



Snake River Skies

December 2005

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Club Officers

- Cheri Lowman, President, 736-7293
- Ken Thomason, Vice President 324-4532 ktst@pmt.org
- Rick Widmer, Secretary Webmaster 539-5162 rwidmer@developersdesk.com
- Jay Hartwell, Treasurer 734-6410 jhartwell@cableone.net
- Tom Gilbertson, Newsletter Editor 734-04383 palo@pmt.org

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

Yearly membership is \$20 per person or family and \$10 per student. Sponsor memberships are \$100.

Do not miss our next meeting and be sure to bring a friend or many friends this Saturday December 10, at 7:00 pm. And Don't be late.

This is our annual Christmas meeting and election of Officers. Nominations are as follows:

Ken Thomason, President

Terry Wolford, Vice President

Jay Hartwell, Treasurer

David Olsen, Publicity

Other nominations can be made from the floor

Chris Anderson will

have a fun filled program and there will be prizes. Be sure to come and support the MVAS at this always special event.

Please bring prizes for the special raffle.

Be sure to thank the officers who served us so well in 2004. Special thanks should go to Cheri Lowman who had a number of good ideas such as the public Messier

Marathon, Great Debate, Nat-Soo-Pah stargazing and other ideas we used throughout the year.

Special thanks to Cheri Lowman Terry Wolford, Rick Widmer and others who contributed to the acquisition of the Share System.

It takes a lot of work from dedicated volunteers to make this club successful.

Their only payment is your thanks.

Time to Re-up. Please pay your upcoming 2006 dues and be sure to let us know any changes in your mailing, and electronic addresses, telephone number, magazine subscription needs and other info. Bring your check and info to the next meeting or mail to: MVAS, P.O. Box 5101, Twin Falls, ID 83303



News from the Herrett Center

A great new show premiered recently at the Faulkner Planetarium “Mysteries from the Depths of Space.” Have you ever wondered is time travel possible? Did alien life ever exist on Mars? And what are the universe’s prime ingredients? Trekkie fans will recognize Jolene Blalock as she narrates this odyssey through some of the most intriguing possibilities in the cosmos.

Also playing are the popular and very entertaining shows “Season of Light” and “Steamrolling through the Holidays.”

Also do your Christmas shopping at the Herrett center Gift shop now 25% off until Christmas.

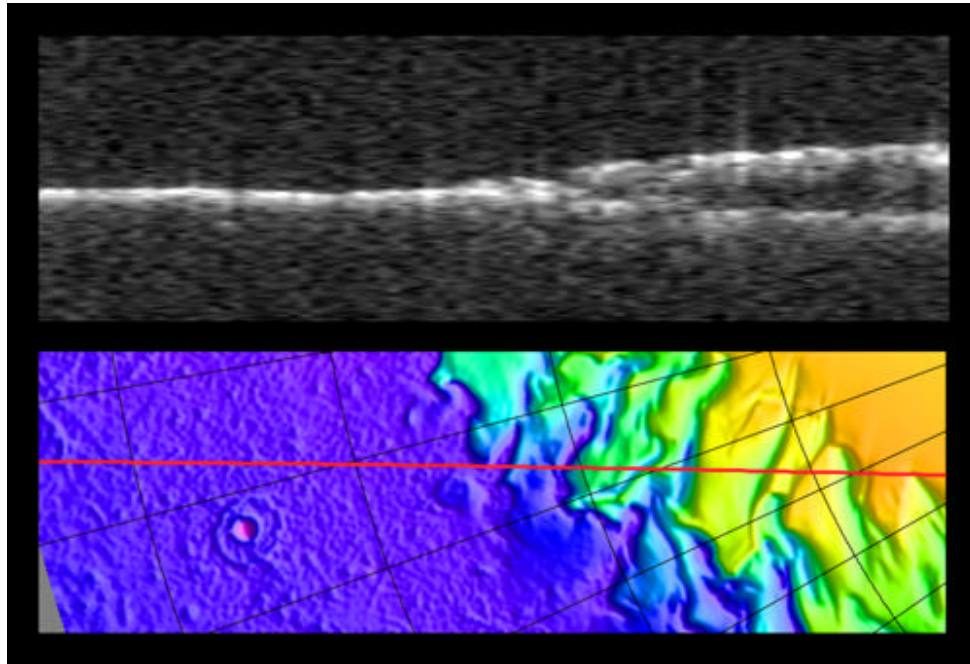
Opportunity knocks for a new Newsletter Editor

This will be my last MVAS newsletter as editor. Other commitments as a new member of the Twin Falls County Museum Board and Twin Falls County Historical Commission will be taking more of my personal time. I will still be involved in the MVAS as a member and besides it is time for a new voice and look to our Snake River Skies. If you are interested please contact any of the officers of the Magic Valley Astronomical Society.

Thank you for your patience and for helping me prepare the past issues.

Tom Gilbertson

MARSIS Uncovers Underground Ice



The upper image is a radargram from the Mars Advanced Radar for Subsurface and Ionospheric Sounding (MARSIS), showing data from the subsurface of Mars in the layered deposits that surround the north pole. The lower image shows the position of the ground track on a topographic map of the area based on Mars Orbiter Laser Altimeter data. The images are 458 kilometers (285 miles) wide.

The MARSIS echo trace splits into two traces to the right of center, at the point where the ground track crosses from the smooth plains onto the elevated layered deposits on the right. The upper trace is the echo from the surface of the deposits, while the lower trace is interpreted to be the boundary between the lower surface of the deposits and the underlying material. The strength of the lower echo suggests that the intervening material is nearly pure water ice. The time delay between the two echoes reaches a maximum of 21 microseconds at the right of the image, corresponding to a thickness of 1.8 kilometer (1.1 mile) of ice. The total elevation difference shown in the topographic map is about 2 kilometers (1.2 mile) between the lowest surface (magenta) and the highest (orange).

MARSIS is an instrument on the European Space Agency's Mars Express orbiter. NASA and the Italian Space Agency jointly funded the instrument. The Mars Orbiter Laser Altimeter is an instrument on NASA's Mars Global Surveyor orbiter.

Credit: ASI/NASA/ESA/Univ. of Rome/JPL/MOLA Science Team



What's up in the sky for December 2005

There was a spectacular view of the thin Crescent Moon this night with bright Venus within a few degrees. Very similar to the symbol on the Turkish flag. Venus is still making an impressive evening show every night this month. Mars is unlikely to catch speedy Venus as he pursues her in his much slower trek across the December sky to the west. From our view from earth this month Mercury makes its greatest western elongation on December 12. What does this mean? Look in the morning sky before sunrise and hopefully you not see clouds, but Mercury appearing brightly low in the eastern sky. This will be the best morning apparition for us northern hemisphere observers of this elusive planet. Bundle up and be prepared to see some incredible sights if the winters skies clear. When they do clear it is incredibly clear, but very cold.