SNAKE RIVER SKIES

MAGIC VALLEY ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

December MVAS Meeting, 7pm Herrett Center: Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?

December is our annual Christmas MVAS fun night. Chris Anderson will warm us up with "Who Wants to Be an Astronomical Millionaire".

No other oxymorons will be discussed during our meeting.

We will be having a raffle for a new eyepiece and a set of filters. The fun starts at December 10th @ 7pm at the Herrett Center. A public star party follows. See you there!

Message from the President: Phil Hafer

I want to congratulate the newly elected officers for next year:

President: Cheri Lowman

Vice President: Ken Thomason

Secretary: Rick Widmer

Treasurer: Matt Holmquist

We want to thank all of you who mailed in your ballots and took part in the election of the new officers. During our annual meeting, there were two amendments made to the by-laws.

Section 6. Vice-President.

The Vice-President shall automatically move to the office of President upon the completion of the Presidents term in office. If the Vice-President does not wish to serve as the President for the coming, year names for candidates will be placed on the regular ballot for the annual election of officers.

Section7. Secretary

Subsection (f) ALCOR Representative shall be removed from Section 7 Sectretary. A new Section 9. ALCOR Representative will be created . The new Officer, ALCOR Representative will handle all ALCOR business. The Secretary will no longer handle ALCOR business.

The December meeting is our annual fun night and will have the theme of Who Wants to Be a Millionaire. Chris is working on the questions for the game and encourages everyone to come and have a great time. There will also be a raffle for a new eyepiece and a set of filters.

I want to thank all of you who helped to make 2004 a successful year for the MVAS. I encourage everyone to continue to participate in 2005 to help the club grow larger and and the members closer as a group.

Wishing all clear nights and dark skies.

Phil Hafer, President

New Comet Machholz Becomes Naked Eye courtesy space.com

A comet discovered earlier this year has now moved close enough to be visible without binoculars or telescopes by experienced observers under dark skies. It is expected to put on a modest show this month and into January.

Comet Machholz, named after Donald Machholz, who discovered the frozen chunk of rock and ice in August. will be at its closest to Earth Jan. 5-6, 2005, when it will be 32 million miles (51 million kilometers) away. People with dark rural skies and a good map should be able to find it on Moon-free nights now into January. Machholz is expected to reach magnitude 4.0, based on an early estimate. Recent observations suggest Machholz will do at least as well as first predicted.

The comet is low on the horizon now, where the atmosphere makes for poor viewing. By early January, the comet will be much higher in the sky, improving viewing conditions.

Volume 5, Issue 12

December 2004

MVAS Officers 2004

- *Cheri Lowman, President, 736-7293, lowmanch@tfsd.k12.id.us*
- *Ken Thomason, Vice President , ktst@pmt.org*
- *Rick Widmer, Secretary/ Webmaster, 539-5162, rwidmer@developersdesk.com*
- *Matt Holmquist, Treasurer, 735-5085, mholmquist@ coopernorman.com*

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

If you would like to write an article or otherwise make an entry for the club newsletter, contact Jay Snedden, 736-2447, jaysnedden@yahoo.com.

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

New Photos from the Centennial Observatory at the Herrett Center

M27, the Dumbbell Nebula in Vulpecula. *Tracking without guiding correction, L, R, G, and B frames, approximately four minutes each, processed and stacked with MaximDL. North is up. 50% reduced from original, in which 20th magnitude stars can be seen.*

M1, the Crab Nebula in Taurus. *Fifteen stacked images (five in R (96 sec. each), five in G (120 sec. each), and five in B (240 sec. each)). Processed with MaximDL. North is up. 50% reduced from original.*

Telescope Buying Tips

By Joe Rao SPACE.com Night Sky Columnist **,** images courtesy skypub.com

As we approach the holiday season, many people may consider the purchase of a telescope. You might already have seen telescope ads in newspapers, catalogues or on TV shopping channels. But sadly, while most of these "department-store" telescopes may seem like a good deal, they usually end up causing complete frustration. Important considerations:

Be wary of power

One of the things that is usually promised is incredibly high power. Be aware that virtually any telescope can provide you with, say, 500-power. Yet in most cases, such an advertised magnification is well beyond the practical maximum magnification of the telescope.

The result: big, blurry images.

A 2.4-inch refracting telescope, for example, should never use more than 120-power (the rule of thumb is 50-power per inch of aperture). In fact, for such a telescope, the most rewarding views will probably come using one-half of the practical maximum magnification (60-power).

Find stability

Another common problem is the telescope mounting, which for most "off-the-shelf" instruments is usually lightweight and unstable. Such mountings are, in turn, attached to a wobbly tripod. A telescope can have the finest optics in the world, yet can be rendered totally useless if the mount is so poor that the image can't be held in place.

More tips

If you still have your heart set on purchasing a telescope, here are a few good tips to follow:

- **Visit the Herrett Center.** Their staff are trained to assist astronomy beginners and enthusiasts is assisting with telescope purchases.

- **Visit a star party at the Herrett Center.** MVAS members are eager to show off their telescope equipment and allow you to "try out" what you might purchase.

Try Binoculars First

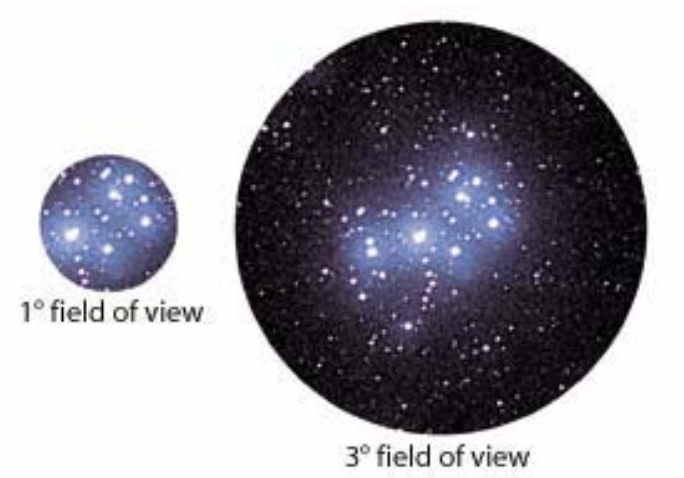
Consider the merits of binoculars before moving up to a telescope.

Some might think that binoculars are a bit of a come down from a telescope, but the fact is that for certain aspects of sky watching they are the best instrument.

(Continued on page 3)

Telescope Buying Tips

By Joe Rao SPACE.com Night Sky Columnist , images courtesy skypub.com



(Continued from page 2)

Good binoculars are excellent for beginning amateur sky watchers.

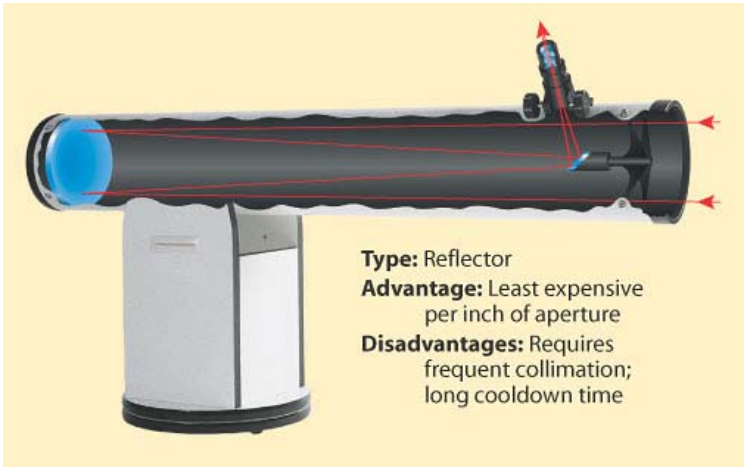
Most preferable for star gazing are the 7x50 "night-glasses," although my own personal preference is a pair of 7x35 binoculars that give a much wider-than-normal field of view. The first number states the power of the binocular (7 power), while the second number represents the diameter of the objective lens in millimeters (35 or 50).

Easy to use and relatively inexpensive, binoculars are helpful in learning the constellations and in getting acquainted with many attractive deep-sky objects.

And since binoculars require an absolute minimum set-up and takedown time, a frigidly cold winter's night won't deter you from enjoying even a brief session outside.

And when held steadily (though you can also mount them on a tripod) they'll give you a glimpse of the craters of the Moon, the crescent of Venus and the moons of Jupiter. Should a bright comet come along, there is no better instrument to give you a great overall view of both the head and tail. And by sweeping along the Milky Way, you'll be treated to a myriad of stars. Because they don't give an inverted view (as is the case with most telescopes), binoculars are especially convenient for comparing a sky map with the stars themselves.

Last, but certainly not least, the practical experience binoculars give will enable any beginner to get much more satisfaction when they're finally ready to purchase their first telescope.



Magic Valley
Astronomical Society

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

,

Planet Roundup courtesy skyandtelescope.com

Mercury is hidden in the glare of the Sun.

Venus (magnitude –4.0) is the bright "star" low in the southeast during dawn. Look for it very far to the lower left of bright Jupiter.

Mars (magnitude +1.7) glimmers faintly in early dawn close to Venus — to its lower right early in the week, and to its upper right by week's end. Binoculars help.

Jupiter (magnitude –1.9, in Virgo) shines brightly high in the southeast before and during dawn. The star below Jupiter, by roughly a fist-width at arm's length, is Spica. More than twice as far to Jupiter's left is Arcturus.

Saturn (magnitude –0.1, in Gemini) rises in the east around 7:30 p.m., glowing to the lower right of Pollux and Castor. In another hour or two it's well up in fine view. Don't confuse Saturn with Procyon sparkling to its own lower right.

Uranus and **Neptune** (magnitudes 5.9 and 8.0, respectively, in Aquarius and Capricornus) are still in the south to southwest right after nightfall. So is the asteroid **Vesta,** magnitude 7.7. Spot them with binoculars! A finder chart for Vesta and Uranus is in the November *Sky & Telescope,* page 68. For Neptune see last April's issue, page 107.

Pluto is lost in the sunset.

Club & Star Party Calendar

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

Next Meeting: **Saturday December 10, 2004,** at the Rick Allen Room of the Herrett Center, College of Southern Idaho. A public star party follows.

Friday December 17th, 2004. 7:15pm-8:15pm. Astronomy Talk: "Introducing: Lepus, the Hare" with telescope viewing afterwards (weather permitting). Rick Allen Community Room, Herrett Center. Viewing: 8:15pm to midnight in the Centennial Observatory. $2 per person $1 students $5 per family.

Tuesday, December 21st, 2004 Herrett Family Night Telescope Viewing (weather permitting) Centennial Observatory 6:00pm to 9:00pm $1 per person (ages 6 and under free)