



THE FIELD OF VIEW (F.O.V.) National Public Observatory Newsletter

“Where the Public Meets the Stars”

Astronomy education, dark skies and quality experiences for ALL!!

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STARS-N-PARKS PROGRAMS IN SEVEN SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO STATE PARKS

Fall 2004

Clear Skies for Venus Transit at Cape Hatteras, North Carolina

By John Gilkison

On the afternoon of June 7th on Cape Hatteras it was cloudy and I was trying to resign myself to missing the long awaited Transit of the planet Venus across the face of the Sun the next morning. Then a weather report talked about a clearing pattern for the next 24 hours and I begin to perk up.

Maybe our 1,200 mile trip across the country to witness this very rare event wasn't to be occulted after all. Fortunately we had decided to make a real vacation out of the trip with stays in New Orleans, Fort Walton Beach, and Savannah along the way.

Steve Davis and a friend linked up with me that evening and we talked observing sites. The landlord of the cabin we had rented had offered me the use of an empty house with a deck some 16 feet off of the ground for the transit, because as he said, it was empty of renters right now. Steve and his friends were planning on an ocean site down the road from the Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. I had decided to stick closer to home.

In the morning I set up my 4 inch Maksutov and my 10X60 mm binoculars on a parallelogram mount. My film camera was mounted to a 90 mm

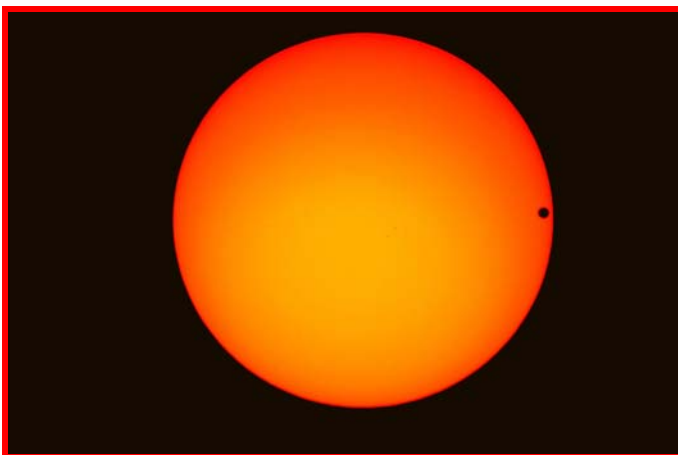
F/5.6 Maksutov. The Sun rose behind a house and I had to go down to the end of the deck to get a clear view. The morning fog had yet to burn off and all I could see was a red area near the horizon. Finally as the sun got about two sun diameters high I could see a blood red Sun with the large black circle of the planet Venus superimposed upon it.

I was in a quandary for although I could clearly see the Sun and the planet with my naked eye, I could see nothing with my solar filter equipped camera lens. I took the filter off and carefully metered and took a series of photographs. I told myself when the Sun begin to get brighter and a strain to look at I would put the filter back. It did.

Once the Sun had cleared the distant beach houses I begin video taping the transit through the 4 inch Maksutov with the Stella Cam Ex. After some moments I realized I was at 2X and put the setting back where it belonged.

I would have to say the best view was through the binoculars. The 10X60's having 20 mm's of eye relief meant I could keep on my astigmatism correcting eyeglasses. A very small sunspot group near the center of the sun were in clear focus. The white light images of a apparently three dimensional planet and Sun was not something I had expected. Clearly this was an illusion I told myself, but a very convincing and pleasant illusion none the less.

People began to come out of their houses for their morning walks, to go fishing and most for things that were clearly not astronomical. Some glanced at me briefly, but none (cont. on pg 3)



Steve Davis photo of Venus Transit from Cape Hatteras, North Carolina. H-Alpha Nearstar 90

Dark Sky Activist meets the Stars up Close

By Jessica Savage

Hearing Alexandra Hall's exclaim in awe at seeing Saturn through a telescope for the first time, it's obvious she loves the night sky and was thrilled at discovering its' hidden treasures. She took the lead in translating for a group of Spanish-speaking girls scouts from Juarez that were attending the program, which made her seem like a natural.

Although Hall barely attended her first amateur astronomy session in May of this year at a Stars-N-Parks outreach program at Leasburg Dam State Park, she's been a dark sky activist for some time.

"I love the Moon and the stars," the budding amateur said. "I know there's a universe out there."

Now involved with a citizen's task force dealing with a lighting ordinance, it all started when Hall, a Mesilla resident, complained about the parking lot lights that were flooding her patio and preventing her from seeing the night sky.

"For years I complained," said Hall, who lives near the Plaza. "The church was the first to do something about it."

Referring to the San Albino Church, a dominating presence in the Plaza, complaints at town meetings resulted in changes to their exterior yellow flood lights that were on all through the night. The complaints were always answered

Matt Wilson stands beside his 10 inch Meade at the Fall seasons first program at City of Rocks State Park.



with the adage that more lights make an area safer at night, and Hall said the town put off making any rules about lighting.

Earlier this spring Hall unexpectedly saw an item on the town of Mesilla's council agenda about a lighting ordinance so she attended a special workshop. At the meeting was a copy of the city of Las Cruces' lighting ordinance and an invited speaker who had helped create the city's ordinance: National Public Observatory's President John Gilkison.

"It meant they were taking it serious," Hall said. This led to Hall and others asking for a night sky task force, which has since become blessed by the town. "Right now it's unofficial," Hall said. "We formed ourselves. We stay in touch."

A tour of the town revealed public and private abuses of lighting and the task force gave the findings to the town. "The next meeting was full of parking lot interests," Hall said. "The main offender is the town, which is lit up like a baseball field."

Hall said Gilkison's lecture at the workshop was excellent and everyone learned the correct terminology for lighting issues and how lights effect the eyes when it's dark.

"The most important thing is that more light doesn't equal more safety," she said. "It's a common misconception."

Hall said she learned that the eye is blinded by light at night and can't see in the shadows. Also, so much light is cast unnecessarily into the sky instead of at the ground where it's useful.

Hall is hopeful that the efforts of the task force will lead in the right direction.

"I want change," she said, "and the town wants an ordinance."

The NPO Website I.T. News

by Steve Self

Last issue, I wrote about the new on-line newsletter and how to access it. I'm back this issue with another navigation tip for the NPO website. I will target the Gallery page of the website. From the home page, <http://www>.



NPO President John Gilkison models the latest optical purchase for the NPO, a pair of 20X100 mm Binoculars from Apogee Inc on a T-Mount.

(Venus Transit cont.) made any enquiries. Good I thought to myself, because I was having to be very still on my wooden perch, and lead footed company would not do. It seemed so strange, here I was witnessing an event no human being alive today had seen because the last time Venus crossed the Sun was one hundred and twenty two years ago. These people seemed so oblivious to this wonderfully unique event taking place right above their heads. I kept observing and carefully trying to document the third and forth contacts where Venus exits the limb of the Sun.

My wife and daughter did pay me a visit and shared some of the moment with me. The ninety minute event (as seen from the Cape) was over all too soon. Time to get packed as we were planning on making Asheville, NC by evening. I was in an excited state of mind for some hours having come all this way and being granted this small miracle of clear skies. We learned later all of North Carolina had been clouded over except the outer banks.

My pictures although they turned out, were not up to even my loose standards. Steve Davis very generously offered to share his H-Alpha pictures with the NPO for our members. We hope Steve can join us in New Mexico in 2012 for the next Transit of Venus.

astronomy-national-public-observatory.org/index.shtml, click the Gallery button from the menu on the left side of the page. The main gallery page opens. There is a button to click that begins a slideshow. The photo's in the slideshow were all submitted by the NPO President, John Gilkison.

The Gallery page was designed to house photographs submitted by NPO members. If you have pictures from an astronomy related event please feel free to share them with the rest of the NPO. You can e-mail them directly to me at webmaster@astronomy-national-public-observatory.org or send them via snail-mail to: NPO, P.O. Box 19, Radium Springs, NM 88054

New or Renewed NPO Members

Bob Cantrell of Las Cruces, NM
 Lucio Garcia of Las Cruces, NM
 Steve Davis of Ellenboro, NC
 Tim Hunter of Tucson, AZ
 Jeff Jenkins of Las Cruces, NM
 Wes Light of Deming, NM
 Aaron Martinez of Faywood, NM



Steve Davis H-Alpha Venus Transit from Cape Hatteras, NC. Note solar prominence near Venus.

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL PUBLIC OBSERVATORY PROJECT

Tens of thousands of people visit major U.S. research astronomical observatories every year. These research facilities do not advertise, and quite altruistically, set aside monies and time from their limited budgets to accommodate the public. Many people travel great distances for the opportunity to observe through a world-class telescope but due to the high cost of telescope time, this generally is not feasible. Where observatories have been able to set aside a night for public observing, it is often booked up well in advance.

While some upscale observatory/lodge facilities have been developed, none have been established to reach families or individuals looking for an intimate public park/camping experience with the proper telescopes, facilities, and knowledgeable tour guides.

The National Public Observatory, Inc. has been established to provide this kind of facility and we need your help.

Please join the National Public Observatory or make your tax-deductible contribution today!