

# SNAKE RIVER SKIES

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New MVAS Officers for 2002

- President Jay Sneddon  
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- Vice President Phil Hafer  
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- Secretary/Webmaster Rick Widmer rwidmer@developersdesk.com
- Treasurer John Dean 733-1846 istco@mindspring.com

Write to MVAS.P.O. Box 5101, Twin Falls, ID 83303

Yearly membership is \$20 per person \$20 per family \$10 per student, Sponsor \$100

## FEATURED SPEAKER THIS MONTH BOB NIEMEYER "WINTER VACATION"

Our special guest speaker this month is Bob Niemeyer. Many of you may remember Bob from some of the fascinating talks he has given to us in past years. Bob has been very active in promoting the education of Astronomy and in making the Bruneau Sand Dune Observatory a tremendous success.

So what does Bob do when he goes on vacation? You guessed it he visits observatories, laboratories, planetariums, and other important sites that have made important discoveries in Astronomy.

Bob's latest list of stops on his travel this winter include the following:

Nova Optical Systems  
National Radio Observatory V.L.A.  
Johnson Space Center Museum  
Clyde Tombaugh IMAX Planetarium  
McDonald Observatory in Fort Davis Texas  
Coronado Optics  
University of Arizona Steward Observatory Mirror Lab  
Flandro Planetarium  
Kitt Peak Observatory  
Star Instrument Company  
and Bob's favorite the Lowell Observatory.

Bob's speaking style is lively and exciting. You will not want to miss this presentation.

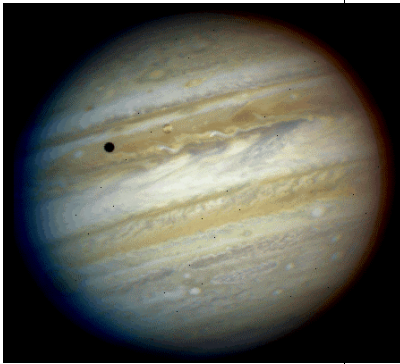
## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT JAY SNEDDON

I admit it. I'm a planet guy. Planets are my thing. I've been one since my father pointed out Venus to me while traveling across a lonely Nebraska Interstate. The first time I saw Jupiter through a telescope, the four moons made me think I

had something wrong with my optics. As I grew in my knowledge, I realized those Jovian moons provide a dynamic observing landscape. My favorite times to observe Jupiter are during *moon transits*.

A moon transit occurs when one of the four large moons of Jupiter traverse the face of the planet. It is very visible in a telescope and quite enjoyable to watch. Look for a moon shadow to trail behind the planet. At times up to three Jovian

## *I Admit it I'm a Planet Nut.*



*Jupiter with it's Moon Io Transiting*

moon shadows will dot the planet. You can know when these shadow transits occur by using Astronomy software like *Starry Night Deluxe* or publications like *Sky and Telescope*. Frequently, we see these spectacular moon transits during our public star parties at the Herrett Center. Watch for them these next few months when we get good looks at our largest planet.

This month's MVAS meeting features Bob Niemeyer, the director of the Bruneau Dunes Observatory. Bob has done quite a bit of touring the last few months in behalf of the park to gather plans for Bruneau's Science and Nature Center. Many of

these Astronomy sites Bob will show us through slides and video including his visit to the National Radio Observatory, Johnson Space Center, Kitt Peak Observatory and Lowell Observatory. Bob is a superb presenter and should be very enjoyable for us to hear.

Just a reminder to send in your dues if you haven't already. We especially welcome new members just gaining an interest in the club or gaining interest in Astronomy itself. We hope to provide more "hands on" observing lessons during our club times. Let us assist you with your new telescope or help you learn the season's constellations. During the public star party,

we will try to host a constellation tour, helping you identify the constellations and other landmarks in the sky. Interested in learning about telescopes? Our members are always glad to answer questions and provide buying tips. They may even let you pilot their telescope for a bit. Keep in mind we have a 6" club loaner scope that members can check out for home use.

Thank you for being a part of the Magic Valley Astronomical Society. We appreciate all your contributions to make this club a success.

Jay Sneddon  
President

A supernova has been discovered in M74, announced on the IAU Circular 7810 today. The position is 1 36 23.9 +15 45 13 (2000), about 4' .5 west and nearly 2' south of the center of the galaxy. Reported to be about mag. 14. Obviously this could become quite bright if it is a type Ia event.

***An excerpt from our MVAS.net site. For the latest in club news and Astronomical events be sure to check it out.***

### Astronomy in Six (6) Easy Lessons

Sign up today for the spring session of "Astronomy in Six Easy Lessons" a quick informative way of extending your knowledge in Astronomy. Starts February 27 and runs every Wednesday until April 3, room 107 Shields Building College of Southern Idaho Community Education. The cost is \$45.00.

For an interesting new picture and explanation by a professional Astronomer call up this site on your browser: [antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/](http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/) The Astronomy Picture of the Day page. This is a sample of the February 4, 2002 picture and explanation



**Comet LINEAR (WM1) Shines in the South**  
**Credit:** Gordon Garradd, Loomberah NSW Australia

**Explanation:** A new comet has brightened unexpectedly and is currently visible to unaided observers of southern skies. Comet C/2000 WM1 (LINEAR) is now reported by some observers to be at third magnitude, making it brighter -- although more diffuse -- than most visible stars. A dust tail as long as 3 degrees has also been reported. Pictured above is the center of Comet LINEAR (WM1) taken the morning of February 1 from 300 km north of Sydney, Australia. A bright coma and the start of the dust tail are visible despite a bright, nearly full Moon. The comet has now passed its closest approach to the Sun (January) and the Earth (December) and will move toward northern skies as it fades.

Thanks to all that contributed to our successful Telescope Workshop.

Also thanks to new sponsor members

First Federal Savings Bank &  
 Tom Gilbertson

Think of how important the MVAS is to our community. Become a sponsor member this year.

Magic Valley Astronomical  
Society  
P.O. Box 5101  
Twin Falls, ID 83303

We're on the Web at [MVAS.net](http://MVAS.net)

## WHAT IS IN THE SKY FOR FEBRUARY 2002

First a little trivia. What is the nearest cross quarter day this time of year. The day halfway between the winter solstice and vernal equinox. It was this past Saturday February 2 and we know it as Groundhog day or Candlemas.

Jupiter continues its retrograde motion still in the constellation of Gemini. Saturn ends its retrograde motion February 8 still in the constellation of Taurus.

Mars appears in the far west shortly after nightfall in preparation for its move from Pisces to Aries late this month.

Venus, still in Aquarius, is due to return as the evening star, but more than likely will not be visible until March.

Mercury may be seen at our mid northern latitude on or around February 21 when it moves into its greatest elongation in the morning sky.

Both Jupiter and Saturn continue to be at ideal positions for evening viewing appearing nearly as high in the night time sky as they can from our mid northern latitude. Saturn's rings are especially impressive. On February 20 Saturn disappears behind a first Quarter moon early in

the evening. From our Longitude we may only see Saturn's reappearance.

Now is an excellent time to practice your skills in finding Messier objects in preparation for our special Messier marathon in March.

***Astronomical Calendar 2002***

**Don't forget to pay your dues. We are in the process of reviewing our mailing lists and we do not want to leave you out.**