longitude. Jupiter the lowercase “h” symbol ☾ will be visible in the east, near Leo.

Map courtesy of John Walker and YourSky (<http://www.fourmilab.to/yoursky/>).



It's Time to Renew Your Membership

by Sara Neale

On March 1, all VBAS memberships will expire. Those who wish to remain members will need to renew their memberships. Not a member? Then become one! It's so easy and much cheaper in the long run, especially if you often find yourself at our local planetarium and observatory on the weekends! To become a member or renew your membership:

- Go to www.vbas.org,
 - Click the "About Us" tab
 - Click "Join VBAS."
 - Fill out the application and send a check to the VBAS address below.
- Or, simply talk to a friendly staff member after a show one night. They can walk you through the membership process.

Payment can be either given to the ticket taker or a VBAS officer at shows, or snail mailed to:

VBAS Membership Secretary
P.O. Box 1142
Huntsville, AL 35807

Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society.

As an all volunteer organization, VBAS counts on your dues and donations to keep running. You truly make a difference in the society, and we try to give that back to the community so that everyone can enjoy the benefits of astronomy. Thanks so much!

Calling All Members ... Well, At Least One

by John Young

We're looking for someone to step up and take a lead role on the board as the VBAS membership secretary.

Most know that the membership secretary is the first contact potential our new members have with our group so it's important to fill this position with someone who has some good people skills and a few hours each week to give to the cause.

Serving on a board is a great way to get your volunteer feet wet by meeting new peo

ple, learning new skills, and giving to the team. I ask everyone to please give it due consideration and feel free to call or email if you have questions about the duties of the position.

Clear skies and warm regards...

John Young
VBAS President
256□797 6038
jgy71@knology.net

Dark Sky Notes

by *Richard Norman*

Model Lighting Ordinance

The International Dark Sky Association announced the release for review and comment of the next revision of the Model Lighting Ordinance. To find out more go online to the IDA website: www.darksky.org

Dark Sky-Friendly Light Installed

A first step toward retrofitting the park lighting has been taken. With the help of the Monte Sano Women's Club, the light on the exit side of the gate shed has been retrofitted with a shielded 70 Watt High pressure Sodium fixture, saving 30 on energy over the old 100 Watt Mercury "glare ball" fixture. Based on the data taken before and after, it would appear that we can reduce the wattage to a 50 watt fixture with a semicircular distribution pattern.

The 70 Watt circular fixture was one that I already had for demo, and it used the same mounting bracket as the old light since they

were made by the same company. Check it out and let me know what you think. We will be retrofitting the entrance side fixture as soon as a suitable fixture can be acquired, and approved by the Park Manager.

I want to give credit to Gena Crook and her son Lowell for helping take before and after light level measurements on the street light retrofit that show the glare levels are reduced, while improving the amount of light on the ground and ticket booth.

Dark Rangers

In other news, the National Park Service is calling for volunteers with amateur astronomy and outreach experience for a four week tour in one of several parks around the country. See page 55 of the April 2009 sky and telescope for an ad, or online at

www.nature.nps.gov/air/lightscapes/astroVIP

Chad Moore is one of the main leaders of the NPS Night Sky Team. He was also heavily involved in the creation of the International Dark Sky Park award program.

2009 Messier Marathon Set for March 27

by *Jeff Delmas*

"Messier Marathon" is a term to describe an effort to observe all 110 deep sky Messier objects in one night. This is possible during several times of the year, but all 110 objects are most accessible to viewers in the Spring months of March and April during or near new Moons.

This year's Messier marathon has been set for Friday, March 27. This year, timing is almost ideal, with the new Moon occurring just one day prior to our marathon on March 26 at 16:06 UT. Saturday, March 28 is the rain date for the marathon. Make your plans now to attend this event to rack up as many Messier objects in your log book as you can in one evening. This is a great opportunity for newer ob

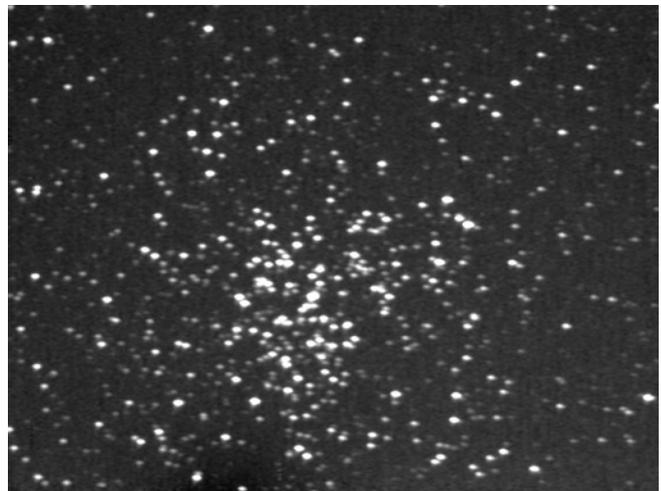


Photo of M37 by Jeff Delmas.

servers to learn more about the night sky and to learn observing techniques from more experienced members.

AstroSystems TeleKit Dobsonian 14.5 inch Telescope For Sale

by Todd Jurhs

I am selling my AstroSystems TeleKit Dobsonian 14.5 inch f4.6 telescope with a Swayze Optics 2 inch thick primary mirror and a 2.25 inch secondary mirror. Both the primary mirror and the secondary mirror have enhanced coatings. This scope was professionally built 8 years ago build manual included and the workmanship is flawless. The scope has seen very little usage. It has sat in storage in my garage. The mirror box has the 9 point flotation cell. The scope includes the Phase 4 Crayford 2" low profile focuser with Quick Switch Filter Slide and the AstroSystems four vane spider. Eyepiece height is about six feet when viewing near zenith. Alt/Az motion is very smooth and virtually vibration free even at high magnification viewing. Mirror cover, 6 inch mask, and transport cover boards are also included. A hand sewn case for the truss tubes is included. A "Go To" dob tracking/drive system could easily be mounted to this scope. Pricing just the TeleKit and both mirrors is approximately

3300, but I'm selling everything for 1000. Plus, a beautiful multi wood in laid storage case built specifically for this scope is included.

Matching optical and laser collimators, TelRad, and three TelVue eyepieces in a rugged and airtight Pelikan 1500 case are also available for sale at an additional negotiable cost. These are all in mint condition.

Will send specific photos upon request. Will deliver to within 2 hours drive time from Huntsville, AL. The storage case not the scope requires a pickup truck for transportation, so I am not able to deliver the storage case.

Below is the manufacture's website:

www.astrosystems.biz/telekits.htm

Here is my contact information:

Todd Jurhs

256 503 4714

todd.jurhs@applied_analytical.com

Meade 8" LX10 with Heavy-Duty Equatorial Tripod For Sale

by Dave Freese

- Meade 8" LX10 with heavy duty field tripod, equatorial mount
- Meade 1.25" 26 mm super Plossl
- Orion 1.25" 12.5 mm HiLight Plossl
- Orion 1.25" Tele Extender
- Orion Moon filter
- Meade 1.25" Diagonal Prism
- Vivitar 2x teleconverter
- Telrad red dot bullseye locator
- Orion RedBeam LED flashlight
- Aluminum Carrying case for accessories
- Heavy roll about storage bin for telescope custom fit

- Canon AE 1 35 mm camera body
- Canon 50 mm lens
- Canon 70 210 mm zoom lens
- T adapter
- Canon 35 mm body adapter

Asking price is 750 but negotiable.
Call Dave Freese, 828 3105

Contributions to Via Stellaris

We welcome contributions to our newsletter that may be of interest to the astronomical community. Contributions are best sent by email to Steve Sloan at editor1@vbas.org. If you don't have access to email, you can send articles in either Word or ASCII format to Steve at 2110 Vilaret Dr, Huntsville, AL 35803.

Membership and Renewal

The VBAS currently has four categories of membership. All four include free admission to the planetarium shows; subscription to this newsletter; membership in the Astronomical League; and use of VBAS library and equipment. The four categories of membership, and the dues for each, are: REGULAR at \$24.00 per year, FAMILY at \$36.00 per year, STUDENT (must be full-time student) at \$12.00 per year, and LIFE at \$500.00. Newsletter Only is also available for \$12.00 per year. Membership renewal occurs for all members annually on March 1st.

All VBAS memberships will come up for renewal on March 1, 2009. If you have questions regarding membership, please contact Gerry Conrad.

Please send your renewal to the Membership Secretary at VBAS, P.O. Box 1142, Huntsville, AL 35807. Make checks payable to the Von Braun Astronomical Society. If your mailing or email address changes, please report the new address promptly to the Membership Secretary, Gerry Conrad, at conrad1908@knology.net or 722-8212, to avoid missing issues of *Via Stellaris*.

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Steve Sloan, Via Stellaris editor