Celestial Highlights

Mars

Credit: Mars March 26, 2014 by Vern Raben

Mars will be at opposition with earth on April 8th. Closest approach will be on April 14th. 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 -1.3 magnitude in brightness and 14.7 arcsec across. It transits at 1:48 am MDT.

Announcements from LAS President

The topic at the April 17th will be “Imaging Mars” presented by Vern Raben. He will discuss some of the equipment and software programs that are available to the amateur astronomer to image the red planet and other solar system objects. He’ll give a tutorial on how to configure and use the “FireCapture” software for capturing planetary images. Alignment, stacking, and enhancement of the images using software tools will be discussed. Techniques to measure and map planetary features will be discussed as well.

Following the presentation will be observing reports and a slideshow of member images during the past month.

Don’t forget the total lunar eclipse on the night of April 14 to 15th! Totality begins early morning on April 15th at 1:07 am and ends at 2:25 am MDT.

Credit: Saturn simulation on April 1 by Cartes du Ciel.

Saturn rises around 10:40 pm at the beginning of the month in constellation Libra. It is +0.3 magnitude in brightness and 18.3 arcsec across. It is directly south around 3:45 am.

Total lunar eclipse by Brian Kimball

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Dark Sky

At the beginning of the month astronomical darkness ends at 5:18 am MDT and begins at 9:01 pm MDT. At the end of this month astronomical dawn ends at 4:25 am mdt and dusk begins at 9:41 pm mdt.

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:

4/02/2014 10:36 pm
4/05/2014 8:06 pm
04/07/2014 9:45 pm
04/09/2014 11:24 pm
04/10/2014 7:16 pm
04/12/2014 8:55 pm
04/14/2014 10:34 pm
04/17/2014 8:05 pm
04/19/2014 9:44 pm
04/21/2014 11:23 pm
04/24/2014 8:54 pm
04/26/2014 10:33 pm
04/29/2014 8:04 pm

Jupiter is currently magnitude -2.2 in brightness and 38 arcsec across. It appears nearly directly south at dusk in the constellation Gemini.

Mars this Month

April 1st at 1:48 am MDT
Syrtis Major and Hellas

April 8 at 1:11 am MDT

April 15 00:53 am

April 22 at 11:53 pm
Solas Lacas the “eye of Mars”

April 29 at 11:15 pm

During the weeks of April 1st and 29th Syrtis Major and Hellas are visible.

During the week of April 22 the Solas Las, “the eye of Mars” is visible.

Messier 64 “Black Eyed Galaxy”

Credit: M 64 black eyed Galaxy

Messier 64 by Gary Garzone
Venus
Venus is now visible low in the southeast before dawn in constellation Capricornus. It is -4.2 magnitude in brightness and 20 arcsec across.

Moon
First quarter: April 7 2:31 am MDT
Full moon: April 15 1:42 am MDT
Third quarter: April 22 1:52 am MDT
New moon: April 29 00:14 am MDT

Markarian’s Chain
In the 1960s astrophysicist B.E. Markarian found that at least 7 galaxies in this chain shared a common motion in space. The galaxies are located in the northern part of the constellation Virgo near RA 12h 27m Decl +13°10’.

Messier 101 “Pinwheel Galaxy”
The Pinwheel galaxy was discovered by Pierre Méchain on March 27, 1781. It was one of the first galaxies to be identified as a spiral “nebula” by William Parsons in 1851. Messier 101 is located in the constellation Ursa Major at RA 14h 03m 12.6s and DECL+54° 20’ 57”.

March 20 Meeting Notes
There was a very nice turnout of 38 people at the March LAS meeting. Stokes McMillan with the Sierra Nevada Corporation in Louisville gave an entertaining and fascinating talk about the development of their Dreamchaser space plane. Following his talk we had a review of recent images taken by LAS members.