

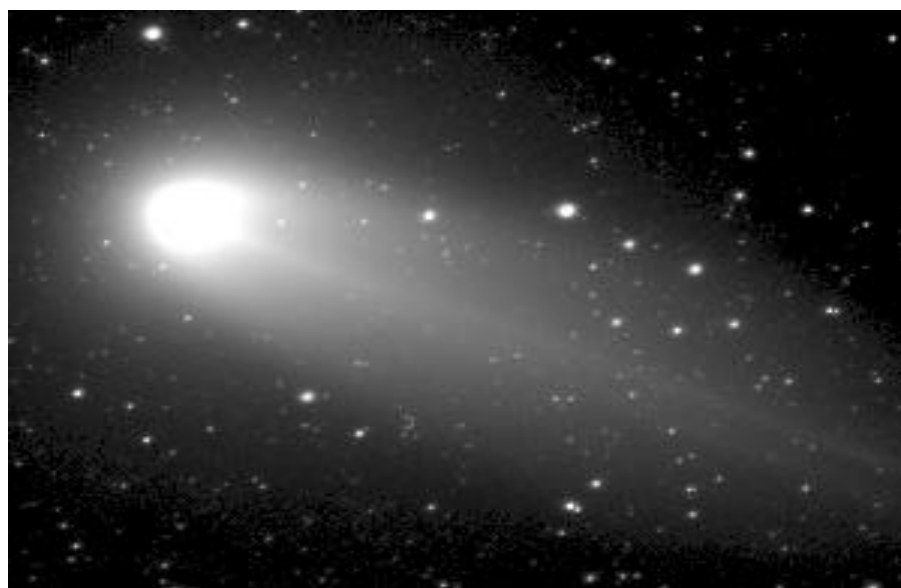
DAYS OF THE COMET!

Days and Nights of Wonder with the Great Comet of '96!

It caught us unawares. The entire astronomical community had been abuzz for *months* about the incoming 'comet of the century,' Comet Hale-Bopp, and little attention was paid at first to the announcement of a new find by Japanese amateur Yuji Hyakutake in late January (using 6" Fujinon binoculars). Since Mr. Hyakutake had previously made a comet discovery in December, some of us were also initially confused about 'Comet Hyakutake,' thinking that his earlier object was being referred to. But it quickly became evident that the 'new' Comet Hyakutake, 1996/B2, had every possibility of putting on a **spectacular** show (despite the naysaying of a few 'experts'), since it would pass a *very* close 9.5 million

miles from us on the 25th of March. Soon, professional and amateur astronomers were scrambling to prepare for the arrival of what was being billed as the *'intrinsically brightest comet to approach the Earth so closely*

the vicinity of Alpha Librae and sure didn't look *anything like* the 'Great Comet of '96.' I had dragged myself out of bed at 3:30am, and was hoping for an impressive looking object (though I knew the comet would still



The Great Comet of 1996!

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since the invention of the telescope! Poor Hale-Bopp was almost totally forgotten, with many observers paying only scant attention to the news of its recovery following its recent conjunction with the Sun.

Like many other amateurs, I went from initial skepticism (remember Kahoutek!), to cautious optimism, to excitement as the comet began brightening and moving into the evening sky. But the first time I caught a glimpse of One-hundred Warriors ('Hyakutake') in early March, it was in

be dim from my light-polluted front yard). Hyakutake was there, alright, but it *wasn't* exactly *impressive!* It was dim enough in 10x50 binoculars that I had to convince myself that I'd seen it. 'Oh well,' I thought, 'it's early yet. Hyakutake still has a few weeks to brighten.' But, I must admit, I went back to bed feeling depressed. Despite all the press that Hyakutake was getting, it looked only slightly better than the many dim little comets I'd seen over the years. It was nice to have a comet in the sky which was

visible in binoculars--especially from the city--but I certainly didn't have the feeling that I had seen something which would become 'spectacular.'

But my next encounter with Hyakutake quickly changed my mind. Due to weather, I wasn't able to get out again until the 19th of March. At around 11:00pm, I trotted out into the backyard with my trusty pair of 10x50s and a star chart generated with *Deep Space*. Walking onto my deck, I looked east--and immediately dropped my star chart! I wouldn't need it. There, hanging among the familiar, friendly stars of Boötes was an intruder: **Hyakutake!** I estimated that its magnitude was at *least* 3.0. In the binoculars it was quite beautiful with a coma *easily* .5 degree across, and some substantial hints of a tail! But the naked eye view was probably the most impressive! It was an almost eerie vision....a....something....that JUST DIDN'T BELONG was hovering amid the stars of the celestial herdsman. In that moment, looking up at this almost-bizarre sight, I finally has some sense of why comets so frightened our ancestors. I took another quick look with the binoculars and ran back inside to waken Dorothy and Beth!

And it just got better and better. Night after night the comet sailed across the heavens growing ever more beautiful! In the 12" Newtonian there was an almost a baffling array of details to be seen! In addition to a coma which easily filled the field of a 12mm Nagler at 125x, a jet was visible stretching for at least 10' and merging into the tail. To me both the jet and 'nucleus' seemed a bright golden yellow! Also obvious in the scope was Hyakutake's swift motion across the sky. Its movement against a background of faint field stars was noticeable in only a few minutes! So it went, as I observed Hyakutake again

and again! But as the day of the comet's closest approach grew nearer, I decided it was time to 'get out of town'! Hyakutake was magnificent--even from my Garden District observing site--but what must it look like from dark skies?

So, with high hopes, Dorothy and I headed for the Mississippi state line on Saturday evening, March 23. While a few gathering clouds heralded an approaching storm, things still looked pretty good. But, just as you would expect, by the time we hit the Mississippi line, a large patch of clouds had settled firmly into the northeastern part of the sky--just where the comet was located! Nevertheless, we persevered and were rewarded with a few quick glimpses of Wonderful Hyakutake, which now sported a tail which stretched for tens of degrees! Heading back to the city, we had to make a stop at the Playhouse in the Park to pick Beth up from a just-completed performance of *Little Women*. Standing out in the parking lot, we were able to show the comet to quite a few members of the departing audience. All were eager to see the comet, and grateful to have it pointed-out to them. After this Saturday night, though, our 'glory days' of the comet were pretty much over, unfortunately. By the time the stormy weather (which, sadly, obscured Hyakutake on the day of closest approach) passed, there was a Moon in the sky which sapped a lot of the now-dimming celestial vagabond's beauty.

Still, there was one last major event scheduled for these Days of Wonder--an MAS/ESC Public Stargaze which would coincide with a total lunar eclipse was set for April 3. This was not a particularly favorable eclipse for us, since the moon would rise during totality. It would also do little to aid

the visibility of Hyakutake, since, by the time it was dark enough to view the comet, the Moon would be coming out of eclipse. And, not surprisingly, given our typical Springtime weather, when the 3rd rolled around, things were not looking too good weather-wise. In fact, on late Wednesday afternoon, I was wondering whether I should even bother to take one of my scopes out to the Environmental Studies Center. A call from Pat Rochford, however, made me decide to start loading the Ultima 8 into the car. He had heard from the ESC's Dianne Martin, who reported that three television news crews, a reporter from the Press Register, and hundreds of visitors were expected for the evening's Stargaze!

Arriving at the ESC, I hurriedly set up the C8. After spending quite some time being interviewed by reporters, and answering the questions of the excited children and parents who were pouring onto the ESC observing field, I finally was able to take a critical look at the sky. I didn't like what I was seeing. Clouds were covering the southeastern horizon where the eclipsed moon would rise, and were stretching all the way to the northwest where Hyakutake would be placed. It looked like a typical MAS/ESC washout. This was especially sad because of the strong show of support for this stargaze by club members. In attendance were: Pat Rochford, Rod Mollise, Dianne Martin, Judy Anderson, Ginny Kramer, Tony Kramer, George Byron, Leland Cox, Loxley Greaves, and Helen Henderson. If I've left your name off this list, please forgive me. By 7:00pm, the field was so full of little ones and their parents milling about, talking excitedly, and chirping-out questions that I wasn't too aware of what was going-on anywhere except my small

corner of the observing field!

It was approaching 8:00pm, and I was beginning to think that it would soon be time to start packing-up the scope, when, almost miraculously, THE SKY BEGAN TO CLEAR. While a few of our visitors had left for home, a crowd of at least 150+ remained. Viewing conditions were still not great, but we *were* able to see to it that all of our guests got a look at the Wonderful Comet. I was really touched by the gratitude of many of the people who looked at Hyakutake through my C8. Most had tried to find the comet on their own without success, and had been very disappointed that they would probably miss seeing Hyakutake, which the media was now touting as the Comet of the Century (which, in my opinion, is not far off the mark!). By evening's end, what we thought was going to be a waste of time turned into a very successful stargaze with quite a bit of publicity being garnered for the club!

It's now mid April, and Hyakutake continues to dim and drop into the west. But I still observe him *every night*. This comet has become a friend! Oh, how we'll miss COMET-SAN when he's finally gone! The one bright thought in this bitter-sweet denouement, though, is that we have another visitor from the Oort Cloud due into the inner solar system at this time next year--Hale-Bopp! Will this one be as good? Some people are opining that Hale-Bopp may be even brighter (though smaller)!

--Rod

Winter Star Party '96

The conclusion of last issue's article on Lunar photography will appear in July-August's Skywatch. I delayed the piece in order to allow space for an excellent article on Winter Star Party '96 by the MAS' own Judy Anderson....

The Winter Star Party, sponsored by the Southern Cross Astronomical Society of Miami, FL, was held Monday, February 12th through Saturday, February 17th, 1996. Over 550 attendees including vendors, speakers, and amateur astronomers from all over the world experienced a change of latitude to 24°38m55s N at a Girl Scout Camp on West Summerland Key, which is 34.5 miles north of Key West, FL.

The weather was unusually cool and windy this year; therefore, it was dry and clear *if* you could stand the wind. The first night my C-90 spotting scope blew over, which I expected might happen; however, Friday night, my C-8 blew over which I did *not* anticipate! Luckily, the old metal dew shield took the fall and spared the telescope. With the help of several new astronomy friends, we got it set up, checked out and operating again. I met a lot more people this year due to the cold windy nights, as we drew together in the galley for coffee, hot chocolate and conversation.

I'll be the first to admit that the Winter Star Party does not have the *darkest* skies that I've seen, but the more southerly latitude for observing and the comradery of fellow astronomers *more* than made up for the less than perfect skies! I've seen Omega Centauri from Mobile, but it is truly breathtaking from the Keys. One night I mentioned an unusual bright skyglow towards the southwest with light streaks radiating up from the horizon, and I was informed that *I was observing zodiacal light!*

There were five lectures every afternoon, Tuesday through Saturday. The lectures covered various subjects and for the most part were interesting and educational. The most popular lecturer this year was **John Dobson**, for whom the Dobsonian type telescope is named. Mr. Dobson is very humble and said that he certainly didn't want a telescope named after himself. He is also very sincere about promoting astronomy, since he started the Sidewalk Astronomers in San Francisco, CA, to share the beauty and awe of the universe with everyone. Mr Dobson distributed leaflets entitled *Watchers of the Skies*, that began by stating that one of the problems of human knowledge is that the world we see on a sunny day bears almost *no* resemblance to the Universe at large. He ended by saying that in order to help make it possible for the people who live on this planet to see and understand the Universe in which we live, astronomers must set up telescopes in shopping malls, on sidewalks in cities, in national parks and abroad.

Another lecturer who impressed me was J. Kelly Beatty, Senior Editor for *Sky and Telescope* magazine, who discussed The Amateur's Future. Mr Beatty asked for a show of hands of the people in attendance of his lecture who were over 40 years of age and this age group made up over 95% of those present. He impressed upon us the need to encourage and share our wonder and love of astronomy with young people. He challenged the people in attendance like **Al Nagler** to offer more affordable equipment for new astronomers. He also reminded us that a big problem with encouraging new observers is light pollution. Mr. Beatty's lecture certainly made me consider what's ahead for the amateur

astronomer.

Tuesday night I got down to some *serious observing* and enjoyed myself with open clusters and planetary nebulae. Wednesday evening the temperature was about 58° F, and I visited Thane Bopp (*not the Mr. Bopp* of Hale-Bopp fame) from St. Louis, Mo, who shared his 17" Dobsonian, showing several of us Messier objects and the Christmas Tree Nebula, which I had not seen before. In the early morning hours, Cliff Jones of St. Petersburg, FL was giving a guided tour of the sky thru his 16" Starfinder using a Sky Commander computer, and I got my first look at Eta Carinae Nebula. Then, with binoculars, I observed **The Southern Cross** with the southernmost star in the haze over the water. At 5:30AM I viewed the new crescent Moon over Jupiter, which made me wish that I could capture the picture on film, with the palms waving underneath and the beautiful sky glowing pink on the horizon!

On Saturday, the last day, the vendors usually offer discounts, so I purchased a Lumicon Filter for deep sky observing and Saturday evening, I found the **Rosette Nebula** in Monoceros around the NGC2244 cluster. The nebula was pale and *beautiful!*

I was privileged to meet two older lady astronomers who had driven from **Seattle, WA** in a van. They left home on February 1st to arrive at the Winter Star Party on February 12th, only driving 300-400 miles a day. They had a big Dob and a C-5 that they used for astrophotography. They didn't even have to use a sky map to find anything they had been doing observational astronomy so long! I also learned from them that I need to get an 'equipment tent', clean the van out and make up the bed and sleep inside in comfort

and let all the "stuff" rest in the tent!

The observing was good, the people were interesting and friendly, the food was excellent, and, had I taken warmer clothes for the night the temperature dropped to 39 degrees, the Winter Star Party 1996 would have been *almost perfect!*

--Judy Anderson



Astrobytes

The Internet--on the Cheap

I've run into quite a few amateur astronomers lately who are very interested in getting on the Internet in order to gain access to the incredible amount of astronomical data available in cyberspace, but who either have an older computer--or no computer--and don't find it possible to upgrade to the latest Pentium SCREAMER just now. Are these folks to be left out of the information revolution that is sweeping amateur (and professional) astronomy by way of the much-hyped Internet? No, not if they're lucky enough to live in Mobile, Alabama or the surrounding area!

It just so happens that your city is a leader in the movement to bring Cyberspace to the community;

since 1995 we have been one of the few places in the country (or, indeed, the world) to host a Freenet, an Internet service provider dedicated to opening the Net to *all* of the people of the area--for FREE. This provider, the Mobile Area Freenet, is doing a splendid job, and, while you don't have to pay a dime to use this service, it would behoove all of us to contribute what we can to this important community asset.

But, you might ask, how does the Mobile Area Freenet help me? All I've got is an old '286 computer and a 2400bps modem--I can't run Windows, let alone Netscape! Well, it is true that to access the World Wide Web, the Internet's graphical side, through the Mobile area Freenet, you'll need a reasonably fast computer (maybe a 486 25mhz minimum) with at least 4 megabytes of RAM (8 is much better). But what you may *not* know is that there is an incredible array of information available on the Internet for non-graphics-oriented (Windows Challenged) computers! This is the 'older' side of the Internet: gopher, TELNET, archie, veronica and jughead (no, I'm not kidding, archie, jughead and veronica are important Internet resource location tools). And the wonderful thing about all this is the fact that these services are quite practical for a '286 or '386 computer with a 2400 baud modem!

But what exactly can you do with a machine like this? Well, you can:

Participate in the Internet 'Newsgroups', which are the Internet's bulletin board/discussion groups. My favorite is sci.astro.amateur, which has become the world's leading forum for the amateur. Here, you'll run into everybody from the guy you

set-up next to at the last star party to Brian Skiff and David Levy!

E-mail. You'll have a regular Internet e-mail address once you register with MAF (Mobile Area Freenet), allowing you to receive 'mailing lists' (people with a common interest exchange mail with all members of the group--I belong to the Celestron Users' mailing list), keep in touch with your astronomy pals, and just send e-mail to whomever you choose.

TELNET. I know you liked those wonderful bulletin boards put-up by JPL and NASA, and you wanted to download LOTS of their programs and images. But, sadly, the long distance rates were just too high to allow it. Rejoice! TELNET allows you to log onto these--and many other--services thorough the Internet. You can, for example, use TELNET to reach JPL's BBS in California and download as many images as you want for the price of a local call!

And all of these services are just a phone call away! All you have to do is set your terminal program for 8, n, 1 with VT-100 emulation, and call 405-4636 to get signed-up with the Mobile Area Freenet! Of course, once you get a taste of the Internet, you'll want more; especially you'll want to get access to the World Wide Web! For the Amateur Astronomer it's just unbelievable! For example, a while back I was observing a faint galaxy with my 12" reflector. I happened to notice

another, even fainter, galaxy which wasn't indicated on my atlas. Was I seeing things? I logged onto the WWW and accessed the Digitized Sky Survey. At this site, the entire Palomar Observatory/National Geographic Sky Survey (POSS) has been digitized and put online. In a very short period of time, my computer was displaying the section of the POSS plate holding my galaxy, and, yes, there was the little companion I thought I had glimpsed! Of course the Internet *can* be a bit confusing at first, but there is a lot of help out there now. Quite a few good books are available on the subject, and I'd be more than happy to answer your questions (to the extent of my somewhat meager knowledge!).

Please give the Internet a try! It's gotten to the point that if you don't have an Internet connection, *you're missing 90% of what goes on in amateur and professional astronomy*. But I've got to run...I need to pick-up *Sky and Telescope's* latest comet bulletin at www.skypub.com, and then I want to get that new picture of Pluto from the Hubble Space Telescope's site, and, oh, I need to check into the newsgroup and see what's up with Hyakutake tonight--better visit JPL's Hyakutake site too. And--on and on!

--Rod

Next Time: RedShift 2!

MAS/ESC Spring Public Stargaze Held

Despite *disappointingly* cloudy skies, the annual MAS/ESC Spring Stargaze was really a resounding success. Favorable weather reports and promising-looking skies had combined

to ensure a good turn-out of both MAS members (Rod Mollise, Pat Rochford, Diane Martin, Judy Anderson, Ginny Kramer, Leland Cox and George Byron) and curious members of the public for this important event. Diane had done a *fantastic* job on publicity, with quite a few Public Service Announcements being broadcast on WKSJ, so we were prepared for a **large** crowd. Oh, we noticed a few clouds scudding across the sky as we were setting-up, but the forecast still seemed to predict good viewing conditions. By about six o'clock, we all had everything ready to go (including Pat's new 24"), and were really excited at the opportunity we *thought* we would have to show the young observers and their parents some beautiful sights (especially Venus, which was high in the west and very prominent). It looked like this was going to be the most memorable public stargaze in *quite* a while!

Alas, it was not to be! Just as the little ones and their parents began to arrive, a bank of clouds began to move inexorably across the sky! We kept **waiting and hoping** for things to improve, but hopes for clearing proved to be fruitless. While we did get a few glimpses of Venus and M42 through occasional breaks in the clouds, very little real observing could be done. This is not to say, however, that the evening was wasted. MAS members Leland Cox and Pat Rochford gave interesting talks on telescopes and observing, and this, combined with some handouts prepared by your editor (computer images of the unfortunately invisible Venus), served to keep our crowd of visitors (which we estimated to number 100-150 children and adults by evenings end) happy until well after 8:00!

We resolved to try another public stargaze on 3 April, which would

coincide with our usual meeting night, the total lunar eclipse and (*maybe*) a spectacular display by Comet Hyakutake. By the time you read this, this stargaze will be history, but your assistance is needed for the *next* public night, which will probably be in November. There is no more important task for the amateur astronomer than public education, so please plan to attend and do your part for your hobby and for the youngsters!

--Rod

From City Lights to Deep Space



Leo the Wonderful Lion

LEO is a very nice old lion, but, sad to say, he suffers from several annoying afflictions: **head lice in his mane, fleas on his tummy, and nits on his hindquarters!** What makes Leo a very *interesting* old lion, though, is the fact that all of these vermin are really GALAXIES!

As I've probably said before, galaxies are my favorite denizen of the deep sky, having replaced globular clusters in my affections in fairly recent times. And,

being a galaxy fancier, you can guess how anxiously I await the rising of the huge Coma/Virgo cloud of Island Universes every Spring. But this Spring the galaxies just seemed to take *forever* to arrive! When we finally got some clear weather after what was really a dastardly Winter, though, I remembered Leo. While the galaxies which lie within his borders are not as numerous (by far) as those in Virgo-Coma, some of Leo's beautiful night birds are really more detailed and wonderful than many of the inhabitants of Virgo (let's face it, quite a few of Virgo's residents are rather plain ellipticals).

And before I knew it, I was observing **galaxy after galaxy**. If you'd like to follow in my footsteps, or design your own tour, get your scope out *now*, since you'll soon be distracted by Virgo and the Summer splendors which quickly follow her into the sky! All of these observations were made with the 12.5" Newtonian in city conditions which ranged from fair to lousy, so you shouldn't have much of a problem viewing any of these objects with a 'scope as small as 6"-8" from reasonably good suburban skies.

MANE LICE

NGC 2903	LEO MAG:10.0
Galaxy	9h32m11s x
21°29' 4"	
H I 56	13'18" x 6' 0"
CLASS:Sb	PA (dgr): 17
cB,vL,E,gmbM,r,sp of 2	

'Under my skies, NGC 2903 was a somewhat ill-defined, but easily visible glow. Its elongation is obvious. I saw what I took to be a stellar-appearing core, but this may have been a faint field star.' While I tried several times to observe nearby NGC2916 it was utterly invisible. Maybe you'll have better luck under better skies.'

NGC 3190	LEO MAG:11.9
Galaxy	10h18m 7s x
21°49'60"	
H II 44	5'30" x 2'42"
CLASS:Sb	PA (dgr):125
B,pS,E,psbMN	

NGC 3193	LEO MAG:12.4
Galaxy	10h18m25s x
21°53'57"	
H II 45	3'30" x 3'30"
CLASS:E0	
B,S,vLE,pslbM,*9.5,354,80"	

'This little pair was a real treat. 3190 is bright, definitely elongated, and shows a stellar core. It really looks like a galaxy! 3193 which is in the same field in a low-power or wide-field eyepiece, is a typical round elliptical. It also showed some hint of a nucleus. I was, unfortunately, unable to detect a third galaxy which should be present in this field, NGC 3185, due to deteriorating conditions.'

TUMMY FLEAS

M 105	LEO MAG: 9.6
Galaxy	10h47m49s x
12°34'57"	
NGC 3379	4'48" x 4'48"

CLASS:E1 M 96 LEO MAG:10.0
vB,cL,R,psbM,r Galaxy 10h46m48s x
11°48'58"

NGC 3384 LEO MAG:10.0 NGC 3368 8'30" x 5' 0"
Galaxy 10h48m18s x CLASS:Sbp PA (dgr): 5
12°38' 5" vB,vL,IE,vsymbM,r

H I 18 5'24" x 3'48"
CLASS:E7 PA (dgr): 53
vB,L,R,psmbM,2nd of 3

NGC 3389 LEO MAG:12.0
Galaxy 10h48m31s x
12°31'59"
H II 41 3'54" x 1'12"
CLASS:Sc PA (dgr):112
F,L,E pf,vglbM,3rd of 3

'While conditions were not good and fast getting worse as the night wore-on, these two neighboring galaxies were as lovely as ever. M96 is large, bright, and clearly elongated. M95 is a little dimmer and, unlike its friend, M96, does not clearly show a core.'

HIND-QUARTER NITS

*'This field was quite a surprise. I remembered the appearance of M105 fairly well, but I DIDN'T remember two other galaxies in the same field! I finally had to run back inside and print a finder chart with Megastar in order to reassure myself that I was on the correct field (the scale is too small on Sky Atlas 2000 to help in cases like this). M105 is quite bright, basically round, and has a stellar nucleus. NGC3384 is like a smaller M105. NGC 3389 is dimmer and somewhat difficult here amid the light pollution. I wasn't sure whether it showed a core or not. This is an intensely beautiful field. Three beautiful galaxies for the price of one!**

M 65 LEO MAG: 9.6
Galaxy 11h18m53s x 13°
4'57"
NGC 3623 10'30" x 2'18"
CLASS: PA (dgr):174
B,vL,mE 165,gbMBN

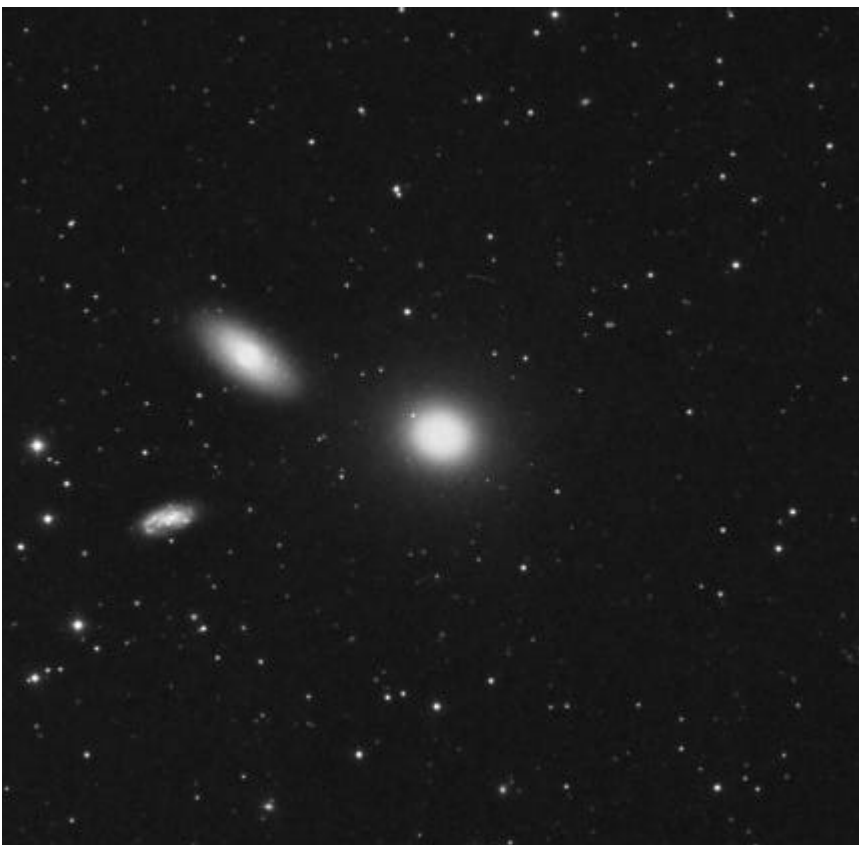
M 66 LEO MAG: 8.9
Galaxy 11h20m12s x
12°59' 1"
NGC 3627 9' 0" x 4'12"
CLASS:Sb
B,vL,mE 150,mbM,2 st np

M 95 LEO MAG:11.2
Galaxy 10h43m60s x
11°42' 3"
NGC 3351 9'30" x 5' 0"
CLASS:SBb PA (dgr): 13
B,L,R,pgmbMN

M65 and M66 are, without doubt, one of the deep sky's most marvelous visions. A wide-field eyepiece lets you stare in awe at both of these wonders at one time, and while they were at a disadvantage in my skies, they are still very, very rewarding! They are both quite bright, and M65 is obviously and definitely more elongated than M66.'

After finally having *almost* my fill of M65 and M66 I pull my eye away from the glass of the eyepiece feeling like a frustrated child at a toy shop window, forever condemned to *look but not touch*. But, in a certain sense, the very inaccessibility of these distant creatures adds to their majesty. They are (for now if not forever) pristine and pure--untouched by the fumbling, clumsy fingers of children like us.

--Rod



M105 is set in a very beautiful field! *Courtesy Palomar Observatory Sky Survey.*

My Back Pages



AstroPoem

To One-hundred Warriors

*Sudden, unlooked-for visitor
From the dark realms,
You pass us briefly,
Warming yourself
In the fires of an alien sun.
When I gaze upon your majesty,
Hyakutake,
I understand the forgotten,
(and now laughed-at)
Emotions of my ancestors:
Fear, awe, and, maybe...
Longing.
I won't see you again, I think,
As I stand saddened,
Watching you dwindle
From mortal sight.
But, straining for a last glimpse
Of your shimmering gown,
I am cheered by the hope
That your beauty will live-on
In the mind of man and woman.
Forever.*

--Rod Mollise



Club Notes

March 1996 Meeting: The March meeting of the Mobile Astronomical Society was held on March 6, 1996 at the

Society's usual meeting place, the Mobile Public Schools' Environmental Studies Center. Among the subjects discussed at this meeting were: the upcoming Mid South Regional Star Gaze (we still haven't received any mailings from organizer Jim Hill; Ginny Kramer to investigate), the rapidly approaching Comet 1996/B2 Hyakutake, and the March 13 Public Star Gaze. An excellent report on the 1996 Winter Star Party (in the Florida Keys) was given by Judy Anderson, who kept the membership enthralled with tales of her adventures at this prominent gathering. Finally, while this meeting featured what was probably the best turn-out in recent memory, there are still some long-time MAS members who are 'missing in action.' Does this describe you? If so, try to make the next meeting (meetings are still held on the first Wednesday of each month at 7:00pm at the ESC on Girby Road)--*your club* needs your participation!

April 1996 Meeting: The April 1996 meeting coincided with a Public Stargaze featuring Comet Hyakutake and a total Lunar eclipse. This event was very successful! See this issue's feature story for details!

RUMOURS

*CRASH!! Without even looking, I knew that a **hermetically sealed mayonnaise jar** containing yet another edition of Rumours had hit my front porch! But this time I was ready! I was going to catch this 'anonymous astronomer' dude! I ran out the door, down, the steps, and onto the walk. But out on Selma Street everything was quiet...except... In the distance I did see two strange looking kids hurrying off: a peculiar looking brown-haired teenager, and an equally odd-looking blond. And, just before they disappeared from sight, I thought I heard:*

*Huh huh huh huh huh huh huh huh, astronomy is cool.
Yeah, yeah, heh heh hmm hmm heh heh, astronomy is cool.*

The Odyssey reborn?! I was *very* surprised to see the following press release:

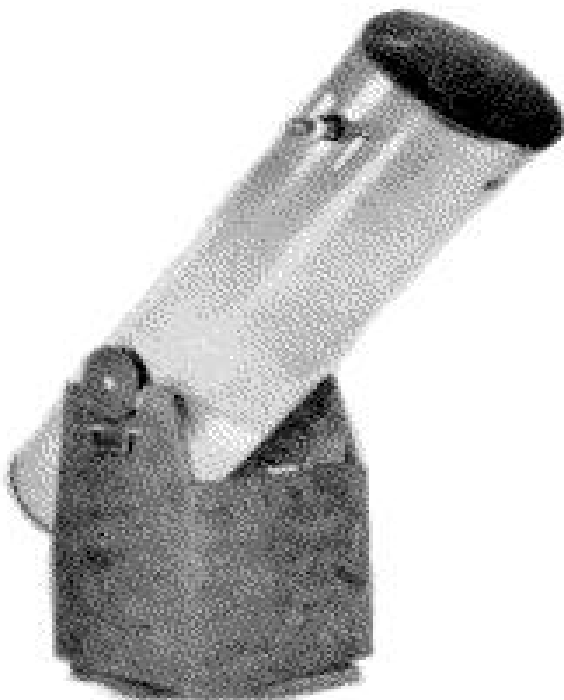
W. PALM BEACH, FL--MURNAGHAN Instruments has purchased the assets of the bankrupt Coulter Optical, Inc., formerly of California and manufacturer of the world-renowned Odyssey™ telescopes.

Over the past fifteen years, Coulter had built a reputation for providing amateur astronomers with good quality, large-aperture telescopes at reasonable prices. The new Coulter Optical™, now combined with the financial stability, management skill and manufacturing capabilities of MURNAGHAN Instruments, will continue production of Odyssey™ telescopes at our new facility in Palm Beach

County, Florida.

MURNAGHAN Instruments builds electronic camera systems, components and accessories for low light imaging applications in astronomy and microscopy. Customers for MURNAGHAN Instruments include NASA, JPL, the Smithsonian Institution and observatories worldwide.

Is this for real? Seems to be, though I don't see how that the Odyssey telescope line could be considered exactly



Odyssey Reborn? The Coulter Odyssey I, the much-loved 'Model T' of deep sky observers.

a gold mine for anybody--at least if the old LOW PRICES are maintained....

It seems, according to reports I'm receiving, that **Meade may have been successful in mass-producing a quality Maksutov-Cassegrain at 'popular prices.'** Early opinions on the 7" Mak seem to be highly favorable. Some people had feared that the large Maksutov corrector plate ('salad bowl') would doom the Meade Mak to poor performance due to very long cool-down times (something that plagued the Questar 7 and Questar 12), but Meade has equipped the telescope with a fan/filter system which seems to handle this problem nicely. Or so we're told, anyway...

Speaking of **Meade**...I notice that the prices of all of Meade's popular telescopes are going up. In a **price increase announcement** that I saw, it appears that most Meade scopes remain fairly reasonably priced (e.g. the

Starfinders). The **big** increase in prices is apparently largely confined to the company's popular LX-200 computer-driven SCTs. Is Meade trying to make up the (continuing?) development costs on this high-tech SCT?...

Alright! In a story that you may have missed (it wasn't reported widely), I understand that an **asteroid** has been named after the late **Grateful Dead Guitarist, Jerry Garcia!** Simon Radford (NRAO) and Ed Olszewski (Steward Observatory) convinced astronomer Tom Gehrels to **'donate' an asteroid he discovered in 1985 but never named** as a memorial to the late, beloved guitarist. Asteroid Garcia orbits in the main belt between Mars and Jupiter, and is about 160 km in size...

I keep hearing that **Celestron's long-anticipated Ultima 2000** telescope (a computerized rival for Meade's LX-200) is **due out 'around the first quarter of '96.'** But so far, no official word on this computer-laden marvel (as of the time of this writing--March). Frankly, this scope **has been under a cloud since Celestron announced it** quite a while back. Though some impressive prototypes were seen for a while at various national-level star parties, and some vendors (Orion) ran fancy ads for these telescopes, both the ads and the prototypes soon disappeared without a trace. Scuttlebutt had it that Celestron had some **severe development problems;** especially in the software department. This seems hard to credit, though, since the company has offered computer-slewing of SCTs for years (although I understand that the software/firmware on Celestron's earlier computerized SCTs, the **Compustars**, was done by a third party--who has since left the scene). We shall see...

One of the most refreshing things about the recent wonderful apparition of Comet Hyakutake was the fact that--since it came upon us so suddenly--the commercial interests didn't have time to capitalize on it as they did during **Comet Halley** (to a sickening degree). But with the much-anticipated Comet Hale-Bopp still almost a year away, and with the public's curiosity whetted by the sudden appearance of Hyakutake, the junk factories must be working overtime!...

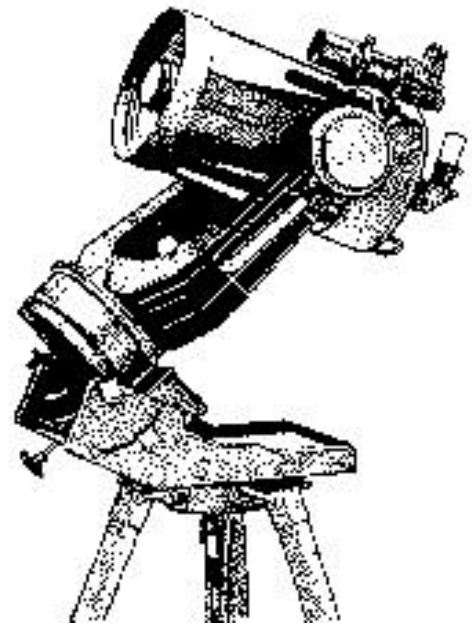
--*The Anonymous Astronomer*

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We're all still recovering from the Spring Stargazes, but let's make an effort to attend every club meeting. *Your* presence means so much!

Peace,

Rod & Dorothy

