



# Snake River Skies

A monthly publication of The Magic Valley Astronomical Society, member Astronomical League

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Visit us at <http://www.mvas.net>

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Yearly membership is \$10 per person, \$15 per family, \$6 per student. Benefits include magazine discounts to Sky & Telescope and Astronomy, club activities, and Astronomical League benefits.

## Dec 9th Meeting: Club Raffle, Fun, & Elections

Join us in our regular December meeting for our annual fundraising raffle, with prizes and games for everyone. Each member of the MVAS gets a free raffle ticket with additional tickets available for \$1. Come to win some great prizes from local area sponsors including the Imagination Station, Barnes & Noble, Kurt's Hallmark & Pharmacy, Elmer's, Chilli's, and many others.



by participating in some of the games. Lots of astronomy fun and learning for all ages.

If you have a prize to donate, please contact Jay Sneddon, 736-2447. We could always use baked goods and other such donations to raffle off. All proceeds go to the Magic Valley Astronomical Society.

Everyone attending the meeting, public included, can win free raffle tickets & prizes

## From the President - Tom Gilbertson

### Message from the President

With all the hoopla regarding dimpled ballots, butterflies and other numerous problems with our national election this may not be the best time to consider that our club must also hold its annual election. If you are a paid member of the MVAS please review the ballot enclosed with this newsletter and mail it back or be prepared to exercise your right to vote at our next meeting.

I did not get an overwhelming response to my appeal to those wishing to be officers next year, in fact I did not get any. Any-

one interested in participating is welcome and the incoming officers will need help in forming committees to plan next year's events.

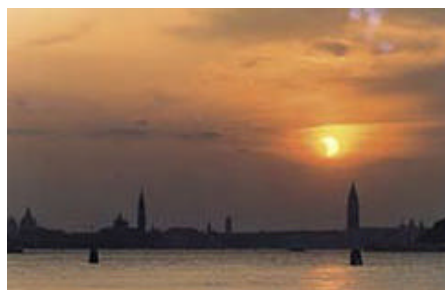


Fun night will follow the annual meeting. There have been a number of generous donations from the community for this event. Plan to learn some new facts about Astronomy from our interactive trivia game and have a chance to win some neat prizes in our annual raffle.

Tom Gilbertson, President

## Christmas Solar Eclipse - Herrett Center will be observing!

Did you know that something very special is happening on the 25th of this month? No, we're not talking about Christmas, but the last eclipse of the millenium! On



Christmas morning from 8:17 to 10:49am, the Moon will partially block the light of the Sun. This event will be visible from the entire U.S. (weather permitting, of course). Faulkner Planetarium staff members will have special solar telescopes set up at the Herrett Center for safe, close-up viewing of this rare event. The Herrett Center store is also selling Eclipse Glasses that allow safe viewing for only \$1.25. They make the perfect stocking stuffer! Either way, don't miss this unique celestial event--Idaho won't see a better solar eclipse until June of 2002. --Chris Anderson, Planetarium Production Specialist

## Solar Eclipse News from *Sky & Telescope*

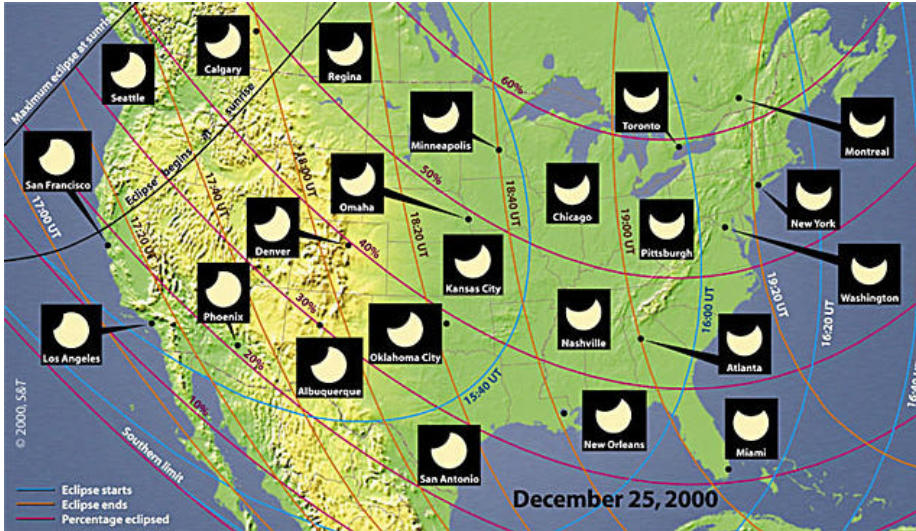
During the partial eclipse of the Sun on December 25, 2000, the Moon passes slightly north of the Sun's center as seen from nearly all parts of North America south of the Arctic Circle.

covered as seen from remote parts of northern Canada.

No place on Earth will see a "central" eclipse - total or annular - though at its maximum (17:35 Universal Time) about 72 percent of the Sun's diameter will be

Skywatchers will see different-sized bites missing from the Sun's disk at mid-eclipse, at different times, depending on where they are in North America. For example, 56 percent of the Sun's di-

*(Continued on page 4)*



## Club Officer Ballot for 2001

The following is a list of the necessary offices of the club and nominees. Each nominee has been contacted and has agreed to volunteer enough time to carry out the office they are nominated for. Write in space is available. This must be brought to the annual meeting or mailed to the Secretary, MVAS P.O. Box 5101, Twin Falls, ID 83303 prior to the meeting.

**President**

Nominee: Tom Gilbertson

**Vice President**

Nominee: Jay Sneddon

**Secretary**

Nominee: Rick Widmer

**Treasurer**

Nominee: Forrest Ray

\_\_\_\_ I accept the list of nominees as officers for next year.

OR

\_\_\_\_ I would like to cast votes for the following individuals for the offices indicated

\_\_\_\_\_

Any discussion, other nominees or other business regarding these offices will be held at our next meeting starting at 7:00 pm Saturday December 9, 2000, Herrett Center Classroom.

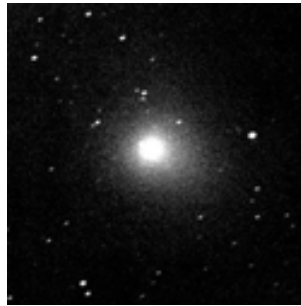
## A Holiday Comet-Visible mid-December

On November 18, a Japanese amateur astronomer named Syogo Utsunomiya was searching the heavens with a pair of binoculars. In the southern part of the sky, he noticed a moderately bright, fuzzy object moving southward. Utsunomiya reported his discovery and several experienced southern-hemisphere observers started hunting through the skies to see if they could find it, too. But they could not. A week passed without any recovery of the comet.

On the morning of November 26, 80-year-old New Zealand observer Albert Jones set up his 3-inch (78-millimeter) reflector to look for variable star T Apodis (T Aps for short). He had tried to spot the star on Friday morning, but dawn had arrived before he “got around to it.” On Sunday morning, he was star-hopping to his target when he noticed a small patch of light moving slowly against the background stars. “Had I looked at T Aps on Friday morning when the comet was far from T Aps, I would not have bothered with it on Sunday morning,” he said.

At the International Astronomical Union’s Minor Planet Center, Brian Marsden and Dan Green suspected that the object Jones had reported could be the same as Utsunomiya’s, even though the two observed positions were a full 90 degrees apart. Assuming the two objects were the same, they calculated a rough estimate of where the comet would appear in the sky during the following days.

On Sunday evening, Alan Gilmore and Glen Bayne used the predictions to look for the comet with a



40-inch (1-meter) telescope at the Mt. John University Observatory in New Zealand. Gilmore and Bayne recovered the comet and found that it had moved another six degrees since being spotted by Jones 18 hours earlier.

From these observations, Marsden found that the comet was probably nearest to Earth on November 25 at about 26 million miles (41 million kilometers) away. The comet is moving toward the sun and will likely reach perihelion on December 26. At that time, it will be about 30 million miles (48 million kilometers) from the sun, approximately the same distance as Mercury. According to the current calculations, **the comet will not be visible to northern observers until mid-December**. But with further observations and refining of its orbit, the comet’s predicted path may change.

**Comet C/2000 W1 (Utsunomiya-Jones) is only expected to brighten to about 7th magnitude**, which is too dim for naked-eye viewing, but it should be easily seen with binoculars and modest telescopes. It will be the brightest since the summer showing of Comet LINEAR. However, some astronomers warn that this comet may not survive to perihelion or beyond. Comet C/1997 N1 (Tabur) had an absolute magnitude identical to Comet Utsunomiya-Jones and disappeared just four weeks after discovery, well before reaching perihelion. Comet watchers will have to wait and see how the new comet fares.

This is the second comet discovery by both Utsunomiya and Jones. Utsunomiya discovered Comet C/1997 T1. Jones, a variable star observer for more than 50 years, found his first comet in 1946 — also while searching for a variable star. The new find has made Jones the oldest comet discoverer alive.

## Two New Moons Discovered for Saturn

Last month, the number of moons known to orbit Saturn was bumped from 18 to 22 when a team of astronomers announced the discovery of four tiny satellites far from the planet. Last week, they raised the number again — to 24.

The recent discoveries have made the Saturnian family

the largest in the solar system. (Uranus has 21 known moons and Jupiter has 17.) Astronomers continue to follow several other potential satellites to determine whether they orbit the Ringed Planet or are just passers-by. This means the Saturn moon count may continue to rise over the next few months.



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## **Solar Eclipse News *continued***

*(Continued from page 2)*

ameter will be covered for residents of New York City at 12:47 p.m., while those in Los Angeles get only 15 percent coverage at 8:23 a.m.

This eclipse belongs to saros series 122. Eclipses in a given series recur every 6,585.3211 days -18 years plus 10 or 11 days (depending on the number of leap days in between). December's event is a close replay of an eclipse that occurred three saros intervals ago, also in North America, on November 23, 1946.

Apart from the geometric similarity of the two events, the year 2000, like 1946, falls near the peak of the 11-year sunspot cycle. So Edward Oravec's prediction in the November 1946 *Sky & Telescope* is quite apt for this year's event:

"There may be a number of sunspots, for maximum is approaching, and the Moon may be seen in contact with some spots."

## **MVAS CLUB CALENDAR**

### **NEXT CLUB MEETING:**

Saturday December 9th 7PM at the College of Southern Idaho Herrett Center Classroom. Club fundraiser. Raffle, games and officer elections. All club members get a free raffle ticket. Public is welcome and encouraged to participate.

*The Magic Valley Astronomical Society meets the second Saturday of each month at the College of Southern Idaho, Herrett Center Classroom at 7pm. Star Party at the Herrett Center follows.*

Visit us at <http://www.mvas.net>

*Please submit web site materials to [mvas@mvas.net](mailto:mvas@mvas.net) We welcome photos and other materials to post.*