



# Newsletter

“Great Comets of the  
20th. Century”  
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PUBLISHER

Volume No 1

Issue No. 9

Date 12th. May 2003.

## ***Astronomical Treat in May!***

*The month of May has a treat in store for all amateur astronomers, with the Transit of Mercury just past, and two eclipses, one of the Moon on the 16th, and a partial eclipse of the Sun on May 31st. which is Annular in Northern Scotland.*

*The total eclipse of the moon is in the early hours of May 16th. and the partial phases start at 02.02.51, with totality from 03.13.49 to 04.06.31, and as the moon sets from Ireland just after the end of totality, the later partial phases will not be seen. In fact with the bright twilight and the moon so low it might even be difficult to observe the later stages of totality, if at all!*



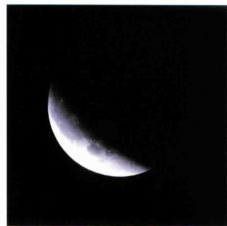
03.25 U.T.



04.03 U.T.



04.30 U.T.



05.45 U.T.

*Information sheets are at the front table.*

*The total eclipse of 21st January 2000. (JMcC).*

*The Annular eclipse of the Sun is one for the early birds as well, but it will only be seen here as a partial with about 74% obscuration at Belfast at sunrise which is at 03.56, where given a clear horizon we should actually see the rising sun already in eclipse. This should make a lovely photograph! Again, sheets are at the front. (All times given are in U.T., be sure to add one hour for summer time!).*

## ***Upcoming Meetings.***

*Things are going really well for our “Planetarium/Telescope Day” at the School on Saturday June 7th. It is running from 10am to 4pm, and is being opened by the Mayor of Newtownabbey. Various events are planned, including short talks by some of our own members, stands, and of course the “Stardome” Planetarium with Robert Hill from Armagh Planetarium. A timetable for the events still has to be worked out and members will be made aware of this ASAP. This has all the hallmarks of being a great day given good weather, so start spreading the word!*

*The first meeting of the new season is already*

booked, and is on Monday September 1st as usual at 8pm. Our first speaker is Mr Derek Heatley of the IAA and the title of his talk is "Relics of the Space Race". Also don't forget about the "Whirlpool Star Party" in Birr from 26th - 28th September, where one of the main speakers is Dr David H Levy of S-L 9 fame.

### ***The Planets in May.***

*Mercury may just be visible low before sunrise but will be very unfavourably placed and a difficult object to observe.*

*Venus is also in the morning sky but as it rises only half an hour before the Sun, it too is a difficult object.*

*Mars remains in the morning sky and moves from Sagittarius into Capricornus. It is getting closer to Earth all the time and as it does so, its diameter increases from 7.5" 12.2" while its stellar magnitude increases from +0.5 to - 0.6, and by the end of May it will be rising about 1am. Its phase is 87% and the planet's south pole is tilted in our direction, and the angle increases from 10° to 20° which will give us a good view of the south polar cap.*

*Jupiter remains prominent in the evening in Cancer, but by the end of May will set about 1.30am. Its apparent diameter reduces from 41"*



*to 34" due to its increasing distance from the Earth.*

*Saturn is still visible in the evening in Taurus at magnitude +0.1, and has resumed its eastward motion and will re-enter the northern tip of*



*Orion, and by the end of May it will be setting only 2 hours after the Sun.*

*Uranus is in Aquarius but is still very close to the Sun, while Neptune is in a rather similar situation regarding visibility.*

*Although we are well past Solar maximum, the Sun has been producing some very big naked eye groups lately, so do keep an eye for aurora. Also, as we are now supposedly in summer keep an eye for Noctilucent Clouds. These lovely silvery clouds are visible long after the Sun has set and are usually visible across the northern horizon, below is an image I took some time ago and will give you an idea of what to look out for.*

*They form at great heights, about 80km, and are thought to be ice formed on meteoritic dust. Do keep an eye and try to image them.*

*Another superb image taken by the Stronge Brothers with their new LX 200 10-inch Meade. It shows one of the nicest crater chains on the moon, that of Ptolemæus (top), Alphonsus (centre), and Arzachel (bottom). Ptolemæus is one of the biggest craters on the moon at 164km, and when lighting conditions are just right as above, you can see the way the floor is bevelled by the curvature of the surface, and to an*

*astronaut standing dead centre on the floor , he could not see anything of the surrounding walls! The large crater on the floor is Lyot called for Bernard Lyot, who perfected the solar coronagraph. Alphonsus is 108km in diameter and it was on the western side of its floor (somewhere in the shadow) that the American Spacecraft Ranger IX crash landed on 24th March 1965, but not before it transmitted back to Earth over 5,800 pictures. The last images which were interrupted by the crash, show objects as small as 300mm in diameter! The large crater on the right with the smooth floor is Albategnius which is 114km across.*

*Don't forget to keep an eye on our website for all the latest gen regarding upcoming events of the Society, and thanks to Dave Mullan for keeping it up to date! [www.eaas.co.uk](http://www.eaas.co.uk)*

*Until next time, clear skies!*

*John.*