



# Snake River Skies

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

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## Feb 10th Meeting: Dark Sky Ordinance & Messier Marathon

Dick Shotwell, who recently joined the Magic Valley Astronomical Society will discuss his work on establishing a Dark Sky Ordinance for Twin Falls County. The superfluous lighting problem actually caught the attention of the county commissioners when local residents had been complaining of intrusive light on their property. Dick has been investigating ordinance regulations that will work for the Magic Valley.

Jay Hartwell will discuss observing awards our members can to earn through the Astronomical League. Tom Gilbertson and Chris Sutton will go over March's annual Messier Marathon.

The club meeting starts at 7pm Saturday February 10th in the Herrett Center classroom, College of Southern Idaho.

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.

## From the President—Tom Gilbertson

### Star Party at St. Edwards

In early January, St. Edwards Catholic Church invited us to present an impromptu star gazing session in conjunction with their evening youth night classes. Jay Sneddon gave a great talk about what we would be viewing. Afterwards the sky party looked like a scene from a Norman Rockwell painting. Kids showing their playful vigor ran around the yard with volunteer chaperones chasing after them to try to keep some order. Long lines formed behind the scopes, and I was impressed by the patience shown by the larger number of kids and adults as they waited their turn to take in the views. We were not lacking for targets as Venus, Jupiter, Saturn and the Orion Nebula showed brightly.



I thought to myself this was a worthwhile evening, but the interest of most of the viewers was common to what I have seen at many public star party sessions. The public in general is interested, but few show the "fire in the belly" of a true Astronomy nut like many of us.



Then a lone boy came up to my scope and asked to have a look. He was dressed in warm looking red snow suit and immediately knew we were looking at Jupiter and it's

## Message from the President *cont*

four Galilean moons. He asked to see Saturn, then the Orion Nebula, then the Pleiades. This boy had waited patiently for the crowds to clear so he could spend extra time talking to us



M42 the Orion Nebula

and getting the most of what was available to see. My spirits brightened as I realized there are still the few boys and girls that catch "the Astronomy disease" as Wallace Blacker calls it. They will ask the questions and possibly someday invest in the commitment to try to satisfy their insatiable hunger to understand what is up in our skies. Thanks to all that brought scopes and helped with that event.

### Coming Club Events

Be sure to make our next meeting February 10, when Dick Shotwell presents some information they will effect all of us. He is in the process of trying to get a lighting ordinance passed to help preserve some of our dark skies. Jay Hartwell will also present

information about observing award certificates available through the Astronomical League.

### Thanks to the Herrett Center...again

We owe a special thanks to Jim Woods, manager of the Herrett Center for the generous donation of a secondary mirror for our 6 inch loaner scope. Rick Widmer our chief engineer on the project has made the final assembly and reports the views from the scope are impressive.

### Eyepieces Needed

We now need a 1.25" eyepiece between 10 mm and 30 mm. If anyone has one they wish to donate to the club please contact us.

### March Marathon

Remember March is March marathon month. Be sure to stock up on warm clothes and come to our March Messier review meeting on March 10, 2001. Thanks for being a member of the Magic Valley Astronomical Society.

Tom Gilbertson,  
President

## New! The Astronomy Discussion Page



Chris Greene, a new MVAS member, and Karl Sloth of Twin Falls, have started a new Internet discussion site dedicated to amateur astronomers around the world. Chris and Karl have successfully built one of the largest guitar discussion forums on the net (see <http://www.fenderforum.net>) and are aiming to duplicate their success with the Astronomy Discussion Page.

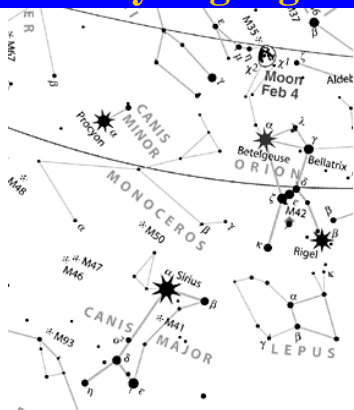
astronomyforum.net) currently has 16 forums including areas to discuss gear, observing, imaging, a beginner's corner, an 'ask the professionals' forum, and, perhaps of most interest to MVAS, a clubs forum.

The clubs forum is a place for individual clubs around the world to start a topic about their club and have a location on the Internet for their members to meet and discuss upcoming events, announcements, etc. The ADP is a moderated forum, thus safe for the entire family to participate. Come join the ADP and share your experiences with your fellow amateur astronomers!

The Astronomy Discussion Page ([www](http://www)).

## Sky Highlights for February 2001

Sirius is by far the brightest star in all the heavens. Right now, Venus and Jupiter shine even brighter than Sirius in the early-evening hours. But you can tell the star from these planets by how much more it twinkles. Sometimes its light is even broken into different colors by turbulence in Earth's atmosphere.

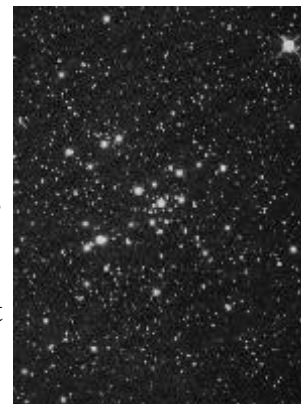


Sirius -- often called the Dog Star -- sits atop the bright pattern of Canis Major, but there is another Dog and another Dog Star. Canis Minor is the Lesser Dog, and Procyon is the lesser Dog Star. As our all-sky map shows, Procyon is located well to the upper left of Sirius. Along with Orion's fire-colored Betelgeuse, Sirius and Procyon form a star pattern called the Winter Triangle.

One reason Sirius and Procyon look so bright is that they are among the closest of all the stars. Sirius lies

8.6 light-years, and Procyon 11.4 light-years, away from Earth. If you show them to kids whose ages are about 9 and 11 you can describe them as their birthday stars -- the light they see tonight left Sirius and Procyon around the time these children were being born.

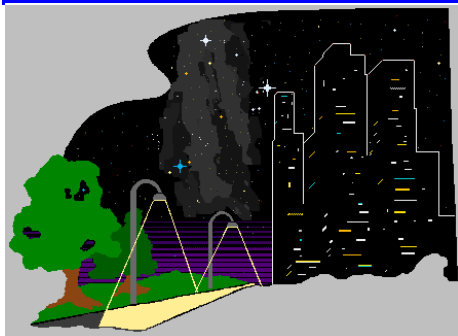
Want an easy-to-find star cluster in this part of the heavens? Then use binoculars or a telescope to look about 4 degrees (the width of two fingers at arm's length, or part of a binocular field) south of Sirius. There you will meet up with the wonderful little cluster M41.



*M41 in Canis Major*

Venus is so bright and high in the west at nightfall this month that it will probably be reported as a UFO by some people who know nothing about astronomy! The planet sets about four hours after the Sun in early February, and more than three hours after sunset by month's end. Venus reaches its very

## Dark Sky Tips



The following is information that is presented by the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) at their Web site [www.darksky.org](http://www.darksky.org).

This sight contains a number of helpful hints about your own lighting and how to educate others about the wasteful misuse of outdoor lighting. The following is a summary they present.

“Dark skies are compatible with quality lighting they require such lighting, in fact. Poor lighting has many adverse effects, including glare, clutter, light trespass, energy waste, and light pollution.

Dark Skies are compatible with safe, secure, and functional nighttime environment. As with astronomers, the public needs and deserves a quality nighttime environment. Glare, clutter, light trespass, energy waste, and light pollution are a major threat to that environment....”

- Use the right amount of light, not overkill.
- Shield the light, so it goes down, not up or sideways
- Use time controls when possible
  - Use low pressure sodium sources whenever possible, not only does it not affect most of the visible spectrum, but it is also the most energy efficient light source.



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## February Sky Highlights *cont*

*(Continued from page 3)*

brightest in late February, when it is truly breathtaking.

Jupiter and Saturn are an impressive pair very high in the south as darkness falls. They begin separating during February. This will be the last month for about 20 years that they will fit together in a binocular field. Their bright globes, their many moons, and Saturn's rings remain a visual banquet for telescopic observers.

Mars is best seen as morning twilight comes. On February 15th the brightening planet is just below the Moon around dawn. Mars is extremely close to the star Beta (b) Scorpii in the predawn hours of February 21st. The planet looks a bit bigger in telescopes than it did a few months ago, but it is still too small to properly show any surface markings.

*From Sky & Telescope's web site ([www.skypub.com](http://www.skypub.com))*

## MVAS CLUB CALENDAR

### NEXT CLUB MEETING:

Saturday Feb 10th. Topics will be efforts to pass a Dark Sky Ordinance for the Magic Valley by Dick Shotwell.

Saturday March 10th, March MVAS meeting.

Saturday March 24th, Boise Astronomical Society Messier Marathon at Bruneau Dunes State Park.

March 30-31st, Messier Marathon at Jerome Rod & Gun Club.

April 28th, Astronomy Day at the Herrett Center.

June 22-24th, Craters of the Moon Star Party, Craters of the Moon National Monument

August 17-19th, Idaho Star Party, Bruneau Dunes State Park

*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.*