Celestial Highlights

Jupiter

Credit: Jupiter Mar 3, 2014 by Vern Raben
The Great Red Spot crosses the center of the disk at the following times this month:
03/02/2014 8:46 pm mst
03/04/2014 10:25 pm
03/05/2014 6:16 pm
03/07/2014 7:55 pm
03/09/2014 10:33 pm mdt
03/11/2014 10:12 pm mdt
03/12/2014 8:03 pm mdt
03/14/2014 9:42 pm mdt
03/16/2014 11:21 pm mdt
03/19/2014 8:51 pm mdt
03/21/2014 10:30 pm mdt
03/26/2014 9:39 pm mdt
03/28/2014 11:18 pm mdt

Jupiter is currently magnitude -2.4 in brightness and 42 arcsec across. It appears nearly directly south at dusk in the constellation Gemini.

Announcements from LAS President, Vern Raben

At our meeting on March 20th, Stokes McMillan, chief systems engineer for the Sierra Nevada Corporation based in Louisville, CO, will talk about the fascinating history and design of their Dreamchaser space plane. He has been in the space business for over 38 years. As a NASA engineer at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, TX, for 32 years, McMillan trained astronauts and flight controllers for the first 25 Space Shuttle missions, monitored over 40 additional Shuttle missions from an engineering console, and was Deputy Manager of the X-38 program. McMillan is currently in charge of astronaut and flight controller training for Sierra Nevada’s Dream Chaser, a spaceship that will carry astronauts to and from the International Space Station.

Credit: Sierra Nevada Corp.
Since a total eclipse of the moon occurs on night of April 14/15, we’ve applied for a permit from city. The partial eclipse begins at 11:57 pm MDT; totality begins at 1:56 am and ends at 2:25 am MDT. Scopes and volunteers will be needed!

No speaker for the April meeting just yet. In May we’re scheduled for a demonstration of the new digital projection system at Sommers-Bausch planetarium in Boulder. In June Fran Bagenal will give us a talk on planetary aurora.

LAS has signed an agreement with the Astronomical League to lease their C14 telescope. Wayne Green will drive to Kansas City, MO and pick it up sometime this month.
Mars

Credit: Mars April 22, 2012 by Vern Raben

Mars rises in constellation Virgo around 9:30 pm at the beginning of the month and 8:15 pm by months end. It is currently -0.5 magnitude in brightness and 12 arcsec across. It transits around 3 am early in the month and 2 am by months end. Mars will be at opposition with earth on April 5th.

February Meeting

The February LAS meeting was at the IHOP Restaurant in Longmont. Gary Garzone gave a presentation on the constellation Coma Berenices and some of the objects within it. He also gave a short talk about construction of a his home observatory. Mike Fellows gave a finance report for February. There was a discussion about possible dark sky observing site at Red Feather Lakes.

Happy Birthday Lina!

Credit: M. F. Tielemanm

Caroline Herschel was born on March 16, 1750 in Hanover, Germany. Her childhood was a difficult one. The family home was occupied for four years by French soldiers during the Seven Years war. Caroline along with her mother and a younger brother were confined to area about the size of small closet and nearly starved to death. Since she was the youngest, her mother wished her to be a servant to her aging parents. After her father’s death, her older brother William paid her mother a small annual stipend so that Caroline could assist him as a singer in the choir in England for which he was the musical director.

Upon arrival in England, William joined Caroline for breakfast each day and provided her daily “Lessons for Lina” covering such topics as learning to speak English, learning music and voice, and the basics of astronomy, mathematics, and social etiquette. Apparently she was a superb student. Within a year and half she became principal singer at the Octagon Chapel in Bath (an audience of 2000) and was so well received she invited to sing professionally. Caroline declined and instead assisted William in his new hobby of astronomy by keeping field notes and computing the spherical coordinates of the objects William observed. She also managed the house, the finances, and helped William grind numerous telescope mirrors and build mounts for personal use and sale -- not to mention entertaining visiting dignitaries and showing them the heavens. The brother and sister thus occupied themselves night and day for nearly a decade.

After William discovered the planet Uranus on March 13, 1781, he was appointed royal astronomer and was often away showing various astronomical objects to King George III and other members of royal society. In his absence, he asked Caroline continue their nightly sweeps of the heavens to catalogue stars and nebulae. Between 1786 and 1791 she discovered 8 comets; five of which she was the undisputed sole discoverer. In 1798 she completed the “Catalogue of Stars” which indexed every star observed by Flamsteed and 560 other stars that he didn’t include. After William died in 1822, she returned to Hanover, Germany. There she completed a “Catalogue of Nebula” to assist William’s son, John, in his studies. In 1828 the Royal Astronomical Society awarded a gold medal for that work. Caroline died on January 9, 1848.
Moon

New moon: Mar 1 at 02:00 am MST
First quarter: Mar 8 6:27 am MST
Full moon: Mar 16 11:08 am MDT
Third quarter: Mar 23 7:46 pm MDT
New moon: Mar 30 12:45 pm MDT

Dark Sky

At the beginning of the month astronomical darkness ends at 5:06 am mst and begins at 7:22 pm mst. At the end of this month astronomical dawn ends at 5:20 am mdt and dusk begins at 9:00 pm mdt.

COSMOS - A Space Time Odessy

The series premier of “COSMOS - A Space Time Odyssey” premiers Sunday March 9th on local Fox channel 31 at 7 pm. It also airs on the National Geographic cable channel at 6 pm.

IC 434 Horsehead Nebula

Located just south of the leftmost star in Orion’s belt (Alnitak) is the dark “horsehead nebula” also known as Barnard 33 which is within the emission nebula IC 434. The likeness of a “horsehead” is from dense clouds of dust. The reddish glow of IC434 is from hydrogen gas ionized by the nearby bright star Alnitak. Although relatively easy to pick up photographically it is challenging to spot visually. You’ll need an exceptionally clear, transparent night, large aperture, and good vision to spot it.

Messier 66

This spiral galaxy in the constellation Leo was discovered by Charles Messier in 1780. It has noticeable dark lanes and bright star clusters along its sweeping spiral arms.