



Newsletter

“Surveying the Skies for
Hazardous Asteroids”
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Leonids a damp squib from Ireland!

Last month's Leonid Meteor Shower turned out to be a failure from Ireland as a whole because of the poor weather. However, at least four were seen through clouds from Armagh Observatory by John McFarland and Co. David Asher fared better from Edinburgh where he bagged about fifty, and Mario de Maggio even better from outside Glasgow where he bagged 194 between 03.55 and 04.25am, making an average of around 400 per hour, and that was in bright moonlight. It appears from the observations in that the Asher/McNaught prediction was spot on yet



again, congratulations to them!

The image above was taken by Andy Skinner from California and shows a bright Leonid passing through Taurus. His title for the image is “Orion Shoots the Bull”!

Upcoming Meetings.

Armagh Planetarium is holding a Traditional Carol Service on Tuesday December 17th. at 7.30pm. Armagh Royal School Brass Ensemble and Chamber Choir are providing the music for the evening. Places are limited, so to ensure your

seat book your ticket from the Planetarium at 028 3752 7457 or email Kate@armaghplanet.com Although this is a free event, all donations



received will go to Cancer Research. Light refreshments are being served.

Our next society meeting will be here in the school on January 6th. 2003 when we have Miss Julie Thompson back with the “Stardome” Planetarium, (above). This is a very popular meeting and rapidly turning into an annual event. We had over 60 people at this event last season and hope to have even more this time. Let me also give you advance notice of our meeting in February. This will be our first “Andrew Trimble Memorial Lecture” and will be given by Professor Mark Bailey from the Armagh Observatory who will speak on the subject of “Giant Comets”, its on February 3rd so make a note in your diary, you wont want to miss it!

US Mirror.

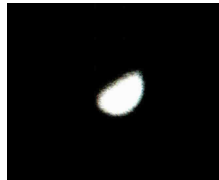
While attending the visit to the Observatory in Armagh by the Antique Telescope Society, I made friends with a chap called Robert Royce from Northford, Connecticut, who makes astronomical

instruments. Robert has offered the society an 8-inch f8 mirror in the hope that we can find enough interested to make a club telescope. The mirror was slightly damaged on the reverse side during manufacture and because of this he cannot offer it for sale, or to put it in his words, "people would scream"! It is otherwise in perfect condition and only needs coated; we could certainly make a lovely "dob" out of it. If anyone is interested in this project please let me know.

The Planets in December.

The sun still remains very active with many naked eye groups appearing; in fact we are just reaching the point in its eleven-year cycle where they are more prominent. There has also been a lot of CME (Coronal Mass Ejection) activity lately so keep an eye for aurora. There is a total eclipse of the sun on December 4th visible from South Africa and parts of Australia. No part of it is visible from the UK.

Mercury should be visible low in the southwest just after sunset, but never rises above about 20 degrees. Only seasoned Mercury spotters might be able to find it so low down in the twilight.



Venus rises about 4am in a dark sky and is dazzling at magnitude -4.7, and showing a crescent phase. It is already about 20 degrees up in the southeast by about 7.30am. It also spends the month close to Mars, being closest on December 6th at 1.6 degrees, but Mars is a lot dimmer at magnitude +1.6. The crescent moon will also be close by on December 30th.

Mars is in the morning skies, (see above).

Jupiter rises about 8pm by mid month and is well placed by about midnight on the borders between Leo and Cancer. The moon will be quite close on the night of 22/23. Jupiter is a beautiful sight even in a small telescope, with the four moons playing "hide-and-seek" with the planet. You can actually watch them change positions over a period of just a few minutes. Jupiter is at

opposition on February 2nd next year, so will dominate the southern sky until towards the end of July when it has a very close conjunction with Mercury on the 25th. low down in the west.

Saturn is at opposition this month on the 17th, so rises at sunset and sets at sunrise, and is highest in the south around local midnight. You will have a good opportunity to see the planet all

night and at its brightest as well, as the rings are almost at their widest open.



An interesting event takes place on the 4/5th January next year when Saturn actually passes in front of

the Crab Nebula. Whether we will be able to see the Crab against the bright light from Saturn remains to be seen, but it will be interesting to try. At left is a nice image sent in by members Nigel & Mark Stronge using a Meade 8" LX90 It shows what can be done with amateur equipment, and of course a clear sky. Saturn also dominates until about the middle of June next year when it fades into the twilight. Uranus and Neptune are still visible in the evening fairly low in the southwest; you will need binoculars though. On December 1st Uranus sets about 10pm but by 8pm at the end of the month. Uranus is reasonably easy to find being only 2 degrees above the star Delta (δ) Capricornus, and you should still be able to make out a tiny disk using a telescope.

Neptune sets about 8.30pm and at magnitude 8 will be a bit harder to find low in the south west, and is just east of Upsilon (υ) Capricornus.

Pluto is in conjunction with the sun on December 12th and is too poorly placed for observation.

FOR SALE.

Tal 110mm (4.5") reflecting telescope, as new, never used, bargain at £130. Basic, but good beginners scope. Contact: Roy Silcock at the EAAS meetings or through the Society address.

<http://www.eastantrimastronomicalsociety.com>

*Let me wish all our members a very Happy
Christmas and Peaceful New Year!*

John.