ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF FRANKSTON INC.

NEWSLETTER, MAY 1985

Meeting Wednesday, June 26th

The June meeting of the Society will be held on Wednesday, June 26th starting at 8 p.m. The meeting will be in Room F.6 of the Upper School, Peninsula School, Mt. Eliza and the map enclosed with the March Newsletter provides directions to this room.

Our speaker will be our member from Geelong, Peter Lowe, who will speak on "Microcomputers in Amateur Astronomy" and who will be showing two varieties of "Apple" computers which can be used for astronomy.

Meeting, Wednesday July 24th

Peter Norman will talk on recent theories linking possible collisions of the Earth with comets and the extinction of the dinosaurs some 65 million years ago, after they had dominated life on Earth for some 100 million years prior to this.

Observing Night for June

The observing night for the month of June will be held on Saturday, June 15th at the Observatory site, Peninsula School, Mt. Eliza commencing at 7 p.m. The night will be close to New Moon and will allow observation of deep sky objects and the planets Saturn and, later in the evening, Jupiter. If clouded out, the following night, Sunday June 16th, will become the Observing Night for June.

Observing Night for July

The July Observing Night will be on Saturday, July 20th or, if clouded, Sunday July 21st commencing at 7 p.m. These nights will be between New Moon and First Quarter and Jupiter should be well placed for observation.

Society News

The Society's April meeting held at Peninsula School consisted of an Astronomical Quiz conducted by Jim Trainor, Director of Astronomical Society of Victoria's Current Phenomena Section.

A stimulating selection of questions on a wide range of astronomical and related topics brought forth a variety of imaginative answers from a number of members and a good deal of fun and mental stimulation was enjoyed by all. The winner of the Quiz, by a narrow margin from Bruce Tregaskis, was Ken Bryant who was presented with a prize in the form of a copy of Hartung's "Astronomical Objects for Southern Telescopes", addressed to the "Astronomical Quiz Kid of 1985".

Another successful Observing Night, using portable instruments, was held on Sunday, April 21st at Peninsula School. A dark moonless night allowed identification of various deep sky objects including a pair of galaxies in Leo and a planetary nebula in Hydra.

An additional Observing Night for a group of Peninsula School students was held on Monday, April 29th, and a number of members demonstrated deep sky objects, the planet Saturn and features on the First Quarter Moon to the group.

Sky Notes

Constellations. The night sky of late May and June displays the bright constellations of Scorpius and Satittarius rising high in the Eastern Sky and with the bright band of the Milky Way stretching from East to West and passing near the zenith. Our Milky Way galaxy's two smaller satellites, the Magellanic Clouds, are now lying close to the Southern horizon just above the bright star Achernar at the end of the "Celestial River", the constellation of Eridanus.

Towards the Northern horizon can be seen the constellation of Böotes, the Herdsman, with its brilliant star Arcturus which is known to be plunging rapidly through the plane of the Milky Way, it being a representative of the Population II, or galactic halo stars. To its right may be seen the curving line of stars known as Corona Borealis, the Northern Crown, one of the relatively few constellation figures bearing a real resemblance to the object after which it is named.

Corona Borealis contains a bright representative of a class of variable stars which is characterised by a sudden decline in brightness from its normal value, followed by a slower recovery to the same normal value. The star concerned is titled R Coronae Borealis and is one which can be followed easily in amateur instruments.

Due North and very low on the horizon at this time of year may be seen the star Benetnasch, Eta Ursae Majoris, the last star in the tail of the Great Bear, the constellation of Ursa Major and one which is very familiar to Northern Hemisphere observers. Two of the stars in the principal asterism, or star grouping, provide a line to Polaris, the Northern "Pole Star" and are known, like Alpha and Beta Centauri, as the "Pointers".

Finding Benetnasch is a challenge for Victorian observers because, as a result of its low elevation, a clear northern horizon is required for the brief time that it can be seen above the horizon.

Planets. For the next few months the two largest planets will be well placed for Southern observers, Saturn in Libra rising first and followed later by Jupiter in Capricornus. Through the telescope both planets offer fascinating views, Saturn with its ring system and satellites, and Jupiter with its ever varying belt markings and changing satellite phenomena.

The two other major planets, Uranus and Neptune, are both visible with instrumental aid at this time of the year and charts for location can be found in the BAA Handbook and, when available, the ASV Yearbook 1985.

The Moon

New Moon	June 18	July 17
First Quarter	May 27	June 25
Full Moon	June 3	July 2
Last Quarter	June 10	July 10

News Notes

Flashers - in the Sky. A number of reports have come from various amateur observers in America of sudden mysterious flashes of light, lasting a fraction of a second, from a location near the Pleiades star cluster, tentatively identified as being coincident with the star W Arietis. These flashes, when seen, have been very bright, about equal or brighter than a first magnitude star, and do not appear to be explainable as meteors seen head on.

It is being suggested that the phenomenon, which has also been observed in other parts of the sky, may be an optical equivalent to the so-called "Gamma Ray Flashers" - sudden bursts of gamma rays recorded by orbiting satellites equipped for Gamma Ray observations. No photographic confirmation has, as yet, been made of the flashes and members may be interested in attempting similar observations for themselves by long term watching of the area of sky reported as involved.

"Astronomy" magazine, April 1985

An observing night at Peninsula School on Saturday, February 15th was attended by a number of members who enjoyed views of the night sky through telescopes ranging from a 25 cm Newtonian to Ken Bryant's 20 cm and Bob Heale's 15 cm aperture telescopes. In addition to observations of deep sky objects, nebulae, planetary nebulae and clusters, numerous meteors were seen, one resulting in a spectacular fireworks type display of blue, red and white. Later in the night a remarkable bright streak near the Large Magellanic Cloud was observed by Ken Bryant and Bob Heale around 00.25 hrs. The streak persisted for some minutes and was presumed to result from a meteor trail.

Steve Malone's project on Aboriginal Astronomy is proceeding and has already resulted in considerable research activity, involving reference works in the National Library of Australia, the Institute of Aboriginal Studies, and approaches to the Aboriginal Arts Board. Steve has found that although there is a large amount of published material on Aboriginal culture there is very little on the astronomical knowledge of Aboriginals. However, what he has so far discovered involves remarkable parallels between European and Aboriginal identification of star figures, or constellations; for instance, the Pleiades, or Seven Sisters, are also a female grouping in Aboriginal myth and Orion is a hunter figure for aboriginals also.

The re-opening of the Society's Observatory is now in sight, the raised floor is now in place and the equatorial telescope mounting is on the concrete pillar. It is hoped to have the Observatory open again for April and Comet Halley.

Annual Subscriptions

Subscriptions for 1986 are now due and payable. Rates remain the same as for last year and are as follows:-

Adult members	$12.00
Member & Associate	20.00
Pensioner member	8.00
Junior Associate	8.00

Subscriptions should be paid to the Treasurer, Peter Brown, at meetings or to 7 Kiandra Court, Frankston, 3199.

Sky Notes

Comet Halley has now passed perihelion, the closest point in its orbit to the Sun, on February 9th at 0.59 A.U. (where 1 A.U. or Astronomical Unit = distance between Sun and Earth).

It is now moving on to closest approach to Earth which on this visit will occur on April 11th at 0.42 A.U. The comet will move from Capricornus near the "Teapot" of Sagittarius to the tail of Scorpius, the Scorpion during March and then during April will move past the Pointers, Alpha and Beta Centauri, and the Southern Cross, to approach Leo at the end of April. All this time it will be well placed in the sky, at a nearly ideal position for observers in our part of the world.

At the end of February Halley has become visible in the morning sky and was seen by Ken Bryant at 5.15 a.m. on February 24th as a