



STAR STUFF

The Newsletter of the Ford Amateur Astronomy Club

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April 2010

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See Special April 1 Internet release attached in mailed version



A Rock Hound Is Born

It's tough to be a geologist when you can't tell one rock from another. Is that a meteorite or a chunk of lava? A river rock or an impact fragment? Houston, we have a problem!

It's a problem Spirit and Opportunity have been dealing with for the past six years. The two rovers are on a mission to explore the geology of the Red Planet, yet for the longest time they couldn't recognize interesting rocks without help from humans back on Earth.

Fortunately, it is possible to teach old rovers new tricks. All you have to do is change their programming—and that's just what NASA has done.

"During the winter, we uploaded new software to Opportunity," says Tara Estlin, a rover driver, senior member of JPL's Artificial Intelligence Group, and the lead developer of AEGIS, short for Autonomous Exploration for Gathering Increased Science.

"AEGIS allows the rover to make some decisions on its own."

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The FAAC 2010 Banquet

President's Corner

The 2010 FAAC Banquet was held on Saturday, March 27th at Karl's Cabin in Plymouth. 58 people attended and good time was had by all. The evening started at 6:00 PM with 45 minutes of chat time followed by a very nice dinner with a salad, choice of three different entrées, and an ice cream sunday for dessert.

Norb Vance from Eastern Michigan University gave a very nice talk on how he was introduced to astronomy and how it became his lifelong passion. He asked all of the attendees to think back to what first got them interested in astronomy.

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Opportunity spots a rock with its NavCam that its AEGIS software says meets all the criteria for further investigation.



A Rock Hound Is Born

(continued from Page 1)

Estlin and her team have been working for several years to develop and upload increasingly sophisticated software to the rovers. As a result, the twins have learned to avoid obstacles, identify dust devils, and calculate the distance to reach their arms to a rock.

With the latest upgrade, a rock hound is born.

Now, Opportunity's computer can examine images that the rover takes using its wide-angle navigation camera (NavCam) and pick out rocks with interesting colors or shapes. It can then center its narrower-angle panoramic camera (PanCam) on targets of interest for close-up shots through various color filters. All this happens without human intervention.

The system was recently put to the test; Opportunity performed splendidly.

At the end of a drive on March 4th, the rover settled in for a bit of rock hunting. Opportunity surveyed the landscape and decided that one particular rock, out of more than 50 in the NavCam photo, best met criteria that researchers had set for a target of interest: large and dark.

"It found exactly the target we would want it to find," Estlin says. "It appears to be one of the rocks tossed outward onto the surface when an impact dug a nearby crater."

The new software doesn't make humans obsolete. On the contrary, humans are very much "in the loop," setting criteria for what's interesting and evaluating Opportunity's discoveries. The main effect of the new software is to strengthen the rover-human partnership and boost their combined exploring prowess.

Mindful that Opportunity was only supposed to last about six months after it landed in 2004, Estlin says "it is amazing to see Opportunity performing a brand new autonomous activity six years later."

What will the rock hounds of Mars be up to six years from now? Stay tuned for future uploads!

Learn more about how the AEGIS software works at <http://scienceandtechnology.jpl.nasa.gov/newsandevents/newsdetails/?NewsID=677>. If you work with middle- or high-school kids, you'll find a fun way to explore another kind of robot software—the kind that enables "fuzzy thinking"—at http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/en/educators/teachers_page2.shtml#fuzzy.

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VICE PRESIDENT: Chuck Jones
SECRETARY: Lori Poremsky / Kevin Medon
TREASURER: Gordon Hansen
WEBMASTER: Greg Ozimek
NEWSLETTER EDITOR: Greg Knekleian

Club Information:

The Ford Amateur Astronomy Club (FAAC) meets on the fourth Thursday each month, except for the combined November/December meeting on the first Thursday of December - at Henry Ford Community College Administration Services and Conference Center in Dearborn. Refer to our website for a map and directions (www.boonhill.net/faac).

The FAAC observes at Spring Mill Pond within the Island Lake State Recreation Area near Brighton, Michigan. The club maintains an after-hours permit, and observes on Friday and Saturday nights, and nights before holidays, weather permitting. The FAAC also has use a private observing site near Gregory Michigan and Lake Erie Metro Park. See the FAAC Yahoo Group* for more information.

Observing schedules and additional info are available on our website, or via the FAAC Yahoo Group.* Or call the FAAC Hotline, for info and leave a message, or ask questions: 248-207-2075. or send email inquiries to fordastronomy@comcast.net.

Membership in the FAAC is open to anyone with an interest in amateur astronomy. The FAAC is an affiliate of the Ford Employees Recreation Association (F.E.R.A.). Membership fees:

Annual - New Members: \$30 (\$15 after July 1)
Annual - Renewal: \$25 (\$30 after January 31)

Membership includes the STAR STUFF newsletter, discounts on magazines, discounts at selected area equipment retailers, and after-hours access to the Island Lake observing site.

Astronomy or Sky & Telescope Magazine Discounts

Obtain the required form from the FAAC club treasurer for a \$10 discount. Send the completed form directly to the respective publisher with your subscriptions request and payment. Do not send any money directly to the FAAC for this.

Star Stuff Newsletter Submissions

Your submissions to STAR STUFF are more than welcome! Send your story and/or images to the editor at pvideo@aol.com. Email text or MS Word is fine. STAR STUFF will usually go to press the weekend prior to each general meeting. Submissions received prior to that weekend can be included in that issue.

* FAAC Members are welcome to join our Ford Astronomy Club Yahoo!Group. Messages photos, files, online discussions, and more! URL: groups.yahoo.com/group/FordAstronomyClub.

This months background photos courtesy of John Kirchhoff. Jupiter photo page 7; and moon background strip on page 1. See more of John's photos at:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/33926475@N06/with/4311533997/>

Presidents Corner *(continued from Page 1)*

Several people described their first encounters and Norb asked everyone to write their experience down and give them to me. I have compiled them and included them at the end of this article.

We recognized the club members for their efforts in support of the club with recognition certificates. For those certificate recipients who were unable to attend, we will present their certificates at the next FAAC General Meeting.

We also awarded the annual Sirius Award to Dr. Timothy Dey for his outstanding efforts leading to the restoration of the Hector J. Robinson Observatory in Lincoln Park. Also present, was Leo McMasters, who wrote the grant request and drove the project for the Lincoln Park Schools.

This was followed by an enthusiastic game of Astro-Jeopardy led by our own Alex Trebeck (Dale Ochalek).

At the end of the banquet, Pat and George Korody held a drawing for astro-door prizes that they have collected over the past year or had donated to the event. Everyone received a prize.

I want to thank everyone involved in making this a very special night:

- Gordon Hansen for organizing the event and finding a great facility.
- Pat and George Korody for their fantastic efforts in putting on a great door prize drawing.
- Norb Vance for his astronomy presentation.

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Presidents Corner

(continued from Page 3)

- Dale Ochalek for putting together and MC-ing the Astro-Jeopardy game.
- Barb Ramseyer, who owns Rose Cellar Florist in New Haven, Michigan, for the beautiful flower arrangements that were donated as door prizes for the drawing.
- A big "Thank You" to everyone who attended the banquet!

Here are the collection of "How you got hooked on astronomy" comments.

Larry Halstead – Cranbrook Institute of Science planetarium at age 8. Man In Space - Disney series on TV. Dad bought a 6 inch reflector.

Ellen Duncan – Looking at the stars with my dad when our family went camping in the summer.

Ken Anderson – Patrick Moore's "Atlas of the Universe" book. Three Rivers Astronomy Club observatory event at the Three Rivers Festival in Ft. Wayne, Indiana (saw Saturn in a telescope and naked eye). Apollo 11 and Space Race (I personally know 2 astronauts). My first scope was a 10 inch Coulter Odyssey Dobsonian.

Chuck Jones – The wonder of the unknown.

Timothy Dey – Alan Shepard and the original manned space flight programs through the end of the Apollo program and the Skylab. I read every book in the local library and knew every astronaut's name.

Sharron Dey – When my husband, Tim, told me there was an observatory out by the school I graduated from. During Junior High and High School I thought it was a shed. The first time I saw Saturn, I was hooked!

Greg Ozimek – Seeing Saturn at the Dearborn Civic Center with Walter Grabow of the Polaris Telescope Shop in the early 1960s.

Jim Frisbie – Bob FitzGerald was my inspiration in Astronomy. (Jim also verbally mentioned that his first view through a telescope was looking into a Victoria's Secret Store from a Nature Center Store at the other end of the mall. I leave it to you to decide what really inspired him).

Tom Jatkowski – At 9 years old or so, I looked up at the sky and wondered about what the stars were about.

Sandra Macika – My first interest in astronomy was sparked by the landing on the Moon, Voyager, dark skies in the U.P., the planetarium at John Glenn High School, Venus and Mars in the early morning (thanks to Paul McCartney). My Interest in observing and telescopes was sparked by the volunteers at the Lick Observatory in San Jose and my first look through a telescope (the 36 inch refractor at Lick) at M13.

Jim Barnes – My start in astronomy was inspired by looking at the Moon through my dad's telescope at age 6. My dad had ground his own mirror (7 1/2 inch diameter) and build it into an English equatorial mount in our back yard in Mt. Clemens, Michigan. He recently gave me the mirror mounted in a PVC Tube Assembly after he lost most of his sight.

Albert Sadellari – Since I was 12 years old from my teacher in an astronomy class.

Doug Bauer – During a trip to Ayers Rock, in the middle of Australia, we had an astronomy show us the southern skies through a 10 inch Newtonian telescope. It was a moonless night and the Milky Way would cast a shadow of your hand on the ground. I decided this would be a great hobby. I came home, bought a telescope and joined FAAC.

Presidents Corner

(continued from Page 4)

Gordon Hansen – First look at Saturn through a telescope.

George Korody – I got interested in astronomy by seeing the Milky Way during the dark nights of blackouts in WWII. Also, in seeing pictures of the Moon and planets.

Dawn Dolsen – I wanted to see Saturn's rings and knew how many moons each planet has, the planet sizes, colors, and types of environments.

Mike (?) – Always interested in science and science fiction and combined with seeing the objects in the objects in the solar system.

Mike Best – in 1945, at age 12, my Aunt Margaret gave me a book to read while sleeping on her couch in Caselton-on-the-Hudson, New York. She grabbed a book off the shelf "The Big Eye". This introduction to science fiction soon made me wonder – Are stars that far away? Are there other planets out there? Are there aliens out there? I switched to astronomy.

John Schroer – As a kid – Apollo Moon Mission, As an adult – Halley's Comet with my dad and reading Starlight Nights by Leslie Peltier.

Steve Flessa – I was inspired by: The Space Program, The science fiction of Robert Heinlein, Arthur Clarke and Isaac Asimov, science books and classes in grade school.

Don Klaser – Watching 'Telstar' move across the sky and the Space Race.

James B Wright – X-15 Project and Disney movie.

Jon Blum – When I retired, my kids bought me a telescope that I could not figure out how to use. I heard there was something called an "Astronomy Club" so I found the Ford Club at Island Lake, where helpful club members taught me how to use my telescope and what fun it is to do astronomy with this club.

Rosie Blum – in the 1950s, I had an older brother who was interested in astronomy and I wanted to do whatever my big brother did.

Frank Carson – My dad set up an antenna/radio receiver to capture the beeping signal of Sputnik as it circled the Earth.

Mike Rousseau – Age 10 – looking through a neighbor's Unitron w/solar filters. The book: "Stargazing with Telescope and Camera". George Korody helping complete my first homemade telescope at age 14.

Unanimous – A teacher, Mr. Bishop and the book "Backyard Astronomy".

Mohamed Mroue – In High School my teacher Mr. Brian Purcell put a picture of a dot on the screen, a pale blue dot. He then played Carl Sagan's speech on the image (the Earth of space). We would spend hours after school talking about astronomy. I knew I had to learn more and more, and here I am.

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Editor's note: *I spend a lot of time with Apple toys, so most my software reviews are about Apple based astronomy products.*

Do you have an idea for an article or review of a PC program? Maybe "Deep Sky Stacker", "The Sky" or some other PC program. Please feel free to send in your review, perhaps with a few screen shots. We can easily review PC based astronomy apps and reduce some Apple articles.

Presidents Corner

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Jamelah Malaki – When I was in 2nd grade (1988) my teacher was crying because a space shuttle blew up and a teacher was in the space shuttle. It then opened the doors to a whole new world, life and interest! Where, why, how, etc. (1988 – present)

David Baranski – Apollo program, shuttle program, Carl Sagan, Star Party at Kensington, SETI, and dark skies in Colorado.

Allison Baranski – Always had an interest, yet lately, since my husband bought a \$2,000 telescope, my interest in astronomy has increased.

Thanks,

Doug Bauer
DougBauer@Comcast.Net



(Tim Dey, Doug Bauer and Leo McMaster)



(Norb Vance from EMU speaks at Banquet)

Treasurer's Report April 15, 2010

Bank Accounts	
Checking	\$676.61
Savings	\$2,104.42
TOTAL Bank Accounts	\$2,781.03
Cash Account	
Cash	\$100.00
TOTAL Cash Account	\$100.00
Investment Accounts	
CD 1	\$1,046.91
CD 2	\$1,080.31
TOTAL Investment Accounts	\$2,127.22
Asset Accounts	
Equipment	\$1,596.42
Scholarship	\$659.30
TOTAL Asset Accounts	\$2,255.72
OVERALL TOTAL	\$7,263.97
Memos	
GLAAC	\$2,596.64
Total	

FAAC General Meeting Minutes 3-25-2010

Kevin Medon/Lori Poremsky

Attendance: 46+

The meeting was called to order by President Doug Bauer at 5:30 p.m.

Members enjoyed pizza while several new members and visitors introduced themselves and were welcomed.

Several members mentioned observing experiences including the recent Messier Marathon this past weekend in Walled Lake.

Today's tech talk was given by Jim Frisbie and centered around battery capacity. Jim explained the testing procedures to determine battery capacity of portable battery power. The conclusion: you get what you pay for.

The main presentation was given by Gordon Hansen and focused on the Winter Star Party in Key West, Florida. Photos were shown and details discussed. There were 600 attendees and over fifty vendors. The price is \$95/ticket and includes the entire week. Camping is available and hotels near the site run about \$160/night.

Club Business

Secretary's Report – Lori Poremsky noted that we have two new members this month.

91 Regular members – 56 which are currently unpaid

82 Lifetime members

7 Astronomical Clubs and Friends

180 Total

Motion & second to accept the February minutes; approved.

Treasurer's Report – Gordon Hansen noted that the net profit from the swap meeting was around \$900 dollars. 150 attendees paid at the

door. \$124 in club merchandise was sold. He reminded the membership and the FAAC Annual dinner is this Saturday night. To date 58 people have confirmed. There is still time to sign up.

Equipment Managers Report – Doug Bauer spoke to Diane Worth and all equipment is accounted for.

Projects/Committees/Events

Doug Bauer noted that Beginner's Night on August 14th has been cancelled at Lake Erie Metropark because of the event being held on the same night at Humburg Marsh Wildlife Refuge. This site is run by the US Forestry Service and is only a couple of miles from Lake Erie Metropark.

Doug Bauer noted the upcoming Multi-Club Outreach event to be held at Metro Beach Metropark on Saturday, April 24.

Harold Thomason will be out in front of the Dearborn Police Department on Michigan Avenue for Astronomy Day. Anyone interested in joining him should contact Harold directly.

John Schroer shared that the Detroit Science Center is holding an event on April 24th to celebrate Astronomy Day. The event will be held between 10 and 4. During this time a meteorite will be presented to the Detroit Science Center. Afterwards, club members that participate at the Detroit Science Center are welcome to join the group for dinner and then head over to the Multi-Club Outreach event at Metro Beach. Sidewalk Astronomy will take place during the day on April 24 at Metro Beach as well.

Doug Bauer noted that the Cub Scout Pack at Memorial Elementary School at 30001 Marquette in Garden City has invited the FAAC to present to about 20 scouts on Monday, April 26.. Several club members have already volunteered. If you're interested, please contact Doug Bauer directly.

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March Meeting Minutes

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Gordon Hansen noted that SIG meetings are taking place the 2nd Thursday of every month in the Berry Auditorium of Henry Ford Community College, located in the Administrative Services and Conference Center. The next meeting is Thursday, April 8.

Frank Ancona noted that Earth Day is March 27 this year. To honor the day all are being asked to turn off their lights between the hours of 8:30 pm and 9:30 pm. In addition, all are being asked to turn off all unnecessary lighting during the week of April 4, 2010. Frank also noted that the entire month of April is Global Astronomy month. Get out and celebrate.

John Schroer mentioned that the Astronomical League will be holding an annual meeting during the summer months.

John Schroer noted that on March 27 there will be a meteorite sale at the Democratic Club on Telegraph Road in Taylor.

Gordon Hansen stated, and Steve Flessa confirmed, that all calendars have been sold. The last one was donated as a prize for the Annual FAAC dinner.

Open Discussion

Stephen Uitti noted that YouTube has a non-profit program that could be used to promote "Astronomy for Everyone". The club can apply for an account, which would allow the full half hour shows to be uploaded to YouTube for international viewing.

Jon Blum noted that if anyone is interested in other star parties that are taking place, that there is a spring star party in Texas that a number of club members attend, and in September, there is a Michigan Great Lakes Star Gaze. If you're interested in learning the sky, consider attending one of these events.

Bill Behr of the Warren Astronomical Society also hosts a couple of weekends a year in Cadillac for star parties. There is one coming up on June 8-13. The facility is inexpensive and there is space for camping. There is a Michigan State Park near by as well for camping. More information can be found on the Yahoo Group in the attachments area.

Dennis Salliotte mentioned that Lake Eric Metro Park has offered a portion of the park outside the gates to be used for evening observing. In order to use this location, you must first register with the park. Dennis is putting that list together. If you believe you are going to use or will ever use the property, please make sure you get your name on the list. The site is open to the club between April 1 and November 30 with the exception of a few weeks in the fall when they are having the Waterfowl Festival. Rules for use can be found on the Yahoo group site.

Jon Blum noted that another place the FAAC club uses often for observing is the Richmond Airfield in Gregory, MI near Ann Arbor. There are rules for using that facility also posted on the Yahoo group site. It is a grassy airstrip. If you're interested in observing at any of these locations, post a note on the Yahoo site. More often than not, another club member will be willing to join you. Greg Ozimek reminded the club members that Richmond Field is a private facility, and you must carry your club membership card with you while using that property.

Dennis Salliotte noted that Beginners Nights will also be held at Lake Erie Metro Park this year at the Nature Center. The park will turn off the parking lights to accommodate observing.

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March Meeting Minutes

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Ken Anderson noted that he has renewed the permit at Island Lake for observing. As a note, the gates are closed at 10:00 pm. There is a lock box at the gate with a key to exit the locked park gate. Please do not share the code for the lock box with non-members of the club. Rules for use are posted on the Yahoo group site.

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Meeting Agenda - April 22nd

HFCC –Berry Auditorium - Admin. Services & Conference Center

For map see: http://www.hfcc.edu/contact/campus_maps.pdf

5:30 PM

Opening/Introduction/Member Observing

Main presentation:

My Observatory Jeff Thrush FAAC

Tech Talk:

Clear Sky Clock George Korody FAAC

Club Business/Secretary/Treasurer/Equipment Reports14

Club Projects/Committees/Member Support

* **Birmingham Temple Outreach - Sat May 15**

* **Astronomy Day at DSC 9:00 AM - 4:00PM - Saturday, April 24**

* **Multi-Club Outreach at Metropolitan Beach (evening) Saturday April 24**

* **Club Scouts pack at Memorial Elementary School in Garden City, 20001 Marquette, Garden City - Friday, April 23**

* **Astro-Imaging SIG**

* **Dark Sky Committee**



Ursa Major?
-Tim Dey's New 400lb
Dark Sky Observing Buddy

Thanks to my good friends at the Ford Amateur Astronomy Club for your many fine suggestions on how to deal with my local bear population during evening observing sessions here in the Delaware Water Gap Highlands, which have included:

- Decoy bears covered with honey and packed with explosives, triggered by mercury switches
- Hanging dead bears from local branches as a warning to live bears to avoid the area
- Electricity in its various and unexpected forms, including hyper-charged stun guns
- Tens of thousands of watts of mercury lighting (acknowledged to be a bit rough on observing anything but the full moon)
- Chemical defenses of various types and their respective odds of success
- Playing dead
- Running like heck, leaving three-legged dogs in a pack strung out behind me
- An endless and prolonged discussion of the various calibers of ammunition and firearms, and where to place the lucky shot should my nerves of steel allow me to fire with perfect accuracy into a vital organ just moments before my pending mauling and possible demise and consumption

I considered buying the Meade LX-200 GPS accessory bear-finder and warning device (if what you see through the finder fills the cut-out accurately, you may have a bear problem, only \$499.95), but OPT says they are back-ordered from Meade's overseas production plants until further notice. Speaking of Oceanside Photo and Telescopes, Mr. Ralph Emerson suggests my best defense may simply be to leave the late-night doughnuts and pizza at home, and make do with just warm coffee. He may be on to something there... Clear Skies, Timothy J. Dey, M.D.

Astro Imaging SIG

Gordon Hansen

The March meeting was held at HFCC

All are invited to join us in the Astro Imaging SIG meetings, to share and discuss images, experiences, and techniques.

We always have a good time, with lively discussion, and sharing of valuable information.

Next meeting is May 14. The meeting room location – HFCC Admin. Services and Conference Center (same building), Berry Amphitheater Auditorium.

Topics invited. Pizza served.

FAAC Events 2010

Kevin Medon and Lori Poremsky

April **23 Cub Scouts pack at Memorial Elementary School in Garden City**

24 Astronomy Day at DSC during daytime

24 Multi-Club Outreach (evening) Metropolitan Beach

May **15 Birmingham Temple Outreach**

Background Jupiter - courtesy of John Kirchhoff

One FAAC members blog

<http://hjiobservatory.blogspot.com/>

A few updates on the observatory, quick articles and photos. I'll try to improve my writing on this blog. Also, I try to keep daily updates on this blog.

Items For Sale

Meade Lightbridge Deluxe 12" – F/5, 1524mm focal length. Purchased new last year. Perfect condition mechanically, optically and cosmetically. Big, clear deep sky views. Built-in battery powered cooling fan, two-speed Crayford focuser (1.25 / 2-inch). Easy to transport, set up collimate and use - smooth as silk. Upgraded with Bob's knobs and heavier collimation springs. Includes shroud, cover, Telrad and secondary mirror heater. Over \$1000 invested, will sell for \$650.

Contact John Johnson at jjohnsonpub@yahoo.com

or (248) 515-0014.



Hector J Robinson Observatory

by Greg Knekleian

Some testing was done with the computer for remote control of the Sky software using GOTOMEETING.

A new door will be installed hopefully in the coming month.

A replacement for the lost camera has been ordered by a donor to the H J R Observatory.

Some members have been out to the site when it was open and some students have been using the site at times when Leo had it open during the day for solar viewing.

Progress continues to happen with the mount and star model in the Gemini with planned video tutorials and further practice in modeling and remodeling the mount to allow core group familiarity with the Gemini.

The mount will have been slightly rebalanced a bit to take up backlash issues when the cameras are on it. Larry Hoffman gave some lessons on the mount setup to a couple core members.

George Korody showed up and gave a short lesson regarding the Sky software.

Dr. Timothy Dey visited the observatory during his visit to Michigan.

Some residents have shown up at times and been given brief tours and a view of some objects through the C-14.

FAAC Profiles

Name: Doug Bauer

Number of years in Astronomy: 14
Years in FAAC: 12
Why astronomy? Always interest in science, astro course
First astronomy experience: in Australia
Minutes Till Eyes Are Dark-Sky Dark-Adapted: 15 - 20
Current interest in Astronomy: Visual observing
Mirror or Lens? 10" SCT
Favorite eyepiece : 35mm Orion Stratus
Star charts or computer: Star Charts: Pocket Sky Atlas, Planisphere, Pennington's Messier Marathon book

Top Site/Experience: Australia by Ayers Rock, no moon, full Milky Way casting a shadow on the ground
Favorite Local Observing Site: FAAC private observing site
Ever Seen/Heard a Bolide: Seen several in Death Valley and Alpena, MI.

Number of binoculars: 7
Any Astro vacations, eclipse etc.: The Star Inn (New Mexico) w/16" Meade SCT
Dream scope: 18" JMI binocular scope!

Latest Astro Accomplishment: Working on seeing all the Messier objects in one session (saw 70 at the 2010 WSP – Winter Star Party in Florida Keys)
Favorite Pizza Toppings: Pineapple, ham

Benefit of being in FAAC: Lots, learning a lot, members are really great and fun, social aspects, coaxes me out to observe. Stimulating. Outreach....



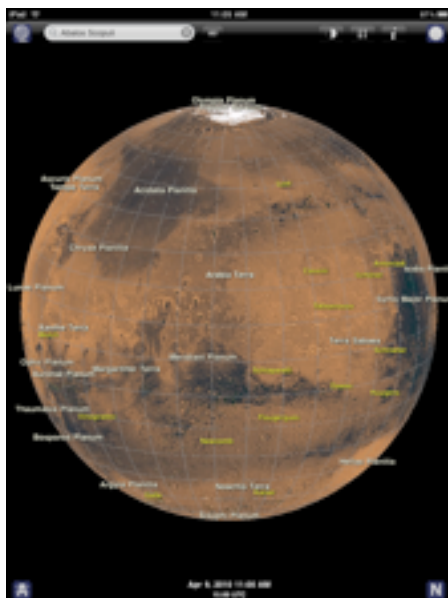


Photo © 2009 Greg Gonsky





Mars Atlas for iPad (above)

A nice \$6 app in the iTunes store with very detailed globe map from NASA.

This app has earth view and globe view, with shadows or no shadows from the Sun

Apple iPad

review by Greg Knekleian

I purchased a WIFI iPad, the first day they were available. At the Apple store I quickly loaded up some Astronomy Apps to test the iPad.

This device is not a replacement for a notebook or net book computer. It's more of a great interface tablet for displaying graphical content, viewing ebooks, movies and web surfing.

As software is written for this, perhaps it will be able to do more functions and start actually replacing a laptop.

Current applications that run on the iPhone work better on the iPad. There are enhanced versions of some applications that gives more features to the iPad version of an application.

Astronomy Apps like StarMap Pro, Star Walk, Sky Voyager and others all work flawlessly on the iPad. They all respond to the digital compass and location service features of the iPad.

When people see the Astronomy applications running on this device, they are simply blown away with the power and iPad's ease of use. It's going to be **the ultimate portable presentation tool** for star parties. But of course any display can affect night vision.

At Applebees, I showed off the Astronomy Apps on the iPad. The waitresses were excited with the features and usability of the iPad. They seemed pretty excited.

Soon their conversation turned to "what's your sign?" One waitress remarked she was a Pisces. It was a familiar situation; when people see star charts, some gravitate toward Astrology instead of Astronomy subjects. *(more details on page 12)*

iPad Review continued

(continued from Page 11)

There are of course many reviews on the internet and articles about this device. Rather than repeat what others have written, I'll mention some things I've found about the initial state of this device.

If you think of this as a much better presentation of Apps that are on your iPhone or iPod touch, this is a dream machine. It's the touch screen device you'd dream of using for surfing the internet. Some complain about the lack of Flash support - a big deal for some who surf the web wanting Flash content, often developed for students.

What about the hype of being able to replace your notebook or laptop computer with this device? If you're looking to view things that are out there, you won't be too disappointed. If you are hoping to design and create web and publish content that is complex or use it as a replacement for your laptop, I think you'll be a little disappointed.

This doesn't replace a laptop. It has options for a bluetooth keyboard, that's about it for input connections except iTunes or some web based transfer. Because the iPad won't attach to a wide variety of devices, like USB memory sticks, disk drives or printers, it can't replace a laptop. You have to transfer information through another computer to complete tasks like "printing". If you want to create content from home movies or "rip a DVD" (that you own), you'll have to use a different computer to convert content to display on the iPad. There are no input options, other than iTunes, email or cloud transfers. It can show photos, play music, but for the most part Apple is giving you an add on device, not a complete laptop replacement.

Apple makes it difficult to create content for the iPad. Apple is betting iPad owners will simply purchase content from the iTunes store. It's more like a fancy web device and a TIVO than a computer.

Thinking of it as an intelligent display

What kind of device will this replace? It's much like the ultimate graphic tablet or touch screen. In the past expensive graphic tablets that have a built in display have been marketed and touch screen accessories are often available as an add on for a computer system.

An iPad is less expensive than high end touch screens or graphic tablets. If you want a very slick interface that is affordable, the iPad likely will meet that need. It doesn't replace any one of these devices with the same depth of power, yet it might replace many of them at once. Graphics tablets have touch sensitivity, use precise pens and sense pressure. The iPad doesn't do that. It's not a large high resolution display and monitor, but it's portable, it's more of a jack of all trades.

It really shines with some newer Apps redesigned for the iPad. The ABC player application was designed for the iPad. This player relies on WIFI connection to stream video to the iPad. The ABC App is like a TIVO prerecorded storage of all the shows from the current season. It's like having a portable ABC TIVO with you at any wifi location.

Unlocking the power of the iPad

LogMeIn Ignition has been redesigned for the iPad. If you have a computer or laptop hooked up to the internet, it can be controlled by LogMeIn. You can securely control any number of PC or Macintosh systems, even with a smart phone. The iPad screen is larger and provides the control you could only dream of having. It securely displays and controls the remote computer.

With LogMeIn Ignition controlling you're PC, the **iPad and computer become something more than they were alone.**



Complete control over my laptop from the iPad, using LogMeIn Ignition.

Using both programs together the iPad controls the computer, even from a recliner. Just sit back, use the full power of your laptop and have complete "pinch and zoom" capabilities of the iPad's touch screen.

The \$30 LogMeIn Ignition app is a one time expense; with the free service is a great value. (I recommend the "free version" of the LogMeIn web service.)

The 3g Version of the iPad

The iPhone spoils folks, I'm used to internet access using a cell phone connection. If you buy the 3G version of the iPad, like an iPhone, you can control a home computer from the beach far away from WIFI hotspots. You'd need to have 3g version and pay for AT&T's monthly service fee. You can buy 3g service "by the month", for the iPad.

Imagine **remotely controlling an observatory computer** (PC or Macintosh), using a iPad 3g tablet. This could be a very compelling add-on. Already, some PC server administrators configure PC's "while at the beach" using their smart phones and LogMeIn software.

SUMMARY: The iPad is a keeper

Most admit they don't need an iPad, but when they see it they want one.

iPad WIFI: \$499, \$599, \$699 (16, 32 and 64 gigs)
iPad 3G version: add \$130 to above configurations.

AT&T 3G wireless service for iPad:	
250 megs/month	\$15/month
Unlimited	\$30/month
LogmeIn Ignition software :	\$29.99
Mars Atlas:	\$5.99

Review Of Star Walk

by Greg Knekleian

Some members of the club have "Star Walk" a graphically rich app (program) that runs on the Apple iPhone family of products. It performs better on the iPhone 3GS or iPad, because they have a digital compass matching the maps with the device's orientation. Star Walk has fewer objects than StarMap Pro or Sky Voyager. Star Walk only costs \$3.99, yet it offers an impressive display. It's especially pleasing to show someone a bright display of the stars and constellations in a bright room.

The program has a nice background of the heavens, but when you zoom in you'll realize fine details are a painted background, it lacks a large object database. Faint stars and objects are missing. It's fine detail is more like a digital painting than a chart. This is still okay for casual viewing and a quick reference. The stars relative brightness on the display are much greater than what I can see with the naked eye, at least in the city. This makes the constellations difficult to pick out compared to the other charting apps. (StarMap Pro represent brightness variations more realistically.)

Users and beginners will enjoy Star Walk because it gives an enhanced size and color of the brighter stars. It has a few features that StarMap Pro and Sky Voyager lack. One is a "live" animation of meteor showers. If you want to go out and view meteor showers and want a mapping program that shows these, this is the application (APP) for you.

Time Slider

Star Walk has a nice time slider display allowing you to change the time or animate the time and have a fast update of what is going to be out. Star Walk updates the large iPad display very quickly.



Quickly slide to any day or time

Star Walk also has links to some Astronomy Photos of the day and will take you directly to some of the better photos. This is nice for those who want to see what others are doing and don't want to have a dedicated APOD app on their iPhone, iPod touch or iPad device.

Sound track, sound effects and Speed

There is background music and nice futuristic button sounds inside Star Walk. It may be more of a wow device for showing off to others in star parties or during the daytime than some of the other programs. It has a little more graphical punch and effect and is more geared toward showing people what's up.

Star Walk brightly displays about 8,000 objects. Stars displayed are magnitude 6.5 and brighter. It's display also nicely renders the Milky Way.

Below the horizon display is visible on the chart. You'll see what you would, if you could "look through the earth". This may be useful for planning a session ahead of time to see what is below the eastern horizon. The maps automatically update on the iPhone 3GS or iPad touch to match where you're pointing the device.

There are no complex menus or control features to link Star Walk and control a goto telescope mount.

Star Walk for iPhone, iPod Touch, iPad : **\$3.99**



Astronomy Picture of the Day



Some object info and nice graphics, but less than in more expensive programs.

(All photo on this page are from my iPhone 3gs.)

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