



Snake River Skies

Magic Valley Astronomical Society

Volume 3, Issue 5

Dance of the Planets

It was quite a night for dancing on May 4, 2002, outside the Herrett Center. MVAS members Phil Hafer, Jay Sneddon, Ken Thompson, Michelle Hartwell, and Tom Gilbertson introduced the dancers to a curious crowd of onlookers just out from the popular Pink Floyd show at the Faulkner Planetarium. The dancers were of course the five naked eye planets, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter.

Maybe still too new to square dancing just yet, dancers Venus, Mars and Saturn were in a very impressive triangular pattern. Always shy Mercury was surprisingly adventurous this night with its uncharacteristically wide separation from the safety of the Sun. Majestic Jupiter looked down on the other dancers high on his perch at the foot of the Twins.

Even the stars gave notice to the odd dance

of the planets. Perhaps a little jealous of the dancing wanderers, Sirius, Capella, and Betelgeuse finally made their entrance to the show fashionably late as the darkness of night approached. The dance also caught the eye of Aldebaran as it looks up at the strange triangular pattern.

In a week or so our local dancer the moon will make its appearance. This dance will continue for the next few weeks so be sure to



look up in the western evening sky to catch more of this impressive show.

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Message from the President

The rare planetary alignment has the Astronomy world buzzing. The five most visible planets in the solar system are clustered together in the Western sky in a show that will be unrivaled for nearly forty years. On Saturday May 4th, Saturn, Venus and Mars will fit into a single binocular view. On Friday May

10th, Venus and Mars will be so close together that they will practically blend into one orange/white star. They both will fit into a single telescopic view.

Unlike star clusters and galaxies,

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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

Astronomy Day 2002 Schedule 5/11/2002

planets can be seen very well in twilight. Jupiter, for example, can contrast so glaringly in a dark sky that its famous cloud bands sometimes washout underneath the intensity. Twilight viewing reduces that glare and features can more readily be seen. Saturn and Venus also do well under twilight viewing.

The MVAS board has voted to purchase an additional telescope for club members to check out. Our new addition is a 3.5" refractor, excellent for planetary and double star viewing. Tyler Shropshire, our club telescope caretaker, is available to provide individual instruction on how to use them. Both telescopes are fairly lightweight and easy to use. Also available to checkout are telrad star charts, made to help us telrad users easily find celestial objects. Contact Tyler if you are interested in borrowing one of the telescopes or star charts.

Our May 11th club meeting features Wallace Blacker, an astronomy instructor at the College of Southern Idaho and Murtaugh School District. Mr. Blacker will discuss the attributes of star clusters and the science behind their formations. May 11th is Astronomy Day at the Herrett Center, with an afternoon of Astronomy activities, including Planetarium shows and rocket launches. Stop by in that afternoon for some solar viewing also.

Mark your calendars June 14-15th for the Craters of the Moon Star Party at the Craters of the Moon National Monument. Last year, over 40 telescopes were on display in the Caves area. A great chance for some suburb dark sky viewing!

Jay Sneddon, President

1:00pm to 5:00 pm - Solar Viewing front Herrett walk (Clouds not permitted)

1:00 pm to 5:00pm—Solar system scale Model North College Road

1:00pm to 5:00 pm—Make and Take Activities, Frost Classroom

1:00 pm to 3:30 pm—Water Bottle Rocket Assembly, Frost Classroom

3:30 pm to 5:00 pm—Water Bottle rocket launches, South Herrett lawn

7:00 pm—Magic Valley Astronomical Society Meeting, Frost Classroom

9:30 pm—Sky Viewing, Front Herrett Walk (Clouds are not invited)

Shows: 2:00 PM Sky Quest

4:00PM Search for Life in the Universe

7:00PM Sky Quest



Comet Ikeya-Zhang still visible, but waning.

Telescopes for Loan

MVAS Telescope Loaner Program

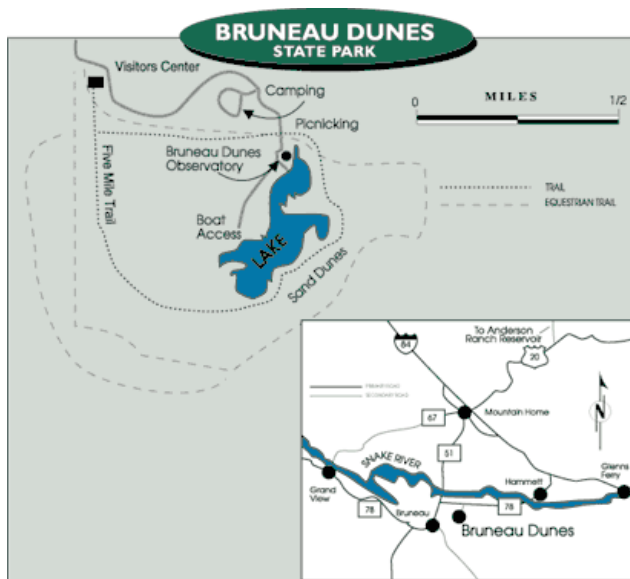
There are many benefits to being a member of the Magic Valley Astronomical Society! One of those benefits is the MVAS Telescope Loaner Program. If you are a member, you are authorized to checkout our two great telescopes—FREE. This can be a major benefit, especially if you do not own a telescope or your own or are hoping to purchase one in the future.

We have two types of telescopes available for loan. One is a 3.5 inch refractor, the other a 6 inch reflector. Borrowing one or both of these telescopes will allow you hands on experience and can provide excellent guidelines for purchasing the right type of scope to suite your needs. Star charts are also available and can be checked out along with a telescope or separately.

Are you having company over? Check into the availability of both telescopes and hold your

own star party! This program is about sharing the night skies; it is never too early to know the heavens! In addition using this program enables you to enjoy the use of a telescope without any initial cost to yourself. It will give you a better appreciation of how fascinating the science of astronomy truly is and can open up to you the wonders of the nighttime skies!

Tyler Shropshire, Loaner Scope manager
733-3499



Time for a Field Trip to Bruneau Sand Dunes

Keep Friday May 17th open for a field trip to the Bruneau Sand Dunes, Camping is available, but you need to call right away for a reservation 366-7919. At our meeting we will discuss car pooling and other arrangements.

Trivia Question: The International Space Station make an impressive sight as it passes overhead. How large is it and how much electricity does it produce?

Answer next page or on page 8 of the year in space calendar.

Magic Valley Astronomical Society

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What's up in the sky for May 2002

The planet dance is still playing as I write this article and will continue for the next few weeks. May 10 will be especially impressive. This is when Venus overtakes Mars and passes within 18' of the red planet.

This impressive planet dance will disburse as the month progresses with Mercury quickly disappearing into the sun, Saturn also will be in the glare. Only Mars, Venus, and Jupiter will be left to view in the evening sky by month end. Watch Venus as it makes its way toward Jupiter. The two planets will be within 3 degrees by month's end in preparation for a dramatic conjunction of the two

planets in early June.

There is a penumbral Eclipse of the Moon on May 26, but may not be visible from our location. There will be a chance for a partial solar eclipse late in the day on June 10th which should be visible from most of Western North America. Be sure to review the proper method of viewing the sun if you attempt to see this event.

Answer to trivia Question: It is as large as a three bedroom house and its solar arrays are capable of generating 35 kilowatts of electricity enough to power the average home.