

ABOVE THE FOG

• BULLETIN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS •

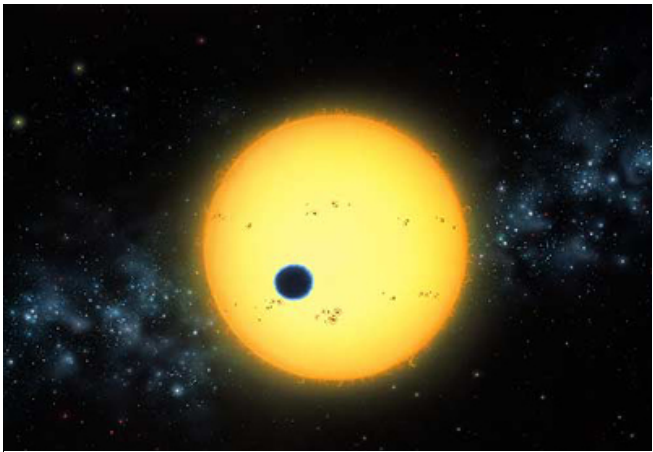
VOL. 53, No. 3 – MARCH 2005

MAY 18, 2005 – GENERAL MEETING

RANDALL MUSEUM 7:00 PM DOORS OPEN
199 MUSEUM WAY 7:30 PM ANNOUNCEMENTS
SAN FRANCISCO 8:00 PM SPEAKER

RON BISSINGER

Amateur and Professional Collaboration in the Search for Exoplanets



Transiting exoplanet by Lynette Cook

The discovery and characterization of planets orbiting stars outside our own solar system is crucial to understanding where life might exist in the universe. As of the end of March 2005, 152 of these exoplanets have been identified whereas none were known to exist a mere 10 years ago. This talk will show how amateur and professional astronomers around the world, are doing real science contributing for the search of other worlds and life in our universe.

Ron Bissinger has been an avid amateur astronomer since childhood when at 12 built his first 6" reflector. From his East Bay backyard observatory, using a CCD camera, he detects the presence of planets orbiting distant stars. Having citations from CNN, Reuters, The Economist and The New Scientist, Ron sits on the NASA Kepler Mission EPO committee representing amateurs. Ron is leading a seminar on the search for life in the universe at Yosemite this July. He was one of a select few who videotaped the space shuttle Columbia's final re-entry and tragic breakup over California and Nevada in 2003, and provided investigation assistance to NASA. Ron is an executive for a local software company and holds a graduate degree in engineering from Cal.

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The SFAA owns 4 club loaner telescopes, Dobsonian/Newtonian reflectors: 6" f/10, 8" f/7, and 10" f/8 and a Starblast. They are available for extended periods (30 days or more) to SFAA members. These are generally very fine scopes, easy to use and well suited for deep sky, planets, and star parties. The loaner custodians are Pete Goldie & Sarah Szczechowicz, located in San Francisco. If you are interested in borrowing a scope, or if you have items you can donate for the loaner program (eyepieces, star maps/books, collimator, etc.) please contact them via email (<mailto:pg@lbin.com>) or phone (415-206-9867). Email communication is preferred and strongly recommended for a quick and accurate reply.

CLUB ASTRONOMY VIDEOS



The SFAA owns a series of astronomy videotapes featuring Alex Filippenko, a world-renowned professor of astronomy at UC Berkeley. The videotapes provide an introduction to astronomy and cover topics such as the Solar System, the lifecycles of stars, the nature of galaxies, and the birth of the Universe. The SFAA loans the tapes free to all members. If you are interested in viewing these tapes, you may check them out at any of the SFAA General Meetings. These tapes were kindly donated to the SFAA by Bert Katzung. Our librarian is Dan Christian.

MEMBERSHIP DUES

The mailing label on the back of this issue shows the month and year through which your membership was paid. If the date has passed, your membership has expired. Members may receive no more than one bulletin after the expiration of membership.

Please renew soon if your membership is expiring.

For information on the course tapes themselves:

<http://www.teach12.com/tc/assets/coursedescriptions/180.asp>

ONLINE SERVICES FOR SFAA MEMBERS



The SFAA's Secretary's Web Site helps keep SFAA information together and accessible to members. The site URL is <http://www.whiteoaks.com/sfaa/>. At this site you can find such information as minutes from meetings of the Board of Directors, the SFAA official by-laws, and other information. SFAA also offers email lists to supplement the bulletin board offered at the SFAA's official web site. At present there are two email lists – an unmoderated list for use primarily for business and discussion by the Board of Directors (but open to all members), and a moderated announcement list for all SFAA members. If you would like to be added to the SFAA-announce email list, please contact the secretary (<mailto:secretary@sfaa-astronomy.org>) and let him know. You can also sign up for the list yourself at this URL: <http://www.whiteoaks.com/mailman/listinfo/sfaa-announce>

Above the Fog is the official bulletin of the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers. It is the forum in which club members may share their experiences, ideas, and observations. We encourage you to participate by submitting your articles, announcements, letters, photos and drawings. We would also like to hear from our new members. Tell us about yourself – what you have done in the past and what other clubs you have joined. **The deadline for the next issue is the 20th day of the month.** Send your articles to Phil Estrin at pestrin@dir.ca.gov.

Through The Finder

Access to Mt. Tam is a major benefit of membership in the SFAA. It is the nearest dark(ish) skies most of us have living within the light dome of San Francisco. Not only do we get to set up our scopes during the monthly public star parties but we can stay on to observe after the public must leave. In addition we now have access to the Mountain on each new moon Saturday. But this special private access is contingent on our public service at the monthly star parties.

We need 2 volunteers for each of the monthly Mt. Tam Lecture/Star Parties. If you have already been "certified" as a Mt. Tam volunteer and would like to sign up, call me at (415) 332-8096. If you haven't been trained as a State Park VIP (Volunteers In Parks) you can attend a one-time, two hour orientation and fill out a few forms. No experience is necessary and the work load is modest. You will help set up the observing area, greet visitors and direct them to the lecture site, and still have time to enjoy the lecture yourself. After the public leaves you will share responsibility as gatekeeper for departing SFAA members. The rest of the night is yours for observing. To sign up for the VIP training call (415) 454-4715. Training will be held before the astronomy programs on May 14 (5-7pm) and July 9 (5-7pm).

An update on the Camp Mather astronomy week(end), Sept 8 - 12: While the summer program at Camp Mather has operated on a first-come, first-served overflow basis for years, the experimental extension beyond Labor Day for amateur astronomers and their families has the opposite problem. If not enough people sign up, the Recreation and Park Dept. will have to close the camp and send staff home at the end of August. Rec/Park officials expect to make a go/no-go decision in June. So if you're interested in taking advantage of this first ever opportunity to spend some quality time with family, friends, and scopes under High Sierra clear skies, without the hassle of camping or cooking, then get your application in soon. Applications can be downloaded from the web at: http://www.parks.sfgov.org/site/recpark_page.asp?id=16322

See you in the dark...

**JOHN DILLON, PRESIDENT
SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS**

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Important Upcoming Dates

BOARD MEETING
MAY 3 . JUNE 7 . JULY 3
7:00-8:30 P.M.

*Randall Museum, 199 Museum Way
(Near 14th Street and Roosevelt)*

SFAA GENERAL MEETING & LECTURE
MAY 18 . JUNE 15 . JULY 20
7:00 P.M. DOORS OPEN
7:30 P.M. ANNOUNCEMENTS
8:00 P.M. SPEAKER

Randall Museum, 199 Museum Way (Near 14th Street and Roosevelt)

CITY STAR PARTY

APRIL 30 – TELESCOPE CLINIC 7:00 PM
JUNE 25 – TELESCOPE CLINIC 7:30 P.M.
JULY 30 – TELESCOPE CLINIC 7:30 P.M.

Land's End, San Francisco (Map and directions <http://www.sfaa-astronomy.org/sfaa/starparties/cspmap.shtml>)

MOUNT TAM PUBLIC STAR PARTY

MAY 14 – JUNE 11 – JULY 9 – 8:30 P.M.

**SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMER'S
ROCK SPRINGS MEMBERS ONLY EVENT (AT OR NEAR NEW MOON)**

MOUNT TAMALPAIS – ROCK SPRINGS
MAY 7 . JUNE 4 . JULY 2 - 7:00 P.M.

SFAA Yosemite Star Party at Glacier Point July 8th & 9th, 2005

The annual Yosemite star party is held at Glacier Point, hosted by the National Park Service (NPS). Rustic camping is located at the Bridalveil Creek campground group site. There is room for several tents. Cold running water is convenient but sans showers. The camp is 8.5 miles away from Glacier Point.

For those of you unfamiliar with this event, we are given free reserved admission and camping space. In exchange, we do two public star parties at Glacier Point, on Friday and Saturday night. We have the public (about 200-300 people) from twilight for a few hours, and then the rest of the night (and all day) to ourselves; this is a mighty good deal, considering how some folks come 12,000 miles to see these rocks. We take a maximum of 30 people, with priority given to SFAA members. Please do not ask if your friends can come...unless they are SFAA members. You are expected to have at least one public telescope for every two people. Check the SFAA website for up-to-date info on Yosemite Park current weather and conditions. Once you've signed up, I'll send you a gate pass, map of our campsites and page of rules.

A note for non-members and those not making the list: Yosemite is your national park, and you may come if you arrange your own accommodations. In this case, you would be welcome to join us at Glacier Point for the public star party and the observing afterward; however, you would not be obligated to set up for the public.

Here are folks and their scopes who are signed up so far –

Jane & Morris Jones - 14.5" & 17.5" Liteboxes
Sarah Szezechowicz & Pete Goldie - 10" Dob
Jorge Morales + 1 C 8, Giant Binocs & 10" Dob
Bob Franklin + 2 C 9.25
Ken, Aeddan Frank & Jayni Allsep - 10" f/6 Dob
Stefanie Ulrey - 4" Star Blaster
Mark & Maureen Mickels & Emma Button -
12.5" 2004 RTMC winning Dob
Jennifer, Jeff & Anna Myer - 12.5" True Dob

Margaret Petrie - Unknown Scope
Patrick McNichols – 130 mm Refractor
Danny Christian - 10" Reflector
Jung Thomas & Jinsook Cho - 8" SCT
Peter, Barbara, Larissa & Cory Schumacher - 10" Dob
John & Mary Dillon – 115 refractor of sorts (we hope)
Russ Cashin & family – C 11 SCT

The observing area is mostly open, with good views from about NNW to the east, around to due south. The horizon from south around to the west is partly to mostly blocked by tall trees. Still, there's a lot of open sky, and typically, the seeing and transparency are excellent. It's warm (70 to 90) during the day, and cool to chilly (40) at night, due to the elevation of 7,200 feet.

One of the rangers does a sunset talk, and then delivers the crowd to us. Following that, Jane and Mojo have been kind enough to give the evening talk complete with slides, which as you all know is always informative and insightful. Some of the public will have white flashlights, and we need to be tolerant of that. We'll have club members with red brake light tape to cover the offending flashlights. We will supply an object list with corresponding finder charts and some brief information. Expect lots of questions from the public.

By around 11 or so, we'll have the place to ourselves, and can stay until dawn. Scopes must be removed when we quit, then set up again on Saturday. Some of us may set up small scopes during the afternoon, show Half Dome, and invite people to come again after sunset.

Saturday eve is traditionally potluck and it was quite an international fete last year. I'm not going to assign what to bring... just provide enough for ~ say 4 or 5. Salads, main course, pu pu's and desserts are all welcome. Let's try again for the best astronomical theme of incredible edibles as we did for last year's desserts at our place for the SFAA Star B Q. Prizes will be awarded! Please remember this repast takes time so it's better to start our own gastronomic party early so there's no need to rush for setup Saturday evening on Glacier Point.

If you'd like to attend and are a current dues-paying member, send me an email with: Yosemite subject line, your name, number of people, type & size of scope(s) to: <mailto:drschu@itsa.ucsf.edu>.

As Pete Goldie reminded me, there will be a sliver of a Moon before it sets with Venus and Mercury ...maybe an eyepiece full! Below, and a short hop are Saturn, Pollux and Castor in the lineup too with Comet Machholz above. It will be spectacular. Don't miss it. Let's make it another great year at Glacier Point. See you there, Ken

August 27, 2005 - 10:00am

**AANC Conference and
John Dobson's 90th Birthday Celebration**

<http://sfsidewalkastronomers.org/newsarticles/aancon2005main>



The SFAA is hosting the anniversary of John Dobson's 90th birthday celebration and AANC Conference at the Randall Museum. SFAA members and John's former students are requested to volunteer. Sign up for this historic event by emailing: <mailto:M42Gal@hotmail.com> with "Volunteer" in the subject line. In the body of the email please leave Stacy Jo your name, phone and preference of morning or afternoon shift.

If you took John's telescope making class and you still have your scope kicking around...bring it! We'll have the "Valley of the Dobs" and "Dob-in-a-Day" where you too can take turns grinding a mirror under John's tutelage. Details forthcoming as the conference accretes enough mass.

Opening July 15 at
San Francisco's Roxie Cinema
A New Documentary Feature Film
on Astronomy, Cosmology and
John Dobson

A SIDEWALK ASTRONOMER

(78 minutes; photographed, produced & directed by Jeffrey Fox Jacobs)

On any given night around the world, thousands of people peer into deep space because of John Dobson. An 89-year old with a white ponytail and a knack for comedy, John Dobson revolutionized astronomy. *"Possessing a quicksilver wit, a gift for turning a phrase that makes scientific concepts accessible, and an energy that belies his nearly 90 cycles around the sun, Mr. Dobson is one of history's greatest popularizers of science,"* (Wall Street Journal 9/1/04). He is the inventor of the Dobsonian telescope mount, which changed the field of astronomy dramatically, making telescopes accessible to the public on every continent. A former Vedanta monk of the Ramakrishna Order, he is a co-founder of "Sidewalk Astronomers," an organization that encourages amateurs to share their telescopes and knowledge with others on busy city streets and in national parks. As John says, "The Universe is bigger than the Earth; it's

bigger than the solar system; it's bigger than our galaxy and we owe it to ourselves to notice it." The film follows John as he tours the country from the sidewalks of San Francisco to colleges, universities, astronomy clubs, star parties and to Stellafane, a convention of telescope makers in Vermont. It features sequences on Vedanta, sidewalk astronomy, telescope making, the Moon, Sun, major planets, galaxies, Big Bang Theory, and the nature of time and space. We also get to know John Dobson, a fascinating thinker, philosopher, teacher, and inventor who encourages us to think about the Universe. This spiritual, astronomical and cosmological journey is illustrated with actual photos and footage of space shot from satellites and spacecraft as well as animation courtesy of NASA, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, the Goddard Space Flight Center and the Hubble Space Telescope Institute.

More information can be found out <http://www.telescopepictures.com/> and <http://www.roxie.com/>. The Roxie Cinema is located at 3117 16th Street (at Valencia Street), San Francisco, CA 94103 * tel: (415) 863-1087 * e-mail: <mailto:rickaren@earthlink.net>.



SKY FRIDAYS

Morrison Planetarium is planning a bi-weekly series of informal astronomy presentations at the Howard Street location of the California Academy of Sciences, and would like to offer volunteers from the amateur astronomy community an opportunity to present short (30-min), non-technical talks for museum visitors on a variety of subjects, such as:

What are star parties and where are good viewing sites in the Bay Area?

How to select the right telescope at gift-giving time

How to take astrophotographs

“Pictures from my recent eclipse trip”

Constellation myths from other cultures

Astronomy on the Internet

Teachers’ mini-workshops in astronomy

The Summer solstice

Hands-on astronomy crafts projects (paper plate & paper cup astronomy, birthday moons, sundial-making, planisphere-making, models of the solar system)

Think of something!

Two presentations times are available: 11:30 am and 1:00 pm (times & frequency of presentations may change depending on speaker availabilities & museum attendance, but biweekly on Fridays with 2 possible times is the current working schedule). Audio-visual facilities are available – you might be presenting in the Academy’s astrobiology exhibit or among starfish in the Aquarium! This series is unbudgeted, so volunteer presentations would be greatly appreciated, and parking costs will be gladly reimbursed.

Keys to the success of these presentations are engaging and enthusiastic speakers, hands-on demonstrations and objects (if possible), and LOTS of pretty pictures!

Contact

Bing Quock

Morrison Planetarium/California Academy of Sciences

875 Howard Street

San Francisco, CA 94103

(415) 321-8186

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Astronomy on Your iPod

Michael Portuesi

Just walk down the street, or ride the bus, and you can't miss them – those little white cables and earbuds everyone seems to be wearing. The iPod digital music player has become enormously popular. Imagine 20 CDs of music on a player the size of a pack of gum, or thousands of songs on a player the size of a deck of cards! No wonder everybody has one.

iPods are great for music, but did you know you can use your iPod for astronomy as well? Over the past year, a new phenomenon called “podcasting” has developed on the Internet. Podcasts are radio shows you download to your iPod, and listen to on the go. Once you subscribe to a particular podcast, new episodes of that show are automatically downloaded to your iPod as they appear on the Internet.



The big advantage of podcasting is that you don't have to listen to a podcast at a particular time, like you would with conventional radio or even an Internet radio station. You can listen to the show whenever it's convenient for you, plus pause and rewind – try that with your radio!

Podcasting is (right now at least) mostly an amateur activity. Anyone can make a podcast, and thousands of people produce them, on all manner of subjects, all for free. New podcasts appear daily, and there are sites devoted to keeping track of them.

You don't need to have an iPod to enjoy podcasts. If you own another brand of digital music player, podcasts work with them as well, since they're really just MP3 files. And even if you have no portable music player, you can still listen to podcasts using your desktop or notebook computer, using whatever music software you already have.

Here's how to get started:

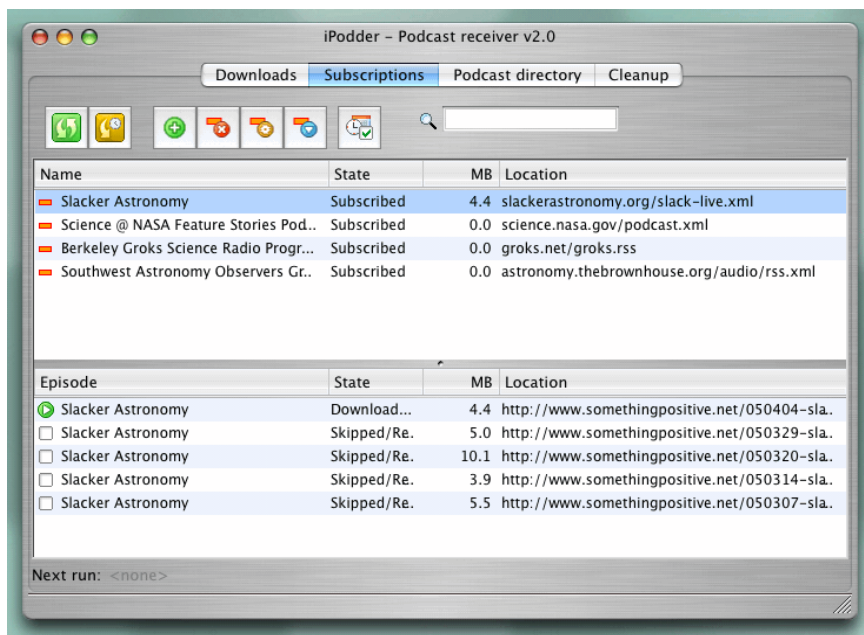
1. Download the free iPodder software, from <http://ipodder.sourceforge.net/>. iPodder is available for Windows, Mac OS X, and Linux. Follow the instructions on the iPodder website to install the software.
2. Subscribe to some podcasts that interest you. One website that lists podcasts is <http://www.podcast.net>. To listen to one of the podcasts listed here, click on the “Add Feed” button in iPodder, enter the link listed here into the “URL” field, then click “Save”.
3. Click the “Check for new podcasts” button. iPodder will search for new podcasts and download them.
4. iPodder will create a play list in iTunes for each podcast “channel”, containing the podcasts you just downloaded. Dock your iPod, and synchronize these play lists along with the rest of your music. To listen with your computer or another brand of music player, just look for the MP3 files in a special folder on your desktop.

Here's some astronomy podcasts I've found on the internet:

Science @ NASA

<http://science.nasa.gov/podcast.xml>

Already one of the most popular podcasts on the internet, Science @ NASA carries news articles about science discoveries and other activities at NASA, such as Cassini and the Mars rovers. Each NASA podcast is about 5-10 minutes in length.



Slacker Astronomy

<http://www.slackerastronomy.org/slacklive.xml>

This weekly podcast is hosted by a professional astronomer at Harvard, and a broadcast journalist who works for the AAVSO. It offers a very silly take on astronomy, punctuated by jokes and other amusing stunts. The April Fool's edition served up a great rap song about astronomy and cosmology, delivered by a Stephen Hawking-esque "speak and spell" voice.

Berkeley Groks Science

<http://www.groks.net/groks.rss>

This is actually a radio show appearing on KALX 90.7 FM in the San Francisco Bay Area. Via podcasting, you can listen to the show whenever you want, plus listen to past episodes. This show is about science in general, but several shows are devoted to astronomy,

cosmology, and other astronomically-related topics. Recent shows have featured physicist/cosmologist Sir Roger Penrose and astrobiologist Dr. David Grinspoon.

Southwest Astronomy Observers Group (SWAOG)

<http://astronomy.thebrownhouse.org/audio/rss.xml>

SWAOG is a group of amateur astronomers who are also ham radio enthusiasts, in the Chicago area. Each week they produce a two-hour podcast, essentially a recording of their ham radio discussion. The podcast I listened to covered shopping for binoculars, including a user review for Celestron 15x70 binoculars, plus the best magnification to use for viewing faint objects. There were also some trivia questions and astronomy news. But be prepared to wade through a lot of "ham radio" talk to get to the good stuff. On the podcast I sampled, the first 20 minutes was nothing but talk about ham radio itself, plus participants signing on and off with the moderator (called the "controller" in ham radio-speak).

Regulus! The Astronomy Newsletter

<http://www.regulusastro.com/regulus/whatsup/podcast.rss>

This monthly podcast covers things you can see in the night sky. Put this on your iPod, then go outside and follow along with the narration to learn the stars and constellations.

Astronomy at Yosemite and the Grand Canyon

If your vacation plans are taking you to Yosemite National Park or Grand Canyon National Park this summer, keep an eye out for the Sidewalk Astronomers. Members of the San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomers, plus other Bay Area Astronomy groups, will be appearing at Yosemite and the Grand Canyon this summer.

More information is available on our website <http://sfsidewalkastronomers.org/newsarticles/starparties2005>

Michael Portuesi . SF Sidewalk Astronomers

Michael Portuesi

My Trip to Visit Bob Berta in Michigan

Last weekend, I went to Michigan to visit my aunt for her 80th birthday. I had planned on stopping by to visit Bob Berta, but it was made even easier by the fact that my brother lives only a 10-minute drive away from his house.

Bob give me a nice tour of his house (VERY big and VERY nice), and I got to say hi to his family. Then we went on a tour of his club observatory.

I wanted to take my family out to observe through the telescopes, but due to a freak of nature it was snowing all weekend. It was 32 degrees outside when we arrived at the observatory!

Nevertheless, I took a few photos of the very nice setup Bob's club has. The observatory houses a 12.5 inch hand-built classical Cassegrain and a 22-inch truss-tube Dobsonian. Both are very nice scopes.

The empty field is the area outside the observatory, where the club conducts star parties and public observing sessions. The observatory is only a five-mile drive from Bob's house. It's situated on land belonging to the public park system, and the park management actively supports the club and the observatory.

I hope I can visit Bob again the next time I'm in Michigan, and have a view through the 12.5-inch Cassegrain scope.



Bob Berta at the entrance to Stargate Observatory (Warren Astronomical Society.).



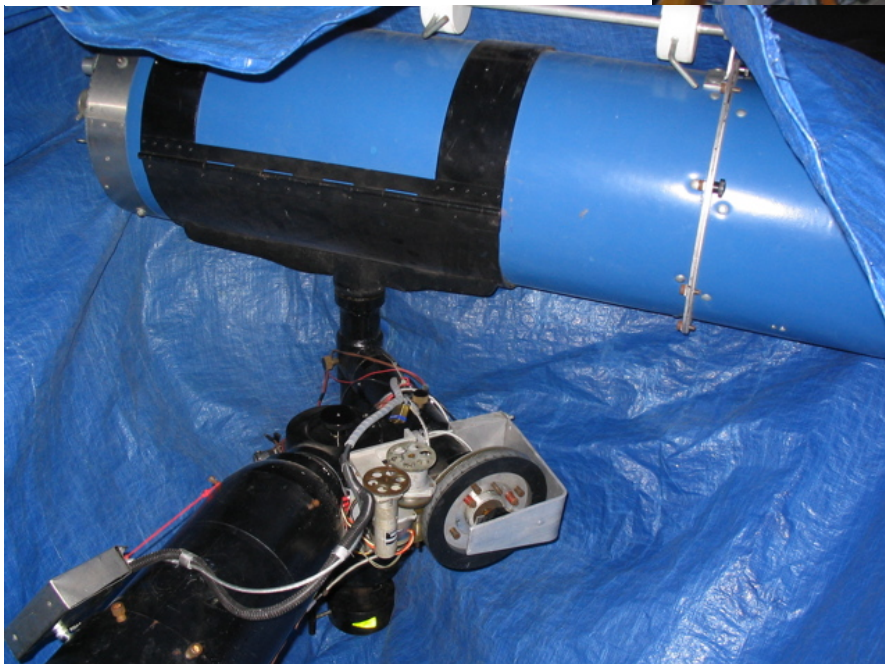
Stargate Observatory. The shed behind the dome houses the 22-inch Dobsonian. The dome houses the 12.5 inch classical Cassegrain.



The empty field is the area outside the observatory, where the club conducts star parties and public observing sessions. (When there's no snowstorm).



The 12.5-inch classical Cassegrain telescope, under wraps due to the bad weather.



The 22-inch Dobsonian. It is an Obsession-style design, and has removable wheels for easy transport out onto the observing field.

Founded in September 1952, the San Francisco Amateur Astronomers (SFAA) is an association of people who share a common interest in astronomy and other related sciences. Our membership consists of people from all walks of life, educational backgrounds and ages. Many SFAA members own their own telescopes; some have been made by hand in local telescope-making classes and vary in size from 6 to 25 inches.

Treasurer, SFAA, POB 15097, San Francisco CA 94115

make checks payable to **San Francisco Amateur Astronomers** and mail to:

- \$10 enclosed, youth/student membership
- \$25 enclosed, individual membership
- \$30 enclosed, family or foreign membership
- \$40 enclosed, institutional membership
- \$75 enclosed, supporting membership

Select one category:

Email address:

Address:

Name: Telephone:

San Francisco Amateur Astronomers Membership Application

San Francisco Amateur Astronomers
P.O. Box 15097
San Francisco, CA 94115



Information Hotline: (415) 289-6636

Web Page: www.sfaa-astronomy.org

Sharing the Wonders of the Universe

Has your membership expired? Your mailing label includes the month and year through which your membership is paid. If it is past, your membership has expired and this may be your last issue.