

# The High Desert Observer

## February 2023



### This Month's Meeting - Feb 24th

IN-PERSON & Zoom, Friday at 7 p.m.  
Mesilla Valley Radio Clubhouse  
6609 Jefferson Ave. Las Cruces, NM

At the corner of Wilt and Jefferson -- take the Porter exit from US 70, about 5 miles east from the I-25 interchange. Go south on Porter until you come to Jefferson. From there, turn left and go to the corner of Jefferson and Wilt. The meeting will also be available to members via Zoom.

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### Tombaugh Lecture Series Speaker for the Month



### Steve Barkes

**Astronomical Society of Las Cruces**

### **"Star Trackers For Portable Astrophotography And More..."**

An introduction to star trackers and how they compare to larger, dedicated astrophotography mounts. We will explore the options available for star trackers and have a hands-on demonstration on the offering from Sky-Watcher.

Could a star tracker become your portable "go to" mount for lunar, solar and astro imaging? You may be surprised at what a small, lightweight, and portable mount can do.

## My Field of View

### Tim Kostelecky

It's been an awfully long time since I've been part of a high school event, but here was my opportunity...Centennial High School's "Science Enrichment Day". With the help of with Ed Montes and Rich Richins, our ASLC booth was certain to indeed enrich these students' life experience. From the questions and feedback we received from many of the participants, we can confidently say we had at least given them a few nuggets of information to be remembered for a while.



This was one of a number of outreach programs in the last month, which included our MoonGaze at the Plaza de Las Cruces, sun-watching at the Las Cruces Science Museum Plutomania event, a star-party at Tombaugh Elementary School, and of course, our special dedication event at the Haas Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park as part of our monthly outreach program at that site. We were honored to have Mary Alba, daughter of the late Walter H. Haas at the Leasburg event, to celebrate the naming of the facility "Walter H. Haas Memorial

Observatory". Mary's niece, Diana Alba Soular was also there, and being a journalist, she interviewed many of the participants and wrote a terrific article that's included in this issue of the HDO. Be sure to check it out.

Thanks to everyone who contributed your efforts to these events! The ASLC is well represented in our community.

Clear Skies to All!



Solar Gazing at the Plutomania Event



ASLC Booth at Las Cruces Centennial High School's "Science Enrichment Day"

## ASLC-West Outreach

**Mike Nuss**

We were clouded out on Friday, February 17th, for the Rockhound event. But, happy to report a great crowd of around 75 for the Saturday presentation at City of Rocks, on the 18th. An elementary school from Silver City (we believe

G. W. Stout Elementary), had a lot of participants— students & parents, seeking “extra credit confirmation signings” from us assisting with the presentation. Always a welcome benefit from schools participating and being aware of what’s happening in their communities.

### The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

**(ASLC)** is dedicated to expanding public awareness and understanding of the wonders of the universe. ASLC holds frequent observing sessions and star parties, providing opportunities to work on Society and public educational projects. Members receive electronic delivery of The High Desert Observer, our monthly newsletter, plus membership in the Astronomical League including their quarterly publication, Reflector, available in either paper or digital format. ASLC members are also entitled to a discount on a subscription to Sky and Telescope magazine. Annual Individual Dues are \$36; Family \$42; Student (Full Time) \$24. Dues are payable in January and partial year prorated for new members. Please contact our Treasurer, Patricia Conley, [treasurer@aslc-nm.org](mailto:treasurer@aslc-nm.org) for further information.

### Coming Events

Monthly, on an evening close to the first-quarter moon, ASLC hosts a public “MoonGaze” observing session in Las Cruces. We also hold periodic special evening sessions at Tombaugh Observatory on the NMSU campus.

Also monthly, the ASLC welcomes public viewing at the Haas Observatory in Leasburg Dam State Park, located just 20 miles north of Las Cruces. Our 16-inch Meade LX200 telescope at this site is used to observe under rather dark skies.

Keep updated on the dates, times, and locations through this [link](#) with additional information available at our website [www.aslc-nm.org](http://www.aslc-nm.org) as well as our [Facebook](#) page.

## Featured Article

# ASLC “Haas Observatory” Dedication Honoring the late Walter H. Haas, Astronomer and ASLC Co-Founder

By Diana Alba Soular

RADIUM SPRINGS, NEW MEXICO – Stargazers recently paid tribute to a renowned amateur astronomer who called Las Cruces, New Mexico home by formally naming an observatory after him.

The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces gathered on Feb. 11, 2023 to dedicate the observatory – a small, stucco building at New Mexico’s Leasburg Dam State Park – in honor of the late Walter H. Haas, founding member of the group and founder of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers. The society hosts public outreach and skywatching events at the observatory once a month.

Mr. Haas died of natural causes in 2015 at the age of 97. He spent much of his life engaged in his passion: meticulously examining and documenting the nighttime sky.



Plaque designed and produced by Anthony Hyde, High Rolls ClayWorks in High Rolls NM

A crowd of about 60 people gathered at sunset to unveil a new plaque in Mr. Haas’ honor that had been installed at the observatory in recent days. The facility’s 10th anniversary also was being celebrated.

To dedicate the building, Mr. Haas’ daughter, Mary Alba of Las Cruces, cut a ribbon that was bedecked with images of the planets. She said her father would have been “very humbled to know this was done in honor of him.”



Mary Alba, daughter of Walter Haas, performs the ribbon-cutting.

“He loved being out and seeing the galaxies and the stars and everything God created,” she said. “Thank you so much; I’m so honored.”

The ASLC is an active group of about 100 professional and amateur astronomers that regularly hosts educational outreach events for the general public. The newly named Walter H. Haas Memorial Observatory is one of the key facilities where those events take place. It houses a 16-inch objective Schmidt–Cassegrain telescope that was donated by New Mexico State University.

“This is our dark sky site,” said ASLC President Tim Kostelecky before the ribbon-cutting. “The observatory is really the crown jewel of our outreach programs.”

Prior to the event, the observatory didn't have an official moniker – but rather had a descriptive title. Kostelecky said the society came up with an idea to name the observatory and began brainstorming ideas.

“What could we name this that would be proper?” he said. “We thought about the founders. We thought it would be great to honor Mr. Haas because he was an amazing astronomer.”

Mr. Haas and the late Clyde W. Tombaugh, known for discovering Pluto, were two of the founders in 1951.

“What Walter Haas had done as a local Las Cruces astronomer and founder of this society – and his influence he's had nation-wide and even globally – just has to be recognized,” Kostelecky said.

ASLC members said Mr. Haas' pioneering work really showed that amateurs could contribute meaningful, high-quality data through their own observations of Earth's nearest cosmic neighbors: the moon and the planets. And he helped, essentially by raising



Mary Alba, daughter of Walter Haas, attended the ceremony



Steve Barkes, ASLC Chair of the Haas Observatory, gives details on operation of the 16" Meade Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope.

the profile and legitimacy of amateurs, to pave the way for many successful amateur-professional collaborations.

“It was huge,” said Steve Barkes, ASLC observatory chair. “What Walter did for lunar and planetary observing was just incredible.”

In 1947, Mr. Haas published a small newsletter, “The Strolling Astronomer,” that would become the “Journal of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers.” He garnered several awards over the decades for his work, including the Presidential Award of the Astronomical League in 2004.

Mr. Haas continued to attend ASLC events well into his 90s. Barkes recounted the senior astronomer had a gift for asking great questions and was all-around “interesting guy.” “He was a real gentleman,” Barkes said. “He had a wry smile – and a great sense of humor. I miss him a lot.”

After the plaque dedication, attendees had hoped for a chance to view the so-called green comet in

a field of vision close to Mars. Unfortunately, cloud cover interfered with those plans.

But several attendees, including members of the public, said they were happy to be outside anyhow on a mild, southern New Mexico winter night. Isela and Philip Alvarez made the 30-minute drive north from Mesilla to attend the dedication. It was their first time at a skywatching event at Leasburg Dam State Park. Isela Alvarez said she enjoyed learning from ASLC members.

“They have so much knowledge – including from the people that have gone before them – and they’re here sharing it with us, as well,” she said.

For more information about the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces, visit: <https://aslc-nm.org>

*Diana Alba Soular is the niece of the late Walter H. Haas, and a freelance writer based in southern New Mexico.*

## Monthly Meeting Minutes January 2023

### John McCullough - Secretary

#### Call to Order:

Tim Kostecky, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC, the Society), called the January 2023 meeting to order at 7:02 pm on 27 January 2023 at the Mesilla Valley Radio Clubhouse. There were nineteen (19) members, spouses, and guests in attendance, as well as eight (8) attendees via ZOOM at the start of the meeting.

Tim welcomed the group to tonight’s meeting, marking the 73rd year of Society, and announced that the minutes from the November 2022 meeting (thanks to John McCullough, Secretary) were published in the January 2023 issue of the

Society newsletter, the High Desert Observer (HDO). Tim asked if there were any required additions, deletions, or corrections to the minutes as submitted. A motion to accept the November 2022 minutes as submitted was offered by Ed Montes and seconded by Gary Starkweather. There being no objections, the motion was passed by acclamation.

Tim introduced tonight’s speaker, Dr. Kelly Lepo.

#### Presentation:

Tonight’s Tombaugh Series speaker was Education and Outreach Scientist Dr. Kelly Lepo. Her topic was “Webb’s First Look at the Universe”. The James Webb Space Telescope (JWST), NASA’s latest flagship space observatory, released its first spectacular color images in July 2022. In her presentation, Dr. Lepo gave an update on Webb’s latest discoveries. She discussed infrared astronomy, why it’s important, the big questions that Webb is helping to answer, and what to expect in the rest of Webb’s first year

of science.

As an Education and Outreach Scientist at the Space Telescope Science Institute located at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD, Dr. Lepo supports outreach efforts for the James Webb Space Telescope. She received her PhD in Astronomy and Astrophysics from the University of Toronto. During her time in Canada, she made numerous local and national media appearances to talk about everything from the 2012 Mayan Apocalypse to the Super Blue Blood Moon. She has previously served as the Coordinator of the McGill Space Institute, taught physics at Gonzaga University, and helped build the Large Hadron Collider at CERN.

Three new/recent members were welcomed at tonight's meeting: Peter Williams was attending his first meeting since the COVID shutdown (he had joined just prior). Jane Himes is coming back to astronomy after an absence of fifteen years; she is very interested in observing. Allen Wong from Deming is attending his first meeting with the ASLCWest contingent; he likes observing and imaging.

#### Officer/Committee Reports:

##### Treasurer:

Recovering from a medical procedure, Trish Conley, Treasurer, was not present to provide a report. In her place, Steve Barkes reported on the status of the Society's accounts. Major expenditures last month were the insurance premium and website registration. He also noted that he had four (4) 2023 Royal Astronomical Society of Canada (RASC) handbooks (\$26) and three (3) RASC 2023 Calendars (\$18), available for purchase.

##### Outreach:

Stephen Wood, outreach coordinator, reported on recent events. A 3rd Quarter Moon event occurred at LDSP on 19 November. Moon Gaze on 03 December was clouded out and this month's Moon Gaze will be 28 January. Other 3rd Quarter Moon events at LDSP were planned on 17 December and 14 January. There will be star

parties at Tombaugh Elementary on 16 February and at Desert Hills Elementary on 23 February.

Centennial High School will hold a Science Day on 08 February. Tim Kostelecky, Rich Richins, and Ed Montes will host a booth for the Society.

Contact Stephen if you can support any or all events.

##### ASLCWest:

Mike Nuss, committee chairman, reported that last week's events at Rockhound State Park had lots of wind and City of Rocks State Park was very cold.

##### Tombaugh Observatory (NMSU):

Steve Barkes continues working to get keys and gate combinations for new coordinator, Preston Hager.

##### Apparel:

Rani Bush, committee chair, reported she continues to work on obtaining Adidas shirts, short-sleeved polos and long-sleeved ¼zips, for \$5 and \$10, respectively, through the Las Cruces Space Festival. The ASLC logo can be added for an additional \$12. She reported the Space Festival is planned for 30 March-01 April (there is also a Moon Gaze 01 April). The Festival is looking for astroimages, both physical (analog) and digital for display. The next organizational mixer will be the second week of February. Contact her for additional details.

##### Loaner Telescope Program:

Charles Turner has a telescope donated from Silver City to add to the program. Tim Kostelecky, program coordinator, reported he is considering establishing a "foster" effort for telescopes getting limited usage in the program.

##### The Walter Haas Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP):

Tim Kostelecky announced that the planned dedication of the observatory memorial plaque will take place on 11 February. There will also be an opportunity for observing the comet C/2022 E3 (ZTF) conjunction. There may also be a live remote

report for local media outlet KRWG by correspondent Johnny Coker during this event. A segment on observatory events aired on KRWG this morning.

**Old Business:**

Holiday Party – This year’s party was a success. Many thanks to Ed and Ruth Montes for hosting Society members.

Web page issues – Stephen Wood and Rich Richins have resolved the reported contact discrepancies and calendar conflicts.

There was no additional old business offered for discussion.

**New Business:**

Gary Starkweather offers to host a Messier Marathon in March. Details will follow.

There was no additional new business offered for discussion.

**Announcements:**

There were no additional announcements for the membership.

The January 2023 meeting was adjourned at 8:35 pm.

-Respectfully submitted:  
John McCullough  
Secretary, ASLC

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**ASLC Board of Directors**

		board@aslc-nm.org
President:	Tim Kostecky	president@aslc-nm.org
Vice President:	Ranimo Bush	vp@acslc-nm.org
Treasurer:	Patricia Conley	treasurer@aslc-nm.org
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Director:	Mark Gorman	director1@aslc-nm.org
Director:	Steve Barkes	director2@aslc-nm.org
Past Pres:	Ed Montes	PastPres2@aslc-nm.org

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**Committee Chairs**

ALCOR:	Patricia Conley	tconley00@hotmail.com
Calendar:	Stephen Wood	Outreach@aslc-nm.org
Education:	Rich Richins	education@aslc-nm.org
Loaner Program:	Tim Kostecky	LoanerScopes@aslc-nm.org
Observatories:		
Leasburg Dam:	Steve Barkes	LDSPObservatory@aslc-nm.org
Tombaugh:	Open	ASLCObservatory@aslc-nm.org
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HDO Editor:	Tim Kostecky	HDO@aslc-nm.org

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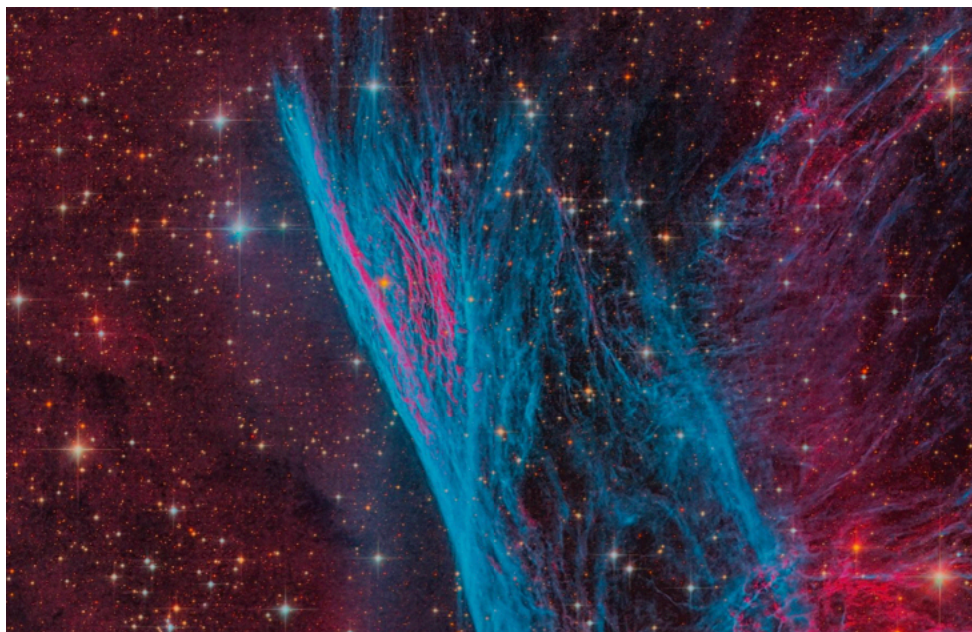


## Rosetta Nebula in Monoceros - Jeff Johnson



This is my first (and only) capture of the Rosette Nebula. I collected the data from my backyard here in Las Cruces using my Tak FS-60C telescope. The data are H-alpha (Ha) plus Lum,R,G,B. I use a method to combine the Ha with Lum and R in ratios that preserve the real color, and this is the result. More details on this capture are here: [http://jeffjastro.com/dso/Rosette\\_6Jan14.htm](http://jeffjastro.com/dso/Rosette_6Jan14.htm)

## NGC 2736 - Vela Supernova Remnant - Alex Woronow



OTA: CDK17; Camera: QHY600;p Observatory: Deep Sky West. Chile

## M44 - Beehive Cluster in Cancer - Mike Sherick



Imaged 2-16-23 from the Sagrada Observatory, Las Cruces, NM; Telescope: 24" f8 RC; CCD Camera: FLI-PL-09000 Gen II Filters. This was imaged as RGB. Seeing conditions continue to be poor in my area... It was fun to image this beautiful object in the night sky.

## Horsehead Nebula (IC434) in Orion - Mike Sherick



This image of IC434 "The Horsehead Nebula" is a reprocess from 2021 image data. My processing goal for this image was to bring out a bit more of the faint detail. Contrast is somewhat on the high side, but a secondary intent of the overall image was to enhance the dense gas cloud areas. Anyway... It was fun to process a close up of this popular object in Ha-RGB. The Ha tends to give a rather pink tone to the image, which I hope you don't mind.