

Astrofiles

Auburn Astronomical Society E-Newsletter April, 2012

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Events Calendar

We'll hold our monthly meeting on Friday, **April 06**, at **7:45PM**, [in room 215](#) of [Davis Hall, the Aerospace Engineering Building](#). Riders from the Montgomery area are welcome to meet at the [home](#) of Russell Whigham, [518 Seminole Dr.](#), and carpool over to Auburn. Plan to be ready to leave for Auburn at 6:45PM.

April 06, April meeting, 7:45PM, [in room 215](#) of [Davis Hall](#)
April 21, Forest Preserve Stargaze at MOTDF in Auburn
April 28, Astronomy Day at the [W. A. Gayle Planetarium](#) in Montgomery
April 30, Venus at greatest brilliancy
June 05, [Transit of Venus](#)

Forest Preserve Stargaze

On Saturday evening, April 21, we'll be at the [Mary Olive Thomas Demonstration Forest](#), located on Moore's Mill. **Jennifer Lolley**, Outreach Administrator at the Louise Kreher Forest Ecology Preserve, has asked that we host her annual Spring Astronomy Nights Stargaze event for the [Forest Ecology Preserve](#) members. This will be a new moon evening AND one week before [Astronomy Day](#). At this writing, we have the following volunteers for the stargaze:

- David McConnell, 8-inch Celestron GOTO
- Frank Ward, 12-inch LightBridge
- Alan Cook, Meade 10" SCT,
- Allen Screws, 10-inch Newtonian
- Chad Ellington, 10" Meade LX200R
- Russell Whigham, C-11 SCT

Jennifer usually has a 200+ sized group, so we'll need 10 or 12 telescopes to keep the telescope queues to a manageable length. Please [let me know](#) if you can bring your telescope. You'll need to be setting up your telescope by sunset at 7:17, and ready for public observing about 8:00PM. Here's a [map](#), and directions are on our [MOTDF](#) page.

Astronomy Day 2012

The Auburn Astronomical Society in partnership with the [W. A. Gayle Planetarium](#), will celebrate [National Astronomy Day](#), at the planetarium in Oak Park in Montgomery on Saturday, April 28. This is traditionally our best attended event of the year. We extend a special invitation to those of you who live too far away to attend most of our events, to come and spend the afternoon and evening with us. Planetarium director, **Rick Evans**, wrote to say that **Chad Ellington** has volunteered to give a presentation on "The Scale of the Solar System". Rick has asked Chad to lay out a Solar System Stroll similar to one he did at the [Alabama Nature Center](#), on the grounds at Oak Park. As always, AAS will offer telescopic viewing of the Moon, Venus, Mars, and binary stars.

If you're bringing telescopes, [let us know](#) what type(s) and size(s). Rick needs a list of names for the name tags and a head count for refreshments.

If you feel reluctant to bring your telescope because you think it's too small, remember that most of the visitors will be more likely to consider one like yours for one of their own.

If you don't have a telescope, we always need help at the **AAS information table** where we'll have an e-mail sign-up sheet. We will also need someone to help keep an eye on the clock to point out satellite passes (times and locations will be provided) to our guests.

If you are considering the purchase of a telescope, this is a good place to **look and ask questions**.

If you have a **telescope or accessories for sale**, this will be the best place in town for your astro-yard sale.

If you have some **old telescope catalogs** or **magazines**, the visitors are happy to have them.

Be sure to bring a **step stool** or **step ladder** if you anticipate the little ones having trouble getting to your eyepiece.

It's OK to ease your vehicle up the sidewalk to **unload your gear**. It would be nice to then move your vehicle out on the park road until the event is over.

It's a good idea to have a tarp to put over any cables or extension cords to prevent visitors from getting tangled and tripping in the dark.

You'll probably want to bring a **lawn chair**, and don't forget your **green laser** -- always a hit with the guests.

Many visitors will ask "**What power is your telescope?**". If you can't do it in your head, it's a good idea to print out a list of your eyepieces and their magnifications.

Another frequently asked question is: "**How far can you see with that thing?**" If you don't know, (and as an homage to [Douglas Adams](#)) "the answer to everything in the universe is 42", so "42 million light-years" sounds about right. 😊

Solar System Stroll

Chad Ellington, Frank Ward, Russell Whigham, C.J. Butterbaugh, Rick Evans and family, and Michael Crouse were on hand for Chad's Solar System Stroll at the Alabama Nature Center on Sunday afternoon, March 18. Aside from me losing Neptune, everything went perfectly. The biggest hit with the kids seemed to be the "Stomp Rockets". See a synopsis and photos at the [Solar System Stroll Web page](#).

Member News

Since last month the following have joined or renewed their AAS membership for 2012:

- Joe Albree
- Richard Caldwell
- Andy Camerio
- Matthew Warren

This brings our 2012 membership to nineteen members. If you're not sure if you've paid for 2012, Check the AAS [Membership](#) page to be sure your name is in [blue](#). If you're grayed out, but thought you had already paid, contact [John B. Zachry](#), AAS treasurer to have this resolved. <http://www.auburnastro.org/aas_name.htm>

Long time AAS friend, **Michael Crouse**, of Prattville, was at the Solar System Stroll and is back on the mail list after an extended hiatus. Also new to the mail list is Auburn Junior High student, **Jiashu Han**. Thanks to **Scott & Rebecca Carnahan**, for giving Jiashu and his mother a ride to our March star party.

David McConnell sent some new images that have been added to his Astrophoto page. < <http://www.auburnastro.org/davepix.htm>>

Frank Ward writes:

I was at the park over the weekend with my son, who has his first R.C. model airplane. There is a group of guys that regularly fly their more expensive models there so while we watched them and learned a thing or two, I set up the PST and handed out several AAS cards, inviting the public to check out our Web site and come to Astronomy day. Most folks were intrigued by the scope and took a peek. These were also interested in coming to Astronomy day.

Web Links

From **David McConnell**: The Most Astounding Fact About The Universe ([Video](#))

[Interactive scale of the Universe](#): This kind of puts things into perspective. Use the full-screen option and the scroll bar to zoom. This appeared at NASA's Astronomy

From **Larry Owsley**: [Amazon billionaire Jeff Bezos to bring up Apollo 11's sunken engines](#)

March Star Party Report

Saturday, March 24, brought deep blue skies and no clouds — our first good star party night since last fall. There were six of us: our junior high student, Jiashu & his mother, [Scott and Rebecca](#), & their dog Zero, Chad, and yours truly and a total of five telescopes and a pair of 20x80 binoculars. We began observing the 2-day old sliver of Moon, then Jupiter with the big-four moons all in a row. Then it was on to dazzling Venus as we waited for dark — well, such as it was. Cliff had left his floodlights on up at his house, turning night to twilight, especially for the dolt who demonstrated his uncanny ability to set-up with a clear line to any local light pollution — yeah, me. In spite of that, Chad found some deep-red carbon stars, a 2nd magnitude satellite, several open and globular clusters to share with our new folks. We were able to see the 13th magnitude supernova in M-95, and the galaxies M-65 & 66 in Leo and the brighter late-winter/early spring objects. Cliff turned off his lights as we were packing up. Oh well... Thanks to Scott & Rebecca for giving Jiashu & his mother a ride. [[Here we are](#)]

Transit of Venus

Only two more months before the June 05 and the encore performance of the [Transit of Venus](#). The transit will begin in late (Tuesday) afternoon just before 5:05PM when the Sun is only about 35 degrees above the western horizon. The full silhouette of Venus' disk will be visible about 17 minutes later at 5:22. Sunset is at 7:48 so we'll only be treated to less than half of the full transit. Obviously we'll need a near perfect western horizon and some really good luck with the clouds. Be sure to get your solar filter if you don't already have one. Just Google "[safe solar filter](#)" and don't forget [our friends down in Pensacola](#). I'm a big fan of the Baader solar filter. It's cheap, has good resolution, and a near-natural color.

Chad has reminded me that the Sun, roughly 2-weeks before Summer Solstice, will be significantly farther north than it is now at sunset. The transit will begin with the Sun at 271 degrees W azimuth & 35 degrees altitude (at 1st contact 5:05PM) and end (for us) at 300 degrees WNW and 0 degrees at sunset. Bear this in mind while searching for that perfect horizon.

Here's a overview of [the black-drop effect](#) , an optical illusion seen when Venus' shadow is near the Sun's limb.

Hoping to see everyone at the meeting,

Russell