NEWSLETTER - MARCH, 1985

Meeting Wednesday, March 27th

The Society's March meeting will be held on Wednesday, March 27th commencing at 8 p.m. The venue this month, and for future meetings, will be PENINSULA SCHOOL, MT. ELIZA, not the Chisholm Institute, Frankston, and the meeting is scheduled to be held in Room F.6 of the Upper School. Please see map enclosed for further directions.

During the March meeting the election of Office Bearers for the forthcoming year will be held, using the nominations previously submitted.

The guest speaker for the month will be Barry Adcock of Astronomical Society of Victoria, who will talk on the effects produced on images in a telescope by obstructions such as reflector diagonals and spiders in the telescope's light path.

Meeting Wednesday, April 24th

The April meeting will be held on Wednesday, April 24th at Peninsula School, Mt. Eliza commencing at 8 p.m. The speaker for this meeting will be Jim Trainor, Director of Astronomical Society of Victoria's Current Phenomena Sect on, who will be remembered by members for his previous talks to ASF, and who, on this occasion, will be presenting an Astronomical Quiz which proved a considerable success at a recent Astronomical Society of Victoria meeting.

Observing Night for March

An observing night for the month of March will be held at the Observatory site, Peninsula School, Mt. Eliza on Saturday March 30th, commencing at 7 p.m. and using portable instruments. Should the Saturday night be cloudy then Sunday, March 31st will be substituted for the Observing Night. The Moon will be shortly after

First Quarter on this occasion and the later part of the evening will show the ringed planet Saturn rising in the East.

April Observing Night

An observing night for April will be held on Saturday April 20th at the Peninsula School site, or, if cloudy, on Sunday April 21st, commencing at 6.30 p.m. These nights will be at the time of New Moon and should allow observation of galaxies in the Leo and Virgo regions.

Distribution of future Newsletters

Commencing with the April Newsletter, the Newsletter will be distributed at meetings to members present and mailed to other members. As a consequence, notices of future meetings will be one month in advance, i.e. the April Newsletter will contain a notice of the May meeting, not the April meeting. Similarly, notices of Observing Nights will be one month in advance in each Newsletter. This method of distribution should allow useful savings on postal expenses.

Society News

The talk at the Society meeting for February was provided by Leon Costerman of Chisholm Institute, who spoke on the Geology of the Mornington Peninsula. The talk provided a perspective of the area in which we live in terms of the Earth's planetary history and included references to the volcanic nature of large areas of Victoria at different times in the past, with extensive volcanic activity in Western Victoria only a few thousand years ago. Reference was also made to the linking of Tasmania to the mainland of Australia during the Ice Age of some 15,000 years ago when sea levels were lowered by the locking of large amounts of water into the Earth's polar caps by, as yet, uncertain mechanisms.

The continually changing nature of the Earth's surface was shown by reference to the uplifting of the Dividing Range within the last million or so years and, closer to home, by reference to the Selwyn Fault, a fault line passing south along the coast from Frankston and which provides us with regular Earth tremors.

Sky Notes

Planets. The brilliant planet Venus, so conspicuous after sunset for the past few months, is now moving to inferior conjunction (between Earth and Sun) and will be lost to view by the end of March, re-emerging into the pre-dawn sky in April. The planet closest to the Sun, Mercury, is also an early morning object during April and early risers should be able to see Mercury and Venus in the same part of the eastern sky during mid-April at around 4 a.m. to 5 a.m.

In the evening sky the ringed Planet Saturn is rising by 8 p.m. at the end of March, and as April advances will be well placed for observation in the late evening sky.

Constellations. The bright star fields of Carina, the Keel and Crux, the Southern Cross, are near the zenith, or point overhead, at this time of the year and well placed for telescopic or binocular viewing of the numerous cluster and nebulosity in this region of the Milky Way.

Rising below the Southern Cross is the constellation of Centaurus, the Centaur, with the two "Pointers", Alpha and Beta Centauri, indicating the position of the Southern Cross and distinguishing it from the so-called"False Cross" in Carina. The Alpha Centauri system, the brighter of the two Pointers, is the nearest Star system of all in the heavens at 4 light years distance.

In the same constellation of Centaurus is also to be seen one of the furthest distant objects easily seen by the naked eye, the bright globular cluster Omega Centauri at some 17,000 light years distance. To the naked eye Omega Centauri has the appearance of a somewhat fuzzy 4th magnetude star and can be found by taking a line from the star Delta Crux through Gamma Crux and extending it into Centaurus. Omega Centauri was known to the ancients but the first observation of it as a cluster, and not a star, was made by none other than Edmund Halley in 1677.

In the telescope this is a magnificent object with many thousands of star images closely crowded towards the centre, the total number of stars in the cluster now being thought to be a million or more. At the cluster's centre the average distance between stars may be no more than one tenth of a light year, a star density 25,000 times greater than in the Sun's neighbourhood.

Although the brightest of the globular clusters in the sky, Omega Centauri is not, however, the nearest, this honour going to the much fainter NGC 6397 in Ara at R.A. 17 h. 36m. Dec. -53° 39'.

The Moon

New Moon	Mar 21	Apr 20
First Quarter	Mar 29	Apr 28
Full Moon	Apr 5	May 4
Last Quarter	Apr 12	May 11

News Notes

Observation of the next (Milky Way) Supernova. Studies at the ESO (European Southern Observatory) have shown that the first indication of a nearby supernova outburst (within about 1,000 light years) would be a sharp, intense "crack" heard on radio or TV broadcasts and caused by an electromagnetic pulse created by the supernova's collapsing core. Surprisingly, the expected brightness of such a supernova, at about -12 mag., or the brightness of the Full Moon, would be too great for the photometric astronomical apparatus currently in operation, and spectrophotometry would be even more difficult for the same reason.

It is suggested that amateur astronomers might set out to design photometric and spectrophotometric equipment in readiness for this long awaited event, the last galactic supernova having been seen in 1604, before the invention of the telescope.

(Sky & Telescope, January 1985).

For the Astronomer's Bookshelf

"Secrets of the Sun" by R. Giovanelli, Cambridge University Press, 1984.

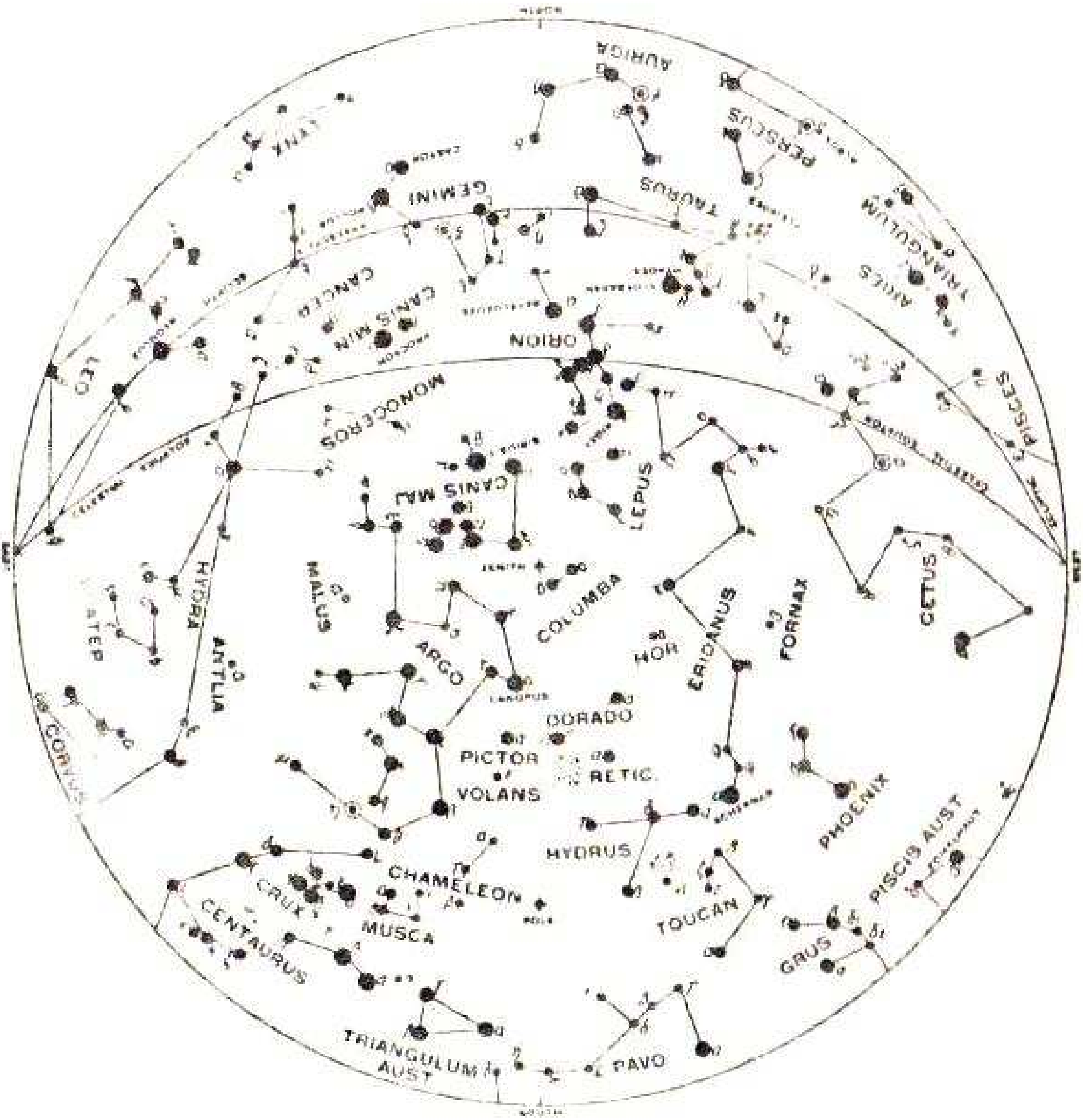
R. Giovanelli, an Australian author, was chief of CSIRO's Division of Physics from 1958 to 1978 and the book is described by Bruce Tregaskis as a technical but understandable work which is concise and authoritative, dealing with all aspects of Solar Physics an the inter-relation of Solar events and Earth's weather and magnetic field.

For Sale

"International Halley Watch Amateur Observer's Manual for Scientific Comet Studies" - $13.80.

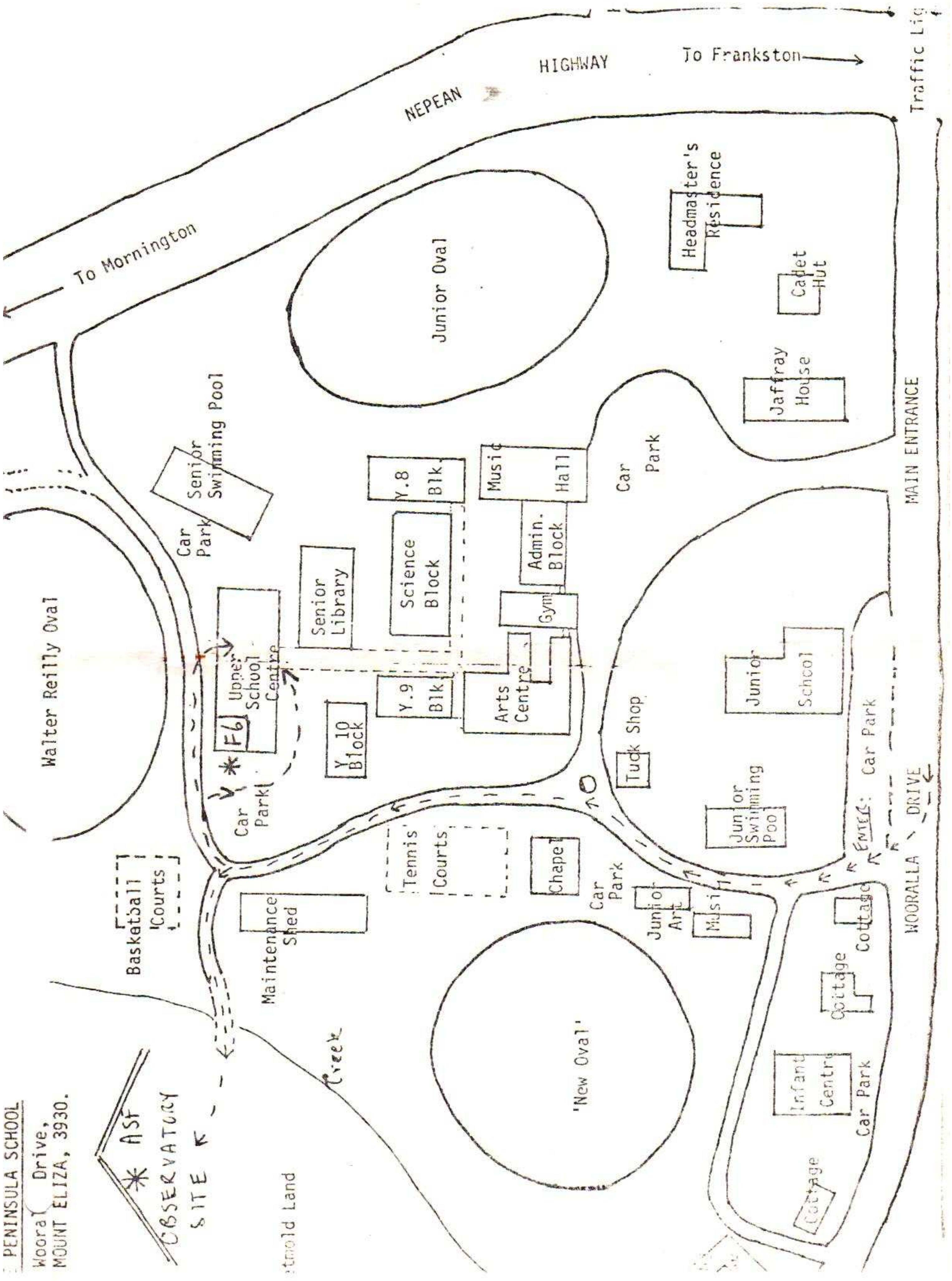
Contact John Palmer, 204 McMahon's Rd.,Frankston.
Tel: 783-2598

Star Groups for February and March



FEBRUARY AND MARCH

Feb.	1	9·15 p.m.	Mar.	3	7·17 p.m.
	11	8·36		13	6·37
	21	7·56		23	5·58
	28	7·29			


PENINSULA SCHOOL
Wooral Drive,
MOUNT ELIZA, 3930.
ASF OBSERVATORY SITE
NEPEAN HIGHWAY
To Mornington
To Frankston
Traffic Lig
MAIN ENTRANCE
WOORALLA DRIVE
ENTER
Junior Oval
Headmaster's Residence
Cadet Hut
Jaffray House
Car Park
Music
Hall
Admin. Block
Y.8 Blk
Science Block
Senior Library
Senior Swimming Pool
Car Park
Upper School Centre
F6
Walter Reilly Oval
Gym
Arts Centre
Y.9 Blk
Y 10 Block
Car Park
Tuck Shop
Junior School
Car Park
Junior Swimming Pool
Tennis Courts
Chapel
Car Park
Junior Art
Music
Basketball Courts
Maintenance Shed
'New Oval'
Creek
Cottage
Cottage
Infant Centre
Car Park
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