

★ ABOVE THE FOG

• BULLETIN OF THE SAN FRANCISCO AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS •

VOL. 53, No. 6 – JUNE 2005

June 15, 2005 – General Meeting

RANDALL MUSEUM 199 MUSEUM WAY SAN FRANCISCO

7:00 PM DOORS OPEN . 7:30 PM ANNOUNCEMENTS . 8:00 PM SPEAKER

Dr. Lynn R. Cominsky

Professor and Chair, Department of Physics and Astronomy

Director, NASA Education and Public Outreach Programs

Sonoma State University

A "Swift" View of the Universe



NASA's Swift mission was launched into orbit on November 20, 2004. A blast of gamma-ray bursts rapidly followed and bursts are now being caught on the fly. The first exciting results from the mission are presented, together with initial results from the follow-up observations. All three instruments on board are working well, and details of the hardware for the Burst Alert Telescope, the X-ray Telescope and the Ultraviolet/Optical Telescope are described, along with opportunities for amateurs to get involved with Swift.

Lynn Cominsky has been a Professor of Physics and Astronomy at Sonoma State University (SSU) since 1986, and currently chairs the department. At SSU, she also directs the Education and Public Outreach (E/PO) group (<http://epo.sonoma.edu>), which develops science and mathematics curriculum resources for grades K-12, and is primarily sponsored by NASA. Since 1992, Dr. Cominsky has been collaborating with physicists at the Stanford University Physics Department and Linear Accelerator Center. As part of this collaboration, she is a scientific co-investigator and is leading the E/PO program for GLAST, the Gamma-ray Large Area Space Telescope. Expected to launch in 2007, GLAST is a space mission that will observe cosmic gamma-radiation from objects such as pulsars and quasars. She is also a scientific co-investigator and leads the E/PO team for the Swift Gamma-ray burst Explorer mission, launched by NASA on November 20, 2004. Swift is studying gamma-ray bursts, the biggest explosions observed in the Universe today. In 2002, Cominsky began leading the E/PO effort for the US portion of ESA's XMM-Newton mission. XMM-Newton studies X-rays from the entire cosmic menagerie: black holes, neutron stars, stellar coronae, supernova remnants, and other exotic things in the Universe. These three NASA E/PO programs concentrate on training teachers, developing standards-aligned curricular materials for the classroom, and educating the general public through various informal educational venues (e.g., planetarium shows, television programs, and interactive on-line activities.) Cominsky is also PI and Faculty Advisor for the North Bay Science Project, a California Science Project site, funded through the Subject Matter Program. This project trains elementary and middle school teachers to teach California-standards aligned science in their classrooms.

Dr. Cominsky is also the Deputy Press Officer for the American Astronomical Society, and for NASA's Swift and GLAST gamma-ray satellite missions. As a result, she often interprets astronomy and physics discoveries for the public. In 1993, she was named both SSU Outstanding Professor and California Professor of the Year by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education (CASE).

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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

Each month I try to look ahead, “through the finder”, to note upcoming astro-events of interest to our members. But I’ve been flogging this summer’s upcoming events for several months now - Yosemite, AANC conference, Camp Mather - so there’s not much more to say. The summer is always so rich in observing opportunities. For example, this year if you plan to attend SFAA’s annual Yosemite Star Party you’ll have to decide not to go to the Shingletown Star Party or the Grand Canyon Star Party, or even the Mt. Tam. Astronomy Talk (& Star Party) that same weekend. But staying home shouldn’t be an option. Unless you have your own observatory and invite a lot of friends over.

Speaking of observing from home, I have a problem not many others have to put up with - I hope. I have a nice steady mount and get very little vibration through my scope - but I have a bad case of sky sway!

Last night, while I tried to watch Ganymede transit the face of Jupiter, Jupiter transited across my field of view continuously every 5 seconds. I know how to fix the problem but the remedy is drastic. It involves moving off my houseboat onto dry land. Or getting to those star parties.

See you in the dark...

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



Important Upcoming Dates

BOARD MEETING

**JUNE 7 . JULY 5 . AUGUST 2
7:00-8:30 P.M.**

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

SFAA GENERAL MEETING & LECTURE

**JUNE 15 . JULY 20 . AUGUST 17
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

**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

JUNE 11, 8:30 P.M. – JULY 9, 8:30 P.M. – AUGUST 13, 8:00 P.M.

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

**MOUNT TAMALPAIS – ROCK SPRINGS
JUNE 4 . JULY 2 - AUGUST 6 - 7:00 P.M.**

IRVING HOCHMAN

SFAA PRESIDENT, SECRETARY AND SPEAKER CHAIR

An 88th birthday party celebration for Irving Hochman, long time member and observer of the SFAA was held at the Intersection for the Arts on May 28th.

Irving was very active on the Board of SFAA as President, Secretary and Speaker Chair.

He was a very positive uplifting person.

His passions besides astronomy were art and music.

SFAA Yosemite Star Party at Glacier Point

July 8th & 9th, 2005

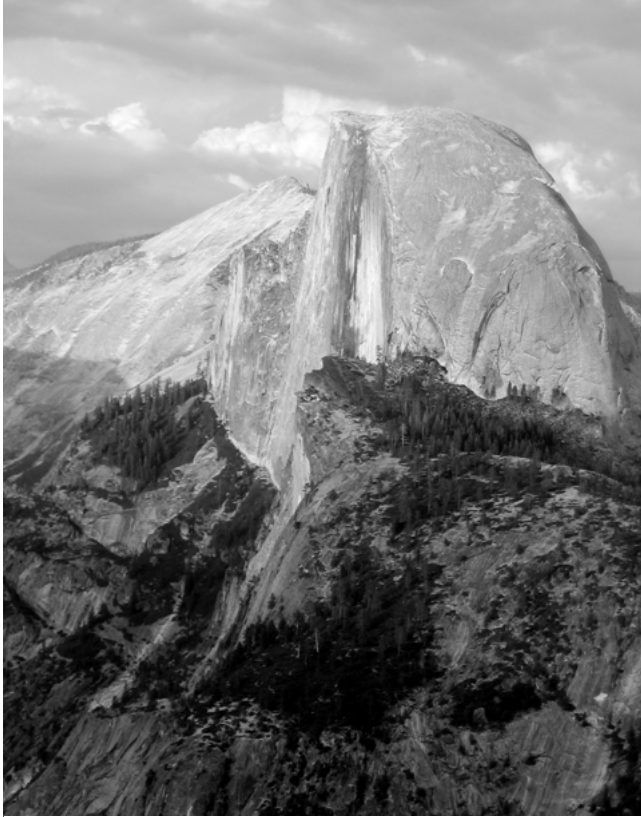


Photo courtesy of Michael Portuesi

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 Szczechowicz & Pete Goldie - 10" Dob
Jorge Morales + 1 C 8, Giant Binocs & 10" Dob
Bob Franklin + 2 C 9.25
Ken, Aeddán Frank & Jayni Allsep - 10" f/6 Dob
Stefanie Ulrey - 4" Star Blaster
Mark & Maureen Mickels & Emma Button + 2 -
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 + 1 - 10" Reflector
Jung Thomas & Jinsook Cho - 8" SCT
Peter, Barbara, Larissa & Kory Schumacher - 10" Dob
John & Mary Dillon – 115 refractor of sorts (we hope)
Russ Cashin & family – C 11 SCT
Robert Keller +1

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.

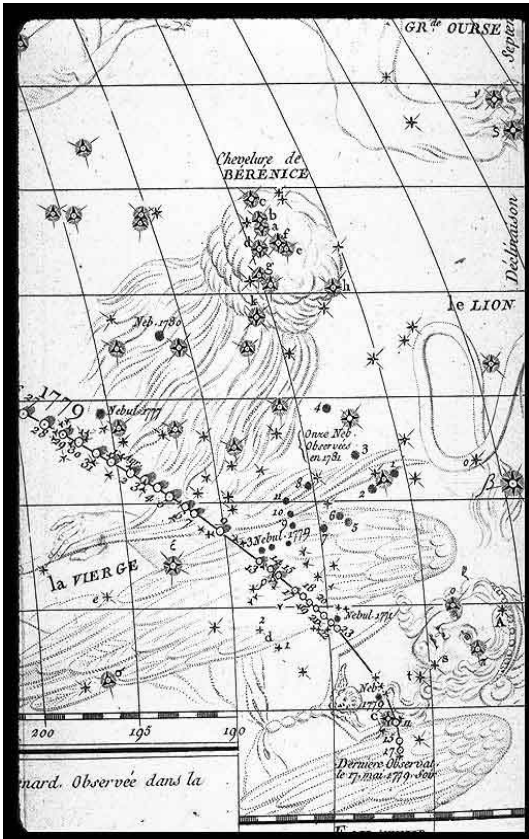
One of the rangers does a sunset talk, and then delivers the crowd to us. Following that, Jane and Mojo have been kind enough to give the evening talk complete with slides, which as you all know is always informative and insightful. Some of the public will have white flashlights, and we need to be tolerant 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 repeat 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:drsclu@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



Courtesy of Linda Hall Library of Science, Engineering & Technology

JUNE 4th SFAA SPECIAL USE PERMIT MEMBERS ONLY NIGHT

The Virgo Supercluster is the theme for this night's viewing. Jupiter is well placed in the southern sky with Io opposite Europa and Ganymede close by. Callisto out by itself will point you thru Gamma Virginis to Comet Tempel (mag 9.6).

Our point of contact for Saturday evening will be one of the Rangers. "Uncle Bob" Robert English is the Guy on the Mountain for the State special use permit placards. Please place your placard visible on the dash of your vehicle to avoid a problem. We'd like you to arrive before sunset prior to the gate being locked so Robert, or his appointee, doesn't have to interrupt his observing session and drive down to open the gate for you.

Saturday, June 11 at 8:30pm 2005 MT. TAM ASTRONOMY PROGRAMS Mountain Theater on Mt Tam

Dr. Roy R. Gal from U.C. Davis will explain the distribution of galaxies throughout the universe and what surveys of clusters of galaxies can teach us about cosmology in his talk "Galaxies Like to Live Together." The Madrone Picnic Area is reserved from 7:00pm and telescope viewing will take place in the Rock Spring Parking Area following the lecture (weather permitting of course) until about 11:00pm. If the weather is questionable (dare I even suggest it?) call the program hotline 415-455-5370 or the SFAA hotline 415-289-6636 for an update after 4:00pm. (Note that there is only an update if there is a cancellation.) Normally the lectures are held even if the observing is clouded out. Dress warmly, bring a flashlight and car pool if possible.

Tinka Ross

FREE CLASSES FOR STARGAZERS!

Where: Orion Telescope Center, 10555 S. De Anza Blvd., Cupertino (408-255-8770)

Learn the basics of telescope use, astronomical observing, and astrophotography! Join Orion's friendly staff of astronomy experts on Friday evenings for a free one-hour class on subjects of interest to stargazers. We'll cover a different topic each session (see schedule). And on one Friday every month we'll host Stargazing Basics, with Orion equipment available for your use and Orion staff on hand to "show you the ropes" and answer your questions. Whether you're an active or a would-be stargazer, you will learn tips and techniques for becoming a skilled amateur astronomer by attending our fun, hands-on classes. And best of all, they're FREE!

May - June Class Schedule

- May 20th - 8:30 - 10:30pm Stargazing Basics
- May 27th - 8:30 - 9:30pm Planetary Viewing
- June 3rd - 9:00 - 10:00pm Computerized Telescopes
- June 10th - 9:00 - 10:00pm Astro-photography (digital and film)
- June 17th - 8:30 - 10:30pm Stargazing Basics
- June 24th - 8:30 - 9:30pm Starry Night™ Software
- July 1st - 8:30 - 9:30pm Deep Sky Observing

**Reed School Solar Telescopes with
John Dobson and Kenneth Frank
May 9, 2005**



John Dobson and Diane
looking at the sun



John Dobson and Lexie, School Principal



John, Ken and friends doing sidewalk
astronomy



Ken doing sidewalk astronomy, pointing
out sunspots in Peter and Barbara's
Coronado PST

Photos courtesy of Ken Frank

Annual SFAA NIGHT at Fremont Peak Observatory May 13, 2005



photo of Renaud Savalle, courtesy of [Art Rosch](#)



Ken Frank and Cheryl Schudel --
We saw solar prominences and sun spots growing
before our very eyes



Sunrise

Travels with John

Ken Frank

RIVERSIDE TELESCOPE MAKERS CONFERENCE

May 27-29, 2005



The first few photos at left are of our stop at Buttonwillow Grammar School. There, John saw beautiful mosaics done by the kids some 25 years ago. Next is John telling the story to the Principal. We stopped at the Buttonwillow tree, used as a gathering place for Native American powwow's. On the way up Highway 38, we stopped for directions from some Park Volunteers on horseback.

The first photo of John at RTMC is with Tom Mathews (bottom center/left), one of the original Sidewalk Astronomers, who was kind enough to find from a vendor at the conference, buy and give me a copy of the August 1989 S & T with his article on page 207, the column: Gleanings for ATM's, THE DOBSONIAN SUN TELESCOPE. It's a classic. Thanks Tom. There's also a photo John signing a sun telescope with President of WAA Jack and his wife, followed (next page) by Doug Burger, another founder of SFSA and AANC award holder. Michelle Stone of Plettstone gets a few pointers from John at lunch. Finally the ever-lovely and hardworking Donna and friends rescue John from RTMC.

By the way, if you have jpgs (less than 150-175 kb please) of you or your telescope that you've made, (and or a few sentences) were influenced by John in telescope making, or cosmology or life for that matter, please send them to: kennethfrank at planitarium dot net w/ JD Telescope in the subject line.

These will be used as a keepsake for John and bound in a plywood book similar to his: How and Why to make a User-Friendly Sidewalk Telescope, and will be presented to him at his Birthday Celebration to which you are cordially invited.

Should you care to attend, please RSVP to: Donna Smith, dsmith1055 at earthlink dot net, with "RSVP" in the subject line, so we can get a handle on how many of you will attend this historic occasion.

When: Saturday, August 27th all day, starting at 10 am

Where: Randall Museum San Francisco

Why: Because John is turning 90! and we want to give thanks for all he's done.

Also, should you plan to attend as I have repeatedly told many of you, please bring your Dob... we'll have VALLEY OF THE DOBS which will make for a great photo op. and BIRTHDAY CAKE once again presented by King Sams.



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:

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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.