



Snake River Skies

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

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August Meeting: Paul Verhage Launches Balloon to Study Perseids

Paul Verhage returns to the Magic Valley to launch a high altitude balloon to study the cosmic activity from the Perseid Meteor Shower. We will meet at the Herrett Center Classroom 7pm, August 11th, to introduce the project. We will witness the actual balloon launch and be able to track it during the star party. See you there!

From the President: Tom Gilbertson

There is some urgency this month to get this newsletter out. The **Idaho Star Party** will be held August 17 and 18th at the Bruneau Dunes State Park. **For those wishing to pre-register you need to fill in the attached form and send it in prior to August 1st.** There is no time to procrastinate. There are a lot of fun events and presentations planned and Boise Astronomical Society President Joann Leone has assured me there will be clear skies those nights.

I was fortunate to be able to attend the **Montana Starwatch** sponsored by the Southwest

Montana Astronomical Society. I was unfortunate to be there the night of a rainstorm. It was hard to be too disappointed though after remembering the smoky skies from last year's forest fires. This year the rains had lowered the fire caution to moderate. Besides although I missed some sky viewing I still took time out to take my annual trip to fascinating Virginia City, a short drive away. The Montanan's are difficult to discourage and they still had their impressive collection of handmade telescopes, and evening presentations. At our next meeting I will show some pictures of some of the innovative tele-

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Tyler Shropshire, Club Telescope Caretaker, 733-3449

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

Write to MVAS, P.O. Box 5101, Twin Falls, ID 83303. 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. A 6" telescope is available for members to checkout.

Porcupine Springs Star Party

On Friday, July 20th, the Magic Valley Astronomical Society put on a star party for the Filer LDS youth at Porcupine Springs in the South Hills. We had six telescopes operating for over 160 kids. Much thanks to Melanie, Forrest, the Shropshires, Rick, Phil, and Jay for making the short notice trip.

Jay Sneddon gave the introduction to Astronomy talk, stalling for time so the clouds could clear. Mars peeked out finally. Soon the rest of the skies opened up to gorgeous views of the Milky Way.

Earlier that day, the kids had hiked over 15 miles so most retired quickly to bed. However, a few kids and many of the adult leaders stayed late asking lots of questions and learning constellations. We had a great observing session lasting until close to 2am.

Virtually no light pollution exists at Porcupine springs other than a campfire or two down the road. If we can get some better horizons, this may be a great spot for a future summertime club outing.

Club Telescope Caretaker Appointed

MVAS is pleased to announce that Tyler Shropshire has agreed to be the new caretaker of the MVAS 6" Telescope. Tyler has designed a checkout system for club members who would like to borrow the scope.

The MVAS 6" telescope comes equipped with a telrad and an eyepiece. Telrad finder charts are also available for checkout. If you would like more information about checking out the 6" MVAS Club telescope, contact Tyler at 733-3449.

East Coast Fireball Most Likely Exploding Asteroid

A large and brilliant flash of moving light accompanied by a trail of smoke and seen high in the sky across a wide swath of eastern North America on Monday evening, July 23, was most likely an asteroid that exploded during a fiery plunge through Earth's atmosphere, scientists say.

The early evening fireball was seen as far north as Toronto and as far south as southern Virginia. Scientists at the American Meteor Society (AMS), who monitor such events, now suspect the event was centered in the skies above Pennsylvania.

Sonic Booms Heard

"Based upon a preliminary review of the data, this appears to be a single fireball event," said Jim Richardson of the AMS. "The sonic booms were generated as the fireball reached lower altitudes, below about 20 miles, and continued to decelerate."



Good Size

Though it was broad daylight, the fireball was described variously as being as bright as the full Moon or even the setting Sun. Others said it looked like an airplane on fire. And

pick your color: Some saw orange and yellow. Others described it more patriotically as a white object with a red tail and blue flashes. Though it was broad daylight, the fireball was described variously as being as bright as the full Moon or even the setting Sun. Others said it looked like an airplane on fire. And pick your color: Some saw orange and yellow. Others described it more patriotically as a white object with a red tail and blue flashes.

Not a Meteor

Earlier news reports had suggested the fireball was associated with a meteor shower, but this is unlikely. Meteor showers involve a rain of small debris -- typically objects no larger than a grain of sand -- left behind by a comet that swung through the inner solar system but did not threaten Earth.

A Scorched Cornfield

Nor was the event likely responsible for a scorched cornfield in Salladasburg, Pennsylvania, west of Williamsport, as was reported by CNN and ABCNEWS.com. In fact, there are no confirmed reports of any meteorites from the event. A meteorite is a meteor or asteroid fragment that reaches the ground.



Each red dot shows the location of an eyewitness to the brilliant fireball. Taken as a whole, their reports suggest the meteoroid entered the Earth's atmosphere above North Carolina and traveled north-northwest to the Canadian border. "X" marks the scorched cornfield outside Salladasburg, PA, where a fragment may have landed. (Fireball Data Center, International Meteor Organization) and Joe Rao (Skyway, Inc.).

Salladasburg

While Salladasburg *is* in the area where the view of the fireball was perhaps the best, ... our preliminary analysis indicates that the fireball probably passed East to West over the Welsboro/Morris Pennsylvania areas, which are slightly north of Salladasburg," Richardson said. "Any potential meteorites from this fireball would have fallen further to the west of all of these towns."

Richardson also notes that fireballs that do generate meteorites stop emitting light when they are still about 9-12 miles high. They are usually "not red-hot when they reach the ground."

Happens All the Time

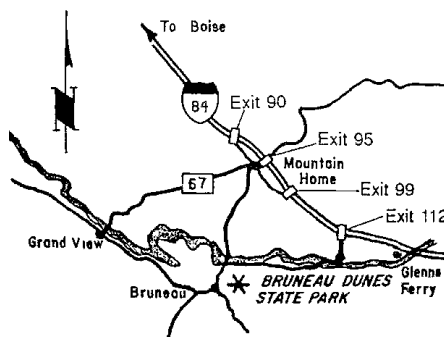
Space rocks fall through Earth's atmosphere regularly, and most pose little or no threat as they vaporize in the atmosphere, due to the intense heat created by friction as they speed Earthward at thousands of miles per hour.

from Space.com

Idaho Star Party—August 16-18th. Preregistration due August 1st!

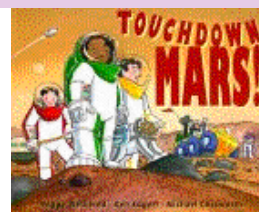
Come join us at the Idaho Star Party, August 16th through the 18th. The Bruneau Dunes State Park features a public observatory that hosts a number of high quality telescopes, including an outstanding 25" Newtonian Reflector (prior training required). Additionally, most amateur astronomers are happy to share their instruments!

The Idaho Star Party is an event for the entire family, with programs for all ages. Participants can chose from classes and workshops on a variety of topics. This year's featured speakers are George



“Fritz” Benedict, senior research scientist from the University of

Texas-Austin. Other speakers include Peggy Wethered, author of “Touchdown Mars!: An ABC Adventure.” Peggy will be handling the children’s activities Saturday August 18th.



Boise Astronomical Society presents the

2001 IDAHO STAR PARTY

The Boise Astronomical Society is proud to present the 17th Annual Idaho Star Party, August 17th and 18th, at the Bruneau Dunes State Park. Please come and join us for a fun filled weekend of camping, learning, and stargazing!

Keep updated at our website: <http://www.boiseastro.org>

IDAHO STAR PARTY 2001 REGISTRATION FORM

PRE-REGISTRATION IS STRONGLY ENCOURAGED!

On-site late registration fee is an additional \$5.

No pre-registrations will be accepted after August 1st
(Post marked on or before August 1st, 2001)

Name _____
 Address _____
 City _____ State _____ Zip _____
 Phone _____ E-mail _____
 Total attending _____ # of Adults _____ # of children _____

_____ SP registration fee **\$10.00**
 _____ Star-B-Que @ **\$8.00 per plate**
 Qty _____ subtotal \$ _____

TOTAL \$ _____

Mail Make checks (payable to the Idaho Star Party) to: **Idaho Star Party,
 P.O. Box 8366, Boise, ID 83707**

DON'T WAIT!! Register for Camping at Bruneau Dunes State Park

To ensure that you will have a camping site reserved for the ISP with either hook-ups or non-hook up, you must contact the Bruneau Dunes State Park office at 208-366-7919. Showers are included in the site fee. Some doubling up per site is allowed. (Inquire for details.) Area sites fill up fast!



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scopes that were at this event.

Be sure to come to our regular meeting August 11 and be prepared to stay late for a special event. **Paul Verhage** will be conducting one of his **high altitude balloon launches** later that evening with the primary mission to successfully **take pictures of the Perseids meteor shower**. He will need help from us in getting the balloon in the air, observing the ascent with our telescopes, and tracking the landing after the mission's completion.

Have you seen the **morning planets** lately? For you early risers there is a special treat waiting for you in the eastern sky. Bright Venus dominates that part of the sky with Saturn above and to the right, and Jupiter lower and to the left. Mercury is dropping fast, but may still be seen very low, rising just before the sun.

Thanks for being a member of the Magic Valley Astronomical Society.

Tom Gilbertson, President MVAS

MVAS CLUB CALENDAR

NEXT CLUB MEETING:

Saturday August 11, 2001. Paul Verhage will be launching his high altitude balloon to take pictures of the Perseid Meteor shower. Tom Gilbertson will discuss his visit to the Montana Starwatch.

August 16-18, 2001. Idaho Star Party at Bruneau Dunes State Park. Registration is required. Pre-registration forms are due by August 1st. See page 3 for the pre-registration form.

Saturday September 8th, 2001. Monthly Magic Valley Astronomical Society Meeting. Star Party follows.

September 14-15th, 2001. Fall Craters of the Moon Star Party at Craters of the Moon National Monument.

Saturday October 13, 2001. Monthly Magic Valley Astronomical Society Meeting. Star Party follows.

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.