ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF FRANKSTON, INC.

P.O. BOX 596, FRANKSTON, 3199

NEWSLETTER SEPTEMBER, 1986

MEETING, WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 8th

The October meeting will be held in Room F.6 of the Upper School, Peninsula School, Mt. Eliza commencing at 8 p.m. The speaker will be Rick Tudor of the Staff of Peninsula School, who will talk on Primitive Life Forms, with special reference to Diatoms in early Australian rock formations, which are similar to other diatoms found in flood desposits in Mesopotamia (now Iraq) at a similar time in the past. Mesopotamia is the reputed site of events, including Noah's Flood, described in the Book of Genesis. Rick now poses the question: "Could Noah have landed in a gum tree instead of Mt. Ararat?".

FRANKSTON ASTRONOMY DAY - ASV VISIT- and OBSERVING NIGHT, SATURDAY 27th SEPTEMBER

A visit by a group from Astronomical Society of Victoria is to take place on Saturday 27th September. Inspections of Bruce Tregaskis' and Arthur Higginson's observing facilities, a BBQ and Star Party at the Observatory are planned for this day. As the main 25cm mirror of the B. J. Smith telescope was removed for re-aluminising at the end of July and may not have been returned and replaced by the date of this Observing Night, members are asked to bring, unless otherwise informed, as many portable telescopes as possible for the use of members and our ASV guests.

If clouded out, the following night, Sunday 28th, will be substituted as the Society's Observing Night for September. The planets Venus, Mars, Saturn and Jupiter will all be available for observation, and it may also be possible to catch a glimpse of Mercuty in the evening twilight.

SOCIETY NEWS

The planned address and show of slides of Halley's Comet scheduled to be given by Ken Harrison of ASV at the August meeting was unable to go ahead for that date and the meeting took the form of an address by Bruce Tregaskis on amateur observations of the Sun and a show of slides of Halley's Comet taken by Bruce and Darren Crerar.

Bruce showed slides and photos of solar eclipses and referred to equipment, such as the Lyot coronagraph, which allows artificial eclipses to be produced by blocking out the precise area of the Sun's disc. He also referred to the spectrohelioscope which allows views of the Sun in one wavelength of light only, and the availability of Hydrogen alpha filters for viewing the Sun at that wavelength.

Radio observations of the Sun were also discussed and the meeting finished with slides of Halley's Comet taken by Bruce between November 1985 and June 1986, while Darren also showed slides of Halley's Comet taken at country locations such as Bendigo, Mildura and Mooroopna, and also from Dandenong.

No Observing Night was held in July as both scheduled nights were clouded out.

SKY NOTES

Constellations. The bright winter constellations of Scorpius and Sagittarius are now sinking towards the western horizon in the evening and the fainter groupings, away from the galactic centre, are now riding high in the sky. Near the zenith is the constellation of Grus, the Crane, with Phoenix, the mythical bird rising from the flames, to the east.

The long chain of stars in Eridanus, the Heavenly River, is now rising in the east, with conspicuous Achernar - the end of the River - near to the two Magellanic Clouds.

Conspicuous in the north is the 'Great Square' of Pegasus - the Flying Horse - the two eastern stars of which point upwards to the 'First Point of Aries', the point on the Ecliptic, or Sun's apparent pathway through the Heavens, where the Sun passes from the southern to the northern hemisphere at the southern Spring equinox.

Planets. Venus shines brightly in the evening sky during September - its magnitude remaining much the same as it both approaches the Earth and at the same time shows a lessening phase, or portion illuminated, to us.

Mars remains an object of continuing interest high in the sky, although the apparent diameter is now steadily declining from its maximum at opposition in July.

In the eastern sky Jupiter is at opposition, or due north at midnight, on September 10th, and with everchanging views of its planetary belts and orbiting satellites when seen through the telescope.

Saturn is now setting in the west during the early evening, and will set at sunset by the end of November.

NEWS NOTES

The Moon's Formation - a Solution at Last?

A number of theories have existed in the past as to the Origin of the Moon, none of them having been completely satisfactory for a variety of reasons.

The three main theories have been firstly, that the Moon split of from the Earth in the distant past - the Pacific Ocean being proposed as the site of this split, or secondly that the Moon was a separate planetary body captured by Earth's gravitation, or thirdly that Earth and Moon formed separately and at the same time from the same material.

The last theory has had the most support. However, investigations of rocks brought back from the Moon by Apollo missions have tended not to confirm it.

Now a new theory from the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics proposes that the Moon arose from a collision between the young Earth and another planetary body about one-seventh its mass. This collision stripped the mantles, or outer layers, from both bodies, whilst their two iron cores fused together. The mantle material, in space, is then thought to have condensed under gravitation to form a second smaller body - the Moon.

Computer analyses of this theory seem to provide strong support, so perhaps the riddle of the Moon's origina has finally been solved.

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