



# The High Desert Observer

The Bulletin of the  
Astronomical Society of Las Cruces

Sharing the Universe with our  
Community for over 60 years



Photo by John McCullough

September, 2013

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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 and provides opportunities to work on Society and public educational projects. Members receive the *High Desert Observer*, our monthly newsletter, plus membership to the Astronomical League, which includes their quarterly publication, *Reflector*.

Individual Dues are \$30.00 per year

Family Dues are \$36.00 per year

Student (full-time) Dues are \$24.00

Dues include electronic delivery of the *HDO*. Prorated dues are available for new members. Dues are payable to ASLC with an application form or note to: Treasurer ASLC, PO Box 921, Las Cruces, NM 88004

*ASLC members are entitled to a \$5.00 (per year) Sky and Telescope magazine discount.*

### ASLC Board of Directors, 2013

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President: Chuck Sterling; [President@aslc-nm.org](mailto:President@aslc-nm.org)

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Treasurer: Patricia Conley; [Treasurer@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Treasurer@aslc-nm.org)

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Director Emeritus: Walter Haas

### Committee Chairs

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Loaner Telescope: Ron Kramer; [ronjkramer@aol.com](mailto:ronjkramer@aol.com)

Membership: John McCullough; [Secretary@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Secretary@aslc-nm.org)

Night Sky Network: OPEN

Observatory:

- Leasburg Dam: Ron Kramer; [ronjkramer@aol.com](mailto:ronjkramer@aol.com);  
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- Tombaugh: Steve Shaffer; [Director1@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Director1@aslc-nm.org)

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## September Meeting

Our September meeting will be held on Friday, September 27, in Room 77 at Doña Ana Community College, with the following schedule:

7:00 pm - 7:30 pm Show & Tell

7:30 pm - 8:00 pm Business Meeting

8:00 pm - 9:00 pm Guest Speaker & Presentation

This month our speaker will be Dr. Nancy Chanover from NMSU Astronomy Department.

## Elections

It's that time of year again. Our Nomination Committee (Tracy Stuart, Jerry Gaber and Robert Williams) will present the candidate list at the September meeting. If you are interested in holding the office of President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer or Director-at-Large, please contact the Committee.

## Update on Walter Haas

ASLC Founding Member, Walter Haas has moved to an assisted living facility, located at 2880 Northrise Drive, Room 209, Las Cruces, 88011. He welcomes visitors but it is suggested you contact his daughter, Mary Alba at [dmvalba@hotmail.com](mailto:dmvalba@hotmail.com) to arrange a visit.

## Outreach

Outreach is a very important part of ASLC. We are always looking for more volunteers to help us educate the public. Even if you do not have a portable telescope to bring to the events, please consider attending our public outreach programs to help answer questions, share knowledge and point out constellations in the sky.

## Events

ASLC hosts deep-sky viewing and imaging at our dark sky location in Upham. We also have public in-town observing sessions at both the International Delights Cafe (1245 El Paseo) and at Tombaugh Observatory (on the NMSU Campus). All sessions begin at dusk.

At our Leasburg Dam State Park Observatory, we hold monthly star parties. Located just 20 miles north of Las Cruces, we use our 16" Meade telescope to observe under rather dark skies. Please see *Calendar of Events* for specific dates and times.

## The President's column-inch...

The next Music and Stars in the Park at Leasburg Dam State Park will be on October 5th. Astronomy will be provided by ASLC; hopefully the otherwise welcome rainy spell we are experiencing will be tapering off by then.

Our September 27th presentation is by Dr. Nancy Chanover from the NMSU Astronomy Department, on a completely different subject from her last talk (but I really, really don't know what it is, yet).

Again, the Okie-Tex Star Party at Camp Billy Joe, adjacent to Kenton, Oklahoma, begins on September 28th, running for a full week, ending October 5th. Those of us planning on attending are gathering up our astronomy and camping gear and are planning menus (or trips to Boise City and its restaurants, some 35 miles away). Also stashed onboard will be bicycles, golf clubs, and RC airplanes; I'm pretty sure about those. I'll bring the chips...

At the last meeting, the club membership voted to pursue the option of having the 2015 Astronomical League Conference in Las Cruces. Ron Kramer later reported that our option was accepted by the AL. He will be working with the AL, ASLC, the City of Las Cruces, and others, to determine a date for the event, and once we get going on this he will be asking for volunteers to help make it a resounding success!

ASLC has received a set of new electronics and motors for the 16" LX200 installed at the Leasburg Dam State Park, and the mount is currently at Jerry Gaber's home being retrofitted with the upgraded system, manufactured by Sidereal Technology. The cost to the club is about half that of purchasing a used set of original electronics and motors. Jerry is documenting the installation, which contributed to a nice cost discount.

ASLC has also purchased a new projector for use at our monthly meetings and any other relevant ASLC events requiring a large-format display; the old projector will be used at the Leasburg Observatory to display images at the park amphitheater for the public, and especially for folks that might have trouble using the telescope eyepiece.

The set of eyepieces ordered for the Leasburg observatory are still mostly on backorder since May; I am about ready to consider alternatives as it may be a while before the order can be filled.

Have a Good Year; keep looking UP.

Chuck Sterling

## *Outreach Events for August, by Jerry McMahan*

### **Saturday, August 10; Music Under the Stars**

The Observatory was opened, at the Leasburg Park, for the Music Under the Stars program. Stan and Carol Chiochio, Chuck Sterling, Sid Webb and Jerry McMahan attended.

The cloudy weather continued. We were able to show a few people a thin crescent Moon and Saturn through clouds. Neither was seen cloud-free and most of the time the clouds were too thick to see them at all. The occasional view prevented the viewing from being a total bust, but we can't claim a great success either. We only had about an hour before there was nothing to be seen at all.

### **Saturday, August 10; Sky Safari at the Tombaugh Observatory**

Steve Shaffer opened the dome for the 12.5 inch Cassegrain. He had about the same luck as we had at Leasburg. In other words, clouds!! He stayed for a while before giving up.

### **Saturday August 17; Moongaze at International Delights**

Finally, we had an event that did not get clouded out. The transparency was not perfect, but we could, at least, see. The Moon was well past first quarter and Saturn is starting to get pretty low in the West.

We could barely see Titan, Saturn's largest moon, which is usually pretty easy. This is probably due to poor



transparency, but Saturn in closer to the Sun than to Earth, which might have something to do with it.

We did have a good crowd of spectators and more that the usual number of telescopes available. Moe Azzolini and his family brought their 6-inch Orion Dobsonian. Steve Shaffer brought his 4.5-inch Dob. Chuck Sterling had the usual 10-inch Schmidt Cassegrain. Danial Giron had an 80mm Orion refractor on a tracking mount. I, Jerry McMahan, brought the EXT Maksutov Cassegrain.

Chuck did get Neptune. It was faint, but visible. We also had Venus, early on. Venus still looks to be in nearly a full phase. It will show more of a crescent and become larger in the next few weeks. I started viewing the Moon at about 112 power, but the image was faint even at that relatively low magnification. I had to go to a lower magnification to obtain a brighter image since it was obvious that Daniel's 80mm was providing a better view than the EXT 125.

Even with the limited transparency, it was a good evening for all of us. After all, we could see Titan.

***Calendar of Events: September 2013 - December 2013 (Mountain Time - 24 hr. clock)***

SEP	14	20:00	OUTREACH EVENT; MOONGAZE; International Delights
	18	14:27	Venus - Saturn Conjunction
	19	05:13	Full Moon
	22	14:44	Autumnal Equinox
	24	16:29	Mercury - Spica Conjunction
		21:39	Moon - Aldeberan Conjunction
	26	21:56	Last Quarter Moon
	27	19:00	ASLC MONTHLY MEETING
	28	20:00	City of Rocks Star Party (contact <a href="mailto:matthewdwilson@q.com">matthewdwilson@q.com</a> )
OCT	03	07:27	Uranus Opposition
	04	18:35	New Moon
	05	16:00	OUTREACH EVENT; MUSIC & THE STARS; Leasburg Dam Observatory
	05	19:30	City of Rocks Star Party (contact <a href="mailto:matthewdwilson@q.com">matthewdwilson@q.com</a> )
	06	16:28	Moon - Mercury Conjunction
	06	22:30	Moon - Saturn Conjunction
	11	17:02	First Quarter Moon
	11	20:00	Tombaugh Observatory at NMSU; Open House
	12	19:30	OUTREACH EVENT; MOONGAZE; International Delights
	14	21:44	Mars - Regulus Conjunction
	16	12:26	Venus - Antares Conjunction
	18	17:38	Full Moon
		17:51	Penumbral Lunar Eclipse
	21	04:17	Orionids Meteor Shower
	25	19:00	ASLC MONTHLY MEETING
	26	17:41	Last Quarter Moon
	26	19:30	City of Rocks Star Party (contact <a href="mailto:matthewdwilson@q.com">matthewdwilson@q.com</a> )
NOV	01		Venus; greatest eastern elongation
	01-02		New Mexico Star Party, Sevilleta National Wildlife Preserve ( <a href="http://www.nmstarparty2013.net">www.nmstarparty2013.net</a> )
	02	19:30	City of Rocks Star Party (contact <a href="mailto:matthewdwilson@q.com">matthewdwilson@q.com</a> )
	03	05:50	New Moon
	05	03:45	South Taurid Meteor Shower
	08	19:00	Tombaugh Observatory at NMSU; Open House
	09	19:00	OUTREACH EVENT; MOONGAZE; International Delights
	09	22:57	First Quarter Moon



NOV 12	03:02	North Taurid Meteor Shower
17	08:16	Full Moon
17	09:19	Leonid Meteor Shower
17	18:59	Mercury; greatest western elongation
18	13:00	Moon - Aldeberan Conjunction
23	19:00	City of Rocks Star Party (contact matthewdwilson@q.com)
25	12:28	Last Quarter Moon
29	09:43	Moon - Spica Conjunction
30	19:00	City of Rocks Star Party (contact matthewdwilson@q.com)
DEC 02	17:22	New Moon
06	19:00	Tombaugh Observatory at NMSU; Open House
07	18:00	HOLIDAY DINNER; Lorenzo's Italian Restaurant, Pan-Am Plaza
09	08:12	First Quarter Moon
13	22:30	Geminid Meteor Shower
15	19:45	Moon - Aldeberan Conjunction
17	02:28	Full Moon
21	10:11	Winter Solstice
22	07:00	Ursid Meteor Shower
25	06:48	Last Quarter Moon

Be sure to visit our web site for the latest updates: [www.aslc-nm.org](http://www.aslc-nm.org)

### ***Minutes, August 2013 ASLC Meeting***

#### **Show & Tell**

There was not a prepared topic for this evening's session. As tonight's Presentation will be of Society member observing equipment, the pre-meeting portion was dedicated to questions and discussion regarding individual telescopes that were already set up in the meeting room.

#### **Call to Order**

Chuck Sterling, President, Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC, the Society), called the August business meeting to order at 7:25 pm, 23 August 2013, Room 77, Doña Ana Community College, Las Cruces, New Mexico.

#### **President's Comments**

Chuck Sterling, President, welcomed the group to tonight's meeting. He noted that tonight's presentation will consist of a rather extensive equipment demonstration and possible lengthy discussion during New Business, thus a slightly earlier Call to Order and abbreviated committee reports tonight. There were several visitors attending tonight's meeting. Winifred Janke, a friend of members Stan and Carol Chiochio, was attending her first meeting and intends to join. Adrian Collier had found the Society via an Internet search and is joining tonight. Ben, Vince Dovydaitis' grandson visiting from New Hampshire, has attended meetings before. Glen Berkshier, Robert Brink (a frequent visitor joining tonight), and John Serchey(?) were also visiting. Chuck asked that all members and visitors check in on the sign-in sheets.

#### **Secretary's Report**

The Secretary, John McCullough, reported that the minutes for the July meeting were submitted for publication in the August issue of the Society newsletter, the High Desert Observer (HDO). Tracy Stuart moved that the minutes be accepted as submitted, Vince Dovydaitis seconded. The motion passed by acclamation and there was not an additional Secretary's report.

#### **Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer, Trish Conley, reported on the status and balances of the Society's accounts, effective 31 July. She also noted she had written a check for \$100 for the Doña Ana Arts Council's 2013 Renaissance Arts Faire. There was no additional Treasurer's report.

## Committee Reports

### ASLC Observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park (LDSP)

Jerry Gaber, Co-Chairman, reported there will not be a public event on 31 August, but he is considering opening the Observatory to Society members. The "Go To" system for the 16" Meade telescope continues to not function well and may require electronics repairs costing \$800-\$1600. He has contacted the NMSU Astronomy Department (the 16" is on permanent loan from them) and they are OK with using a different, i.e., less expensive, guidance and control system for the telescope.

### Apparel

Ron Kramer, acting Chairman, has items available for purchase. He would like to further deplete the available stock before ordering additional items. Also, a full-time/permanent chair for this activity is needed.

### Nominations

A 2014 Officer Nominating Committee should have been formed at the July general meeting. Three (3) Society members in good standing are required to form this committee. Robert Williams, Tracy Stuart and Jerry Gaber volunteered to submit a slate of nominees at the September meeting.

### Holiday Party

Several members have inquired about holding this year's party somewhere other than the EAA hangar. Several options were discussed and Lorenzo's Italian Restaurant on 07 December drew the most interest. Chuck Sterling asked for an indication of interest and twenty-one (21) of the members present indicated acceptance. Ron Kramer will pursue this option.

There were no additional committee or officer reports.

### Old Business

1. Okie-Tex Star Party, 2013 – This event starts 28 September. Contact Steve Barkes for details.
2. State-wide Star Party, 2013 - Ron Kramer has been working on this event with the TAAS (The Albuquerque Astronomy Society) president. The planned date is 01-02 November at the Sevilleta National Wildlife Refuge north of Socorro. Participating clubs are expected to include Albuquerque, Silver City, Carlsbad, El Paso, Alamogordo, Socorro, and Las Cruces. It is expected that there will be no attendance cost to participants other than transportation (if not using housing at the Refuge). A website should be active with details within a month at [nmstarparty2013free.net](http://nmstarparty2013free.net). This has potential to be the largest star party in New Mexico. 8-10 Society members have expressed interest in attending.

There was no additional old business for discussion.

### New Business

1. Treasury Audit - Trish Conley noted an audit of the Society's books is required per the By-Laws. Ron Kramer volunteered to perform the audit.
2. 2014 Budget - A proposed budget was worked out at the July Board of Directors meeting. This budget will be presented to the membership in the High Desert Observer for review and consideration. Voting on the budget will take place before the end of the year.
3. ALCon 2015 – Ron Kramer and Judy Kile attended ALCon 2013 in Atlanta, GA, Ron as editor of the AL quarterly, *Reflector*, and council member. Both had a good time. Ron was also interested in seeing what is involved in hosting an ALCon (Astronomical League Convention), possibly in 2015 or 2016 (ALCon 2014 will be in San Antonio, TX, and ALCon 2017 will be in Casper, WY, in conjunction with a total solar eclipse). The Society had agreed to tender an offer to host an ALCon at the June meeting. The AL Council tentatively agreed to hold a future ALCon in Las Cruces pending approval of Society members and acceptance of the proposal by the Council. Ron sees the advantages of Las Cruces as a convention site including its dark skies, ability to host

a convention with up to 400 attendees, and being the home of the US space program. Ron put together a brief proposal for July or August 2015 (despite the New Mexico “monsoon season”) because the new moon occurs in mid-July and mid-August. Some things Ron believes must be considered are:

- A venue for lectures will be required, possibly NMSU facilities
- Housing in 2 or 3 local hotels will be needed, depending on number of registrants
- Vendor exhibition space (Meade, Orion, etc. will be invited) will be needed (NMSU preferred; Las Cruces Convention Center another option)
- There will be a “Star-B-Que” dinner on Friday evening, August 14 and a Banquet (including dinner and awards ceremony) on Saturday, August 15. The Star-B-Que could be held at Leasburg Dam State Park, with an observing session immediately following; the Banquet could be at the new Saratoga Room (owned by Lorenzo’s Italian) or at the Convention Center if more space is needed (catered by Lorenzo’s)
- One or two tours will be arranged (options include White Sands Missile Range Museum, SpacePort America, Sunspot Observatory, Roddenberry Planetarium, VLA)
- One or two tours/outings for spouses, etc. will be arranged (options include Old Mesilla, the Outlet Mall in El Paso, etc.)
- Transport will be arranged (for those flying in) from El Paso Airport to Las Cruces hotels, the hotels to the lecture venue and the vendor venue, the hotels to the Star-B-Que and Banquet and the tours
- At least 20 speakers will have to be arranged for Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday (Candace Grey, Jon Holtzman, Fred Pilcher, Bert Stevens and others) who are willing and able to give a scientific presentation. If Walter Haas is still able, he might give a very short (a few minutes) talk at the Banquet (he is an Honorary Member of AL)
- Possibly coordinate activities and get support from El Paso, Alamogordo, Silver City and Albuquerque societies
- Possibly arrange corporate sponsors; Chamber of Commerce and Convention Center support.

Ron concluded his presentation by noting the Atlanta society has thirty-five (35) members and he believes the Society could host an ALCon with 20-30 members volunteering. Also, the AL provides \$3000 in seed money to “jump-start” ALCon planning. Discussion of the issue followed, concluding with Ron asking for a show of hands of those present how many members would commit to being actively involved on committees to host an ALCon – eighteen (18) members raised their hands. Ron Kramer moved that the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces determine to host ALCon 2015. There were seventeen (17) ayes, no (0) opposed.

There was no additional new business for discussion.

### **Announcements/Awards**

Robert Williams reported that the new radio sundial at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory’s Very Large Array (VLA) west of Magdalena, NM, will be dedicated on 30 September. A “behind-the-scenes” tour of the VLA may be available to Society members at that time.

Robert also noted that the Enchanted Skies Star Party sponsored by the Socorro club will be 02 05 October. This event will include viewing at the Magdalena Ridge Observatory and the Socorro club’s dark site at Ft. Craig. Camping sites will be available.

As noted earlier, a check has been written for the 2013 Renaissance Arts Faire on 02 03 November in Young Park. Volunteers to set up, tear down and man the Society’s booth that weekend are needed. Eleven (11) members indicated interest.

The 2013 White Sands Star Party will be 05 October (one night, camping only). Details are available on the Society’s yahoo group.

There were no additional announcements made.

Jerry Gaber moved to adjourn the business portion of tonight’s meeting, Wes Baker seconded. The business meeting concluded at 8:21 pm.

### **Presentation**

This month’s presentation, a Show & Tell of Society member viewing equipment, was started off by Chuck Sterling, current Society President, describing the three (3!) set-ups he had brought, including his imaging rig.

Steve Shaffer, Jerry McMahan, Rich Richins and Ed Montes followed with their various telescopes, all describing advantages and disadvantages of the equipment. The session was then opened for general discussion and questions.

The August meeting of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces concluded at 9:10 pm.

-Respectfully submitted by John McCullough, ASLC Secretary

***New Mexico State Star Party (November 1 - 2, 2013)***, by Ron Kramer

All New Mexico astronomical societies and astronomers are invited to join the upcoming star party, to be held at Sevilleta National Wildlife Preserve (between Sororro and Albuquerque). The official dates are (Friday/Saturday) November 1 - 2, but if you wish, you can arrive as early as (Thursday) October 31 and leave as late as (Sunday) November 3.

General information as follows (for further details, please visit [www.nmstarparty2013.net](http://www.nmstarparty2013.net)):

- You can bring your RV's (no hookups)
- Housing is available (either dorms or casitas) for \$40 per night (add \$10 for linens)
- Each night will have a group cookout (bring your own food; cooking facilities are in each room)
- Guest speaker, Tom Prettyman from NASA will discuss the DAWN spacecraft mission to Vesta
- Very dark skies (Albuquerque light dome is blocked by mountains)

Participating organizations include:

- Amateur Astronomers Group
- Apache Point Observatory
- Astronomical Society of Las Cruces
- Carlsbad High School Planetarium
- Clayton Astronomy Club
- Clovis Astronomy Club
- El Valle Astronomers
- Lea County Astronomical Society
- National Public Observatory
- National Solar Observatory
- New Mexico Tech Astronomy Club
- Pajarito Astronomers
- Rio Rancho Astronomical Society
- Roswell Astronomy Club
- San Juan College Planetarium
- Santa Fe Community College Planetarium
- Silver City Astronomical Society
- Space Center Museum
- Sun City Astronomers
- The Alamogordo Astronomy Club
- The Albuquerque Astronomical Society (TAAS)
- Very Large Array Radio Telescope