



SCORPIUS

THE JOURNAL OF THE
MORNINGTON PENINSULA ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY INC.

Volume XVIII, No. 1 (January/February 2009)

The Mornington Peninsula Astronomical Society (formerly the Astronomical Society of Frankston) was founded in 1969 with the aim of fostering the study and understanding of Astronomy by amateurs and promoting the hobby of amateur Astronomy to the general community at all levels.

The Society holds a focused general meeting each month for the exchange of ideas and information. Regular public and private observing nights are arranged to observe currently available celestial objects and phenomena. In addition, the society encourages the services of its members for educational presentations and observing nights for schools and community groups.

In 2009, we celebrate the society's 40th Anniversary.

MPAS 40

CELEBRATING 40 YEARS OF ASTRONOMY IN 2009

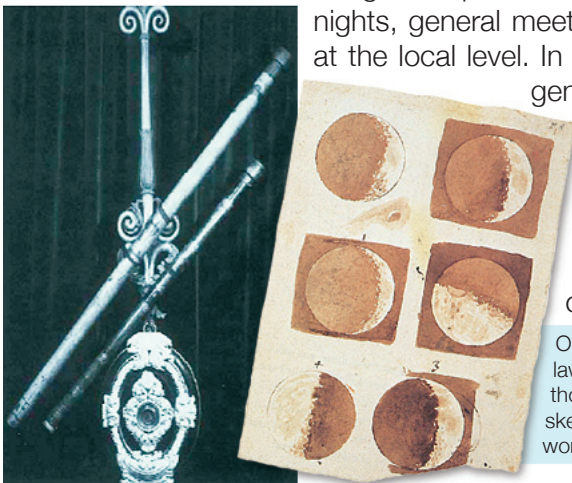
International Year of Astronomy



Welcome to 2009, a year where astronomy takes centre stage through the International Year of Astronomy.

The International Year of Astronomy (IYA2009) will be a global celebration of astronomy and its contributions to society and culture, highlighted by the 400th anniversary of the first use of an astronomical telescope by Galileo Galilei. The aim of the Year is to stimulate worldwide interest, especially among young people, in astronomy and science under the central theme "The Universe: Yours to Discover". IYA2009 events and activities will promote a greater appreciation of the inspirational aspects of astronomy that embody an invaluable shared resource for all nations.

The IYA2009 activities will take place at the global and regional levels, and especially at the national and local levels. This is where our society comes into the picture. Through our general public outreach programs we run like the public viewing nights, school viewing nights, general meetings, learning days, etc., we are well placed to promote astronomy at the local level. In turn, it is expected interest generated by IYA2009 will also lead the general public into what we can offer as a society.



Not to be lost in the IYA2009, this year also marks the society's 40th Anniversary of astronomy on the Peninsula. The society is planning a couple of 40th anniversary events to mark this milestone.

In all, a very busy year ahead but one that offers fantastic opportunities and rewards. We hope you enjoy it.

On 25 August 1609, Galileo (*Upper Left*) demonstrated his first telescope (*Lower Left*) to Venetian lawmakers. This was the first astronomical outreach activity with a telescope, and the first thoroughly documented use of the telescope for astronomy. Galileo's observations, like his sketches and observations of the Moon (*Left*), revolutionised astronomy and changed our worldview profoundly.

Article extracts from IYA2009 website. Image Credits from Wikipedia & The Galileo Project

Also in SCORPIUS for January & February...

- Upcoming Events • Astro News • Society News & Pics • Skywatcher •



INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF ASTRONOMY 2009

THE UNIVERSE: YOURS TO DISCOVER

www.astronomy2009.org.au

YOURS TO DISCOVER IN JANUARY 2009

- Fri 2nd - Public Viewing Night at The Briars (8pm)*
- Fri 9th - Public Viewing Night at The Briars (8pm)*
- Fri 16th - Public Viewing Night at The Briars (8pm)*
- Wed 21st - General Meeting at The Peninsula School (8pm)
Session 1 - Speaker - To Be Confirmed
Session 2 - Open Forum & 'Sky for the Month'
- Sat 24th - Members Viewing Night at The Briars
- Mon 26th - Solar Australia Day (12pm onwards)
(to celebrate Melbourne's grazing Solar Eclipse - 7:41pm to 8:08pm)
- Wed 28th - Committee Meeting

YOURS TO DISCOVER IN FEBRUARY 2009

- Fri 6th - Public Viewing Night at The Briars (8pm)*
- Sat 14th - Telescope Learning Day at The Briars (4pm onwards)*
- Wed 18th - General Meeting at The Peninsula School (8pm)
Session 1 - Speaker - To Be Confirmed
Session 2 - Open Forum & 'Sky for the Month'
- Sat 21st - Members Viewing Night at The Briars
- Wed 25th - Committee Meeting

THE UNIVERSE
YOURS TO DISCOVER



* Denotes assistance in the form of telescopes and general evening operating assistance (i.e. - parking, answering queries, organising supper, etc.) for the public/school nights would be appreciated.

Public Nights

With the influx of holiday makers to the Peninsula, coupled with the Summer school holidays, the society is once again running extra public viewing nights throughout January and February. These nights are growing in popularity each year, as the word of mouth travels, so we will be requiring extra volunteers to cope with the expected large general public attendance. We realise we keep asking for assistance in every newsletter for help with the public viewing nights, however it is appreciated not only by us, but by the members of the general public too.



Pictures: John Cleverdon

School Nights

Our last school visit for 2008 was St. Joachim's Primary School in Carrum Downs. The afternoon's overcast weather miraculously cleared by evening, taking everyone by surprise. We expected 180 people there, but I'm sure there were many more as the hall had 97 seats which were fully occupied, the floor was covered thickly in students right up to my ankles and it was standing room at the back and sides of the hall.

After the presentation, a stampede of students was felt and heard approaching the school oval even before they could be seen. Sure someone said reminded them of the battle charge in the Mel Gibson movie Braveheart? A big thanks to everyone who came along and survived the ground shake!

Article extract from Peter Skilton E-Scorpius report

Calling Any Plumbers???

The committee is putting out a call to any plumbers that may be in the society for some help in installing a new hot water system, which was recently purchased. If you are a plumber, or know someone who is that maybe able to help us out, please contact one of the committee members.

Bruce Tregaskis (1927-2008)

Back in mid November of last year the society was relayed the sad news of the sudden passing of Bruce Tregaskis after a very short illness.

Bruce was always an extremely energetic and kind individual keen to shape the future and who lived life to the max. He was past President of the Mornington Peninsula Astronomical Society in 1991 (then called The Astronomical Society of Frankston), and one of the original four founding members in 1969. He was Vice President for 5 years prior to that and Secretary for 6 years before then, so his influence on MPAS has been long and profound. In addition he was a past President of the Astronomical Society of Victoria in 1976 and with interests in other fledgling astronomical societies in Victoria as well, most notably in the Yallourn region where he used to work. When not being involved also in local Probus Club activities he spent his spare daylight hours as a paid part-time market researcher on the streets.

He was a real gentleman and mentor to a generation of amateur astronomers who had the good fortune to have crossed timelines with him. I recall as first time visitors to the Peninsula School meetings, that he particularly took the time after the meeting to say hello personally and have a long chat with myself and Ros, and this warm welcoming was one of the key factors that led to us joining the society that night.

Bruce remained a prolific and systematic active observer and reporter of variable stars, often observing in his Mt.Eliza backyard at times of the night when almost everyone sensible would be sound asleep! He actively participated in many minor planet appulse and grazing occultation field trip adventures with myself and others across societies over the years, often in the cool darkness of night and fearlessly in the most remote of locations. Bruce was an avid observer of sunspots and photographer of the Aurora Australis to the last, as well as a highly keen attendee at almost all MPAS public and school telescope viewing evenings where he'd bring along his much travelled trusty white telescope, used on eclipse expeditions he'd been on around the world, and seated on an upturned recycled paint can which was just the right height for the job.

His last school evening was in Frankston only 3 weeks prior to his passing, when his telescope featured at the front of the classroom while our talks were in progress, making this news all the more unexpected.

His funeral service in Mornington was attended by numerous friends from MPAS and ASV, and was filled to overflowing. Bruce is survived by his wife Betty, children Julie and Michael and grandchildren. The committee and society extend our sincerest condolences to Bruce's family. He will be truly missed.

From the stars we come. To the stars we go.

From Peter Skilton's E-Scorpius article and www.mpas.asn.au

Mrs. Betty Tregaskis sincerely thanks all MPAS members who attended Bruce's funeral or expressed their sympathy in other ways on the occasion of his sudden death. She apologises for not thanking people individually but has not yet had an opportunity to sort through all the astronomy files.

Thanks, Peter Norman

November 2008 Annual General Meeting

Our final meeting at the Peninsula School for 2008, was the society's Annual General Meeting. Unfortunately this meeting started on the sad note of Bruce Tregaskis' passing (see above), and as a mark of respect we observed a minute's silence.

Peter Lowe then delivered the President's report, outlining the society achievements in the last 12 months and thanking specific members for their special contributions during the year. Marty Rudd presented the Treasurer's report which showed the society in healthy financial condition, then Peter Lowe thanked and disbanded the outgoing committee. Based on nominations received, the 2009 committee was elected without voting (*a list of Committee members and positions is on the back page*). One position remained vacant and so a call for nominations from those present in the meeting was made to fill it, though without success. Anyone keen to participate in the Committee as an Ordinary Committee Member, please contact the Secretary at any time.

After the formalities were out of the way, our speakers for the night were our Ian Sullivan and ASV past President Barry Adcock presenting a talk together about 'The Great Melbourne Telescope' (GMT). Ian's segment of the presentation centred around the history behind the GMT. After Ian's presentation we had the regular raffle draw and then we took a quick tea break. Barry Adcock then concluded the GMT presentation with a look at what is occurring now with the push to restore the telescope back to it's original home, back in the Botanical Gardens in Melbourne. It currently mainly sits in hundreds of pieces in storage in Museum Victoria's vaults. The evening finished up with Bob Heale presenting his 'Sky For The Next 2 Months'. The meeting concluded at 10:30pm.



The Committee and Society
welcome the following new member.
Wishing you clear skies.



Dave Rolfe



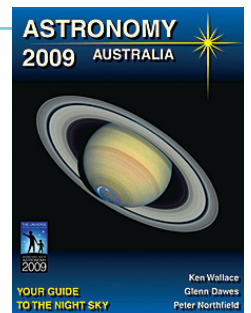
VASTROC 2009: Galileo to Google

On the weekend of May 1st through to 3rd in 2009, the Ballarat Astronomical Society will be hosting VASTROC (Victorian Amateur Astronomers Convention). Unlike a star party, amateur astronomers and interested public will gather to share ideas, experiences, and good company. Lectures by experienced amateurs and workshops will occur. Early registration opens on Friday evening (May 1st) with a BBQ at the Ballarat Observatory, and the weekend wraps up on Sunday around 2:30pm. Details regarding this event will be online soon, at the Ballarat society's web page <http://observatory.ballarat.net>

At this time, the organisers of VASTROC 2009 are currently putting out a call for presentation papers. Presentations may take the form of a Full paper presentation (20 minute talk with an additional 10 minutes for questions), a Poster paper, a 'Take-10' presentation, or a Workshop presentation. If you feel you have something you would like to present to fellow astronomers from around Victoria, please email the Ballarat society via the contacts link on their website. VASTROC 2009 is an International Year of Astronomy 2009 event.

ASTRONOMY 2009 AUSTRALIA

The society will be fortunate enough to secure your guide to the astronomical year ahead with the 2009 ASTRONOMY AUSTRALIA. This practical guide to all things astronomical in the Australian skies is a wonderful reference for all levels of star-gazers, from newcomer to expert. Pricing is \$24 to the public, though society members can get it at the discounted rate of \$20. Society members can get a further discount by renewing their 2009 Society membership (see above) before the March General Meeting (18/3/2009), entitling them to a further \$4 discount. This makes 2009 ASTRONOMY AUSTRALIA only **\$16**.



Orders and payments can be made in person at any MPAS gathering, by cheque to P.O. Box 596, Frankston 3199, or by phone by leaving a message on 0419 253 252. These sky almanacs will be available at any society gathering, from mid-November onwards. **Hurry**, the society only orders in a specific quantity each year, and it's first come, first served.

Bentleigh Street Festival

Back in mid-November, the society had a successful day at the Bentleigh street Festival. We estimated probably 500 people enquired about the Society and were most impressed with the meteorite, photos and knowledge of members. At least 150 membership forms were handed out during the day. Hopefully some of them will visit us at the upcoming public viewing nights.

Our first two raffle prizes (Lunar and Martian meteorites) were won by two 10 year old boys who were both very excited to collect their prizes! We would like to thank members that helped out during the day and offered support. And a big thanks to Trevor & Kathryn Hand, and Greg Walton for a lot of the organisation



Snake Warning for the Briars

With Summer now upon us, we wish to remind all members that it is the time of the year again when we must be aware of snakes at the facility. Usually there are a few sightings reported each Summer. If anyone does come across a snake on the site or in any part of the grounds at the Briars then the best thing to do is to walk away and alert other people of the presence of the snake. Do not disturb the snake or attempt to kill the snake under any circumstances as they are a protected species on the Briars site.

The dangers of annoying the local wildlife is illustrated in this exclusive (*or is that dubious*) photo of Steve Mohr's recent encounter with a Velociraptor at A.S.V.'s Heathcote observing site. Note that the lady in the photo is the only one concerned that Steve is about to be eaten! The other A.S.V. members are naturally just interested in the telescope!



It is now some 40 years since the “Mornington Peninsula Astronomical Society” was founded in 1969 or, as it was originally known “The Astronomical Society of Frankston”. With the 40-year milestone rapidly approaching and the sudden passing of our original President Bruce Tregaskis it is felt we need to start documenting in some way the history of the society and I have been asked to bring together what remains of that history. Some of the history will be from memory which I must admit is becoming fuzzier with the passing years and so I apologize if I don’t get it all right. A great deal will be gleaned from various archival records held by the committee and personal records by some of the long-standing members. In this I am indebted to the excellent archives collated by life member Don Leggett who as Society Secretary has preserved literally boxes of documents both official and private.

Preparing this history I intend to take an era-based approach rather than merely chronologically documenting events and activities. In this way I hope to outline the transitional phases the society has undergone in its journey from 1969 to 2009.

The Formation Era

In 1969 if you lived on the Mornington Peninsula the ASV was the only available astronomical society. Other societies existed of course such as Ballarat, Geelong and Latrobe Valley but were too far away to be of much use around the Frankston region. There was a small group of ASV members who met at the Melbourne monthly meeting and leading up to 1969 there had been some discussion about the possibility of a local peninsula society. Space was the latest thing in the 1960’s. The manned space programme was in full swing as were various space missions to the planets. The Mercury and Gemini missions galvanized the public’s attention and the Apollo missions were building to the first lunar landing. A group consisting of Bruce Tregaskis, Dave Wiley, Don Driver and myself as a 17-year-old student agreed to advertise a public meeting at the Mechanics Hall in Frankston to talk about the formation of an astronomical society. As I recall Don Driver and Bruce arranged the meeting. The exact date is lost but I remember it was a Friday, which makes it either the 4th or 11th July. I suspect the 11th because the meeting was held to coincide with the landing. We filled the hall with more than a hundred people; the meeting was a great success and a Frankston society was duly formed. Don Driver took on the role of organizing the new club but due to work commitments quickly handed the reins over to Bruce. The first general meeting was held at the new Bruce Park (different Bruce!) hall a week later with about twenty people attending. Subscriptions were set at 20 cents per meeting to cover tea.

Our time at Bruce Park was short lived. The Frankston council had decided to impose hall charges and we had to find a new home, the first of many moves. Fortunately the new head master at Frankston high school was a supporter and we were soon settled into one of the classrooms where we stayed until our move to the B.J.Smith



A 20 year old Peter Lowe pictured with the B.J. Smith telescope

observatory at Monash University but that’s another story. Once settled, we quickly applied for associate membership of the ASV and arranged to borrow a telescope on permanent loan. The 12½-inch B.J.Smith Newtonian was available. All we had to do was pick it up. A few of us under the guidance of Dave Wiley promptly set out to collect it. The B.J.Smith telescope turned out to be a rusted hulk buried under a pile of dirt. Fortunately the optical components were in storage. Over the next few months Dave Wiley, a fitter, totally rebuilt the instrument and mounted it on a car trailer, no doubt a forerunner to our “Astronomy on the Move” program in future years. The telescope on a trailer became a common site around Frankston as we moved it from Public Park to Public Park and it always attracted a crowd.

For the 1970 year we had a home, a telescope and because we were the ASF which is ahead of ASV alphabetically we also got the monthly 16mm NASA movies from the library first. Things were looking good. In our next issue we can discuss some of our activities and developments leading to our first observatory at Monash University.

Article by Peter Lowe.

Just a note: I would like to collate as many pictures and stories from members of the society’s history, so if you would like to add your part of the story to our society’s please send me a note or better yet come and talk to me.

Peter Lowe.

Laser pointers

Recently the Astronomical Society of Australia (ASA) released a fact sheet on the use of laser pointers in astronomy. While stressing right from the outset that this fact sheet is provided for information only and should not be regarded as legal advice, it does give some guidelines for the safe use of laser pointers in astronomy. These are listed on page 4 of the fact sheet, as below.

Guidelines for the safe use of laser pointers in astronomy:

It is the view of the ASA that the safe use of hand-held battery-operated laser pointers is possible in astronomy by following the guidelines presented below.

Note that a 5 mW laser pointer is sufficient for astronomical use at dark sites while a 10 or 20 mW laser pointer is sufficient at light polluted sites. Any power over 20 mW is excessive for astronomical purposes.

1. A laser pointer must only be used in accordance with the laws of the state or territory in which it is used.
2. Ensure that the laser pointer used requires a button to be held continuously to activate the beam. If the laser pointer is dropped the beam will automatically switch off.
3. Hold the laser pointer overhead in an outstretched arm before activating the switch and release the switch before lowering the pointer. This will help avoid accidental eye exposure.
4. Aim the beam only at celestial objects. Do not aim the beam at any object on the ground, nor at aircraft, motor vehicles, any person or any animal.
5. When the laser pointer is not being used to point at celestial objects return it to its case, place it in a pocket or cover the aperture from which the beam is emitted.
6. Store the pointer in a secure place away from the reach of children and anyone with a potential to misuse the device.

Some amateur astronomers and small observatories have similar lasers permanently fixed to telescopes, although not always in use. While technically not hand held laser pointers, they should be used with similar safety guidelines in mind.

Article extract is Copyright © 2008, The Astronomical Society of Australia.

A full copy of the PDF can be obtained going to the ASA website www.astronomy.org.au, and going to the **Education** menu, then clicking on the **Astronomy Factsheets** sub-menu.

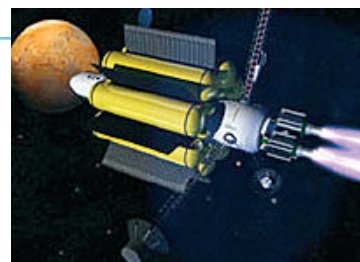
Moving forward with a different propulsion

A press release by NASA back in December may show the future of space propulsion. NASA and Ad Astra Rocket Company of Webster, Texas, have signed a Space Act Agreement that could lead to the testing of a new plasma-based space propulsion technology on the International Space Station. The Variable Specific Impulse Magnetoplasma Rocket (VASIMR) engine initially was studied by NASA and is being commercially developed by Ad Astra.

NASA Administrator Michael Griffin said, "Dr. Chang-Diaz's VASIMR engine concept has long held great theoretical promise for future high-efficiency space propulsion. With this agreement, we are taking the first steps down the road to its practical realization. I am grateful to the teams on both sides who have worked to develop a plan that yields a near-term step forward for both Ad Astra and NASA on this exciting prospect."

Upon the achievement of a series of assessment milestones, NASA and Ad Astra envision that VASIMR will be launched to the station and be tested, for the first time, in the vacuum of space.

Article extract & Image Credit: NASA

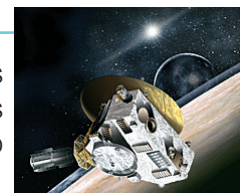


Checkup, then rest (for a few hundred-million miles)

After an intense annual checkout – more like a deep space workout – New Horizons is getting some well-deserved rest. Mission operators at the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory eased the spacecraft into electronic hibernation back in mid-December, wrapping up nearly four months of tests, data collection and software upgrades.

New Horizons mission (launched in January 2006) is the first-ever spacecraft exploration of Pluto and the Kuiper Belt. It is currently travelling between the orbits of Saturn and Uranus.

Article extract & Image Credit: Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory/Southwest Research Institute (JHUAPL/SwRI)



Shuttle returns after ISS 'home improvement'



Space shuttle Endeavour and its seven astronauts followed up recent missions that added to the International Space Station's exterior by beefing up the interior of the orbital complex. During about 16 days in space, the crew added new living, cooking and exercise facilities to the space station. They also performed four spacewalks to service the joints in the station's truss that turn the power-producing solar arrays.

By the time Endeavour left the station on Nov. 28, 2008, it had spent almost 12 days at the complex. The seven astronauts, joined by the three crew members living on the station, had transferred more than seven tons of equipment and supplies to the station, and moved more than 3,400 pounds from the station for return to Earth.

After launching from NASA's Kennedy Space Center well after sunset on Nov. 14 Endeavour glided back to Earth awash in sunlight over California. Commander Chris Ferguson guided Endeavour to an afternoon landing at Edwards Air Force Base on Nov. 30 to end the space flight. After post-flight processing at Edwards, Endeavour made the final leg of it's trip to Kennedy Space Centre on the back of the Shuttle Carrier Aircraft - a modified 747.

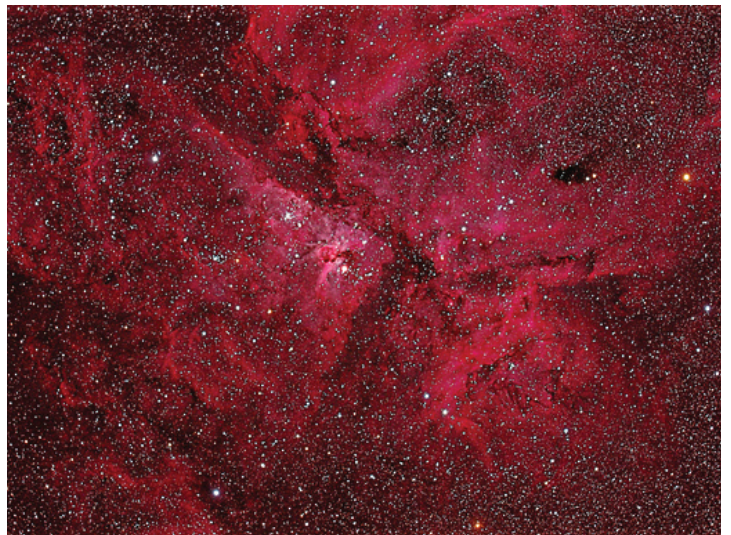
The next shuttle mission is STS-119, targeted for launch on Feb. 12, 2009, on a flight to install the fourth set of solar arrays on the International Space Station.

Article extract from NASA website. Image credit: NASA/Kim Shiflett

Society Pics



M45 Pleiades taken by Steve Mohr 29/11/2008.



NGC3372 Carina Nebula taken by Steve Mohr 29/11/2008.



☺ When Venus (L), Jupiter (R) and the Moon get together like this, it's always enough to put a smile on your face!



☺ ☹ ☹ ☹ ☹ And the other smiley interpretation for the evening. This time the three appearing to be **ROFL** (Rolling Over in Fits of Laughter)



There was plenty of Christmas cheer back in early December when members got together at the society Christmas party. John Cleverdon took these pictures of everyone relaxing and enjoying the evening.

Office bearers of the Mornington Peninsula Astronomical Society

President: Peter Lowe - 0419 355 819

Secretary: Peter Skilton - 0419 253 252

Vice President: Bob Heale

Treasurer: Marty Rudd - 5977 8863

Scorpius Editor: Peter Lowe

Public Officer: Rhonda Sawosz

Committee: Ian Sullivan, Kevin Rossiter,
Trevor Hand, Brett Bajada

Phone Contact: Peter Skilton - 0419 253 252

Web Master: Steven Mohr

GENERAL MEETINGS

Meeting Venue: Peninsula School, Wooralla Drive, Mt. Eliza, (Melways map 105/F5) in the Senior School at 8pm, on the 3rd Wednesday of each month, except December. Entry is via the main gates or Gate 2, off Wooralla Drive. Exit is via Gate 2 (see map).

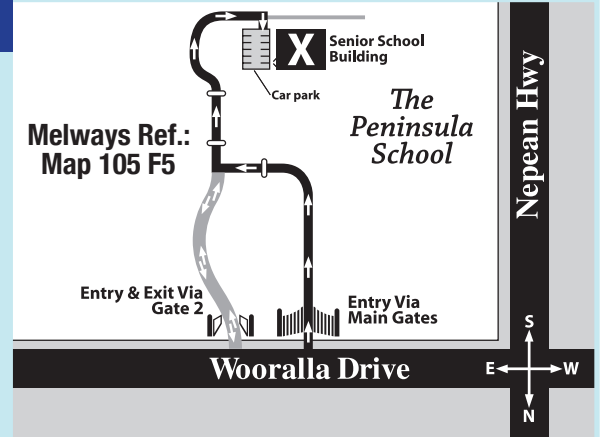
For additional details:

Phone: 0419 253 252

Mail: P.O. Box 596, Frankston 3199, Victoria, Australia.

Internet: <http://www.mpas.asn.au>

email: welcome@mpas.asn.au



LOAN EQUIPMENT

The Society has a variety of telescopes including an 8-inch reflector, 80mm refractor and binoculars, all available for loan. Contact Kevin Rossiter or a committee member to arrange the loan of equipment. The Society also has books and videos for loan from its library, made available during General Meetings.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO SCORPIUS

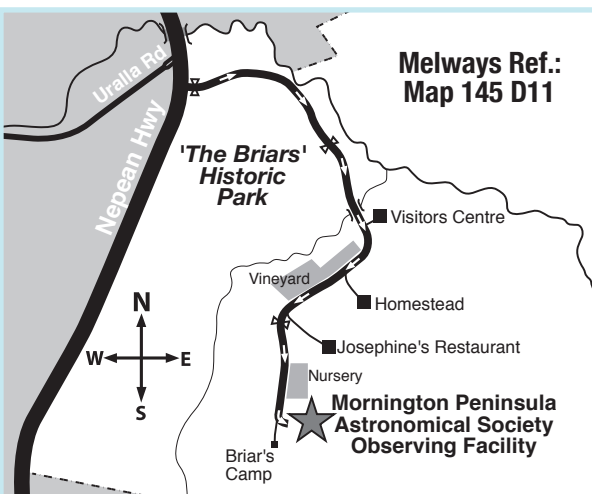
If you would like to submit an article or written contribution to Scorpius, then please send your submission to M.P.A.S., P.O. Box 596, Frankston 3199, or you can now email to welcome@mpas.asn.au.

Any astronomical events that you have witnessed or tales you would like to tell, things you have for sale (eg: telescopes, eyepieces, etc.) then please send them in. And the new 'Society Pics' page requires images that you have taken for all members of the society to see - don't keep them to yourself! All contributions are welcome.

E-SCORPIUS NEWSGROUP

The M.P.A.S. has an online newsgroup called E-Scorpius. Here you will be kept up to date with the latest M.P.A.S. news and event information as well as being able to join in discussions and ask questions with other members. To join, go to <http://groups.yahoo.com> and sign up to Yahoo groups. You require to sign up to Yahoo groups to join E-Scorpius.

Once you have signed up at Yahoo groups, email skywatch@iprimus.com.au saying that you want to join E-Scorpius and you will be added to the E-Scorpius list. Come on, join up. The more people in the group the better.



VIEWING NIGHTS - MEMBERS ONLY

Any night, at The Briars, Nepean Hwy, Mt. Martha, starting at dusk. If you would like to know if others are observing at the site, then call the society's site mobile on 0408 127 443.

Members visiting The Briars for the first time must contact Greg Walton on either 9773 0098 or 0415 172 503 if they need help in getting to the site. Upon arrival at the site, remember to sign the attendance book in the observatory building to verify that the mobile is turned on.

For additional details:

Internet: <http://www.mpas.asn.au>