

Report on the Fifth Biennial ASSA Symposium

T P Cooper, Chairman of the Organising Committee

The concept of the ASSA Symposium was started with the First Symposium held in Cape Town from 23–25 April 1992. The Second and Third Symposia were held as scheduled, hosted respectively by the Pretoria and Bloemfontein Centres. The Cape Centre had to intervene to ensure that the Fourth Symposium went ahead, and following this the committee of the Pretoria Centre decided to make a definite commitment to host the Fifth Symposium to ensure continuation of the concept.



Group photo taken at lunchtime on Day 2.



Janet Mattei with members of the Overbeek family, who attended her talk as guests.

In this report we summarise the planning and execution of the event, and make some conclusions which we hope will be useful to conveners of future ASSA Symposia.

Early planning

Planning for the Fifth Symposium started in early 2001. A request at a Pretoria Centre meeting for volunteers to assist met with little response, and as so often, organisation fell on several existing Pretoria Centre committee members. The Organising Committee was made up of Tim Cooper (Chairman and Program Organiser), Marianne Barendse (Treasurer), Trevor Green (Registration), Louis Barendse (Venue and Catering), Joy Hodgson (Advertising), Mike Haslam (Secretary), Janet Cooper (additional member) and Theo Pistorius (co-opted member).

We held our first meeting on 26 February 2001. Subsequent meetings were held on 23 April, 12 July, 22 October, and then in 2002 on 27 January, 10 March, 28 April, 9 June,



Michael Poll, Pieter Prinsloo, Barbara Cunow and Neville Young.

28 July, 19 August, 16 September, 7 October, 28 October and 11 November. Thus we held 14 meetings in all.

The First Announcement of the Fifth Symposium was made in *MNASSA* in February 2002 (vol 61, p.1). We decided to use *MNASSA* as the main vehicle to announce the Symposium, and have to thank Auke Slotegraaf at this point for his support. The first Call for Papers was published in *MNASSA* in April (vol 61, p.29), and repeated in the June and August issues.

Program

The initial idea was to hold the Symposium to coincide with the total solar eclipse of December 4, visible over the northern extremities of South Africa, thus enabling travellers to the eclipse to attend the Symposium in the same trip. To this end the dates were set as Friday November 29 to Sunday December 1, allowing two days to travel to the path of totality of the eclipse. It became apparent later that many used the eclipse as an excuse not to attend the Symposium and we may have had more attendees had we arranged the Symposium as a stand-alone event.

In our first planning meeting we identified six dedicated sessions:

- Session 1 Invited speakers
- Session 2 Instrumentation
- Session 3 Observing Sections
- Session 4 Historical session
- Session 5 Latest professional research
- Session 6 The Solar Eclipse

The final program is given in the appendix at the end of this report. From this it can be seen that Session 1 survived intact, with papers by Professor Brian Warner (Keynote Lecture. Novae), Dr Janet Mattei (Variable



Cliff Turk in consultation with two previous resident astronomers at Aloe Ridge.



Neville Young, J Kelly Beatty (Executive Editor *Sky and Telescope*) and Michael Poll.



The ladies at the Reception Desk, Stacey, Marianne, Janet and Joy.

Stars) and Fabio Frescura (Pulsars).

Session 2 was later converted to an open session due to insufficient response and the retraction of two initially-promised speakers.

Sessions 3 and 4 were well supported, and we had a surplus of speakers from the amateur fraternity, and particular interest in historical papers.

Session 5 was a disappointment, with few offers of papers from professional observatories, even after pressing in some cases. The professional session was thus replaced by another open session. The lack of professional interest in the Symposium remains a disappointment to the Organising Committee.

Session 6 on the solar eclipse was well received with papers on the December 4 eclipse, the June 2001 eclipse and the 1940 eclipse, including African Mirror film footage.

We were saddened during the planning period by the passing of Danie Overbeek on 19 July 2001. As a result we amended the program and requested Dr Janet Mattei to present her lecture as the Danie Overbeek Memorial Lecture. This she did, concluding with a slide of the outburst of the star WZ Sge, the outburst coinciding almost exactly with the time of Danie's funeral, and after a quiescence of 33 years. It provided a very touching moment during the proceedings.

Advertising

Apart from regular notices in *MNASSA* which started already in February 2002, we also sent the same announcements for insertion in all ASSA Centre newsletters. Posters were produced and distributed to several libraries, university notice boards and the Johannesburg Planetarium. Analysis of the registrations would indicate that few attendees resulted from the posters. We also sent inserts to be published in *Sky and Telescope* and *Astronomy* magazines. A request to advertise in some newspapers and radio stations drew negative response, though Louis Barendse did advertise the event over Radio RSG. Tim Cooper gave several introductory talks on the Symposium to canvas support. It is clear that most attendees resulted in canvassing via the Centres of ASSA.

Registration and attendance

A dedicated registration form was designed by Trevor Green. This was sent to all members of ASSA via insertion in *MNASSA*, to ASSA Centres via e-mail, via e-mail to those who specifically asked and was made available on the Pretoria Centre and ASSA websites. The final number of attendees was:

Day	Paid	Unpaid	Total
1	54	10	64
2	58	2	60
3	50	1	51



Delegates during one of the lectures.



The tea time discussions were especially enjoyed by all.



Rupert Hurly and Eben van Zyl related their stories of the 1940 solar eclipse.

fifth assa symposium

The figure for Unpaid includes guests for the Danie Overbeek Memorial Lecture and unregistered speakers.

Analysis of the attendees shows the following geographical Centre affiliation:

Pretoria	37
Johannesburg	13
Cape Town	6
Bloemfontein	3
Polokwane	1
Garden Route	1
Natal Midlands	1

In addition we were privileged to have in attendance Dr Janet Mattei and J Kelly Beaty (Executive Editor of *Sky & Telescope*) from the USA and Jay Anderson from Canada.

The contribution of Pretoria Centre members to its host Symposium was thus 37/65 or roughly 57%.

Sponsorship

The successful organisation of the Symposium could not be achieved based on attendance fees alone, and hence we solicited sponsorship to help with speaker and organisational expenses. The main sponsor was Vodacom, who provided financial assistance for speakers. We also received donations from The Friends of Boyden, Fotokats, Radio Lens and CMR. Nokia donated carry bags, folders and pencils.

During planning we also approached a large number of other companies, mostly considered blue-chip companies. These declined sponsorship, due to our request being 'unbudgeted'. Interestingly, two companies who openly advertise sponsorship of previously disadvantaged students ignored our request to sponsor attendance of black students to the Symposium despite three written requests.

Finance

The Symposium made a surplus, after income and expenses, which will be transferred to the ASSA Symposium Fund for future Symposia.

Venue

We had decided very early in the planning process to use Aloe Ridge Hotel as the venue for the Symposium. This was based on the facilities available for conferences, the excellent catering arrangements, availability of accommodation to those requiring it on site, and the fact that Aloe Ridge is a working private observatory. This was especially enhanced by the completion of the Aloe Ridge 25-inch telescope project in time for the event. A function was held on the Saturday evening to demonstrate this telescope, and also the 16-inch, which has been



Brian Fraser takes a nap from the hectic schedule.



Ad Sparrius and Tony Viljoen in contemplation.



Brian Fraser in more attentive mode, with Lerika Cross.

operational for some time. Coupled with these facts, Aloe Ridge also submitted the most cost effective quotation when we went out for cost estimates.

The choice of venue turned out to be a most successful decision, the approval by attendees unequivocal, and Aloe Ridge are thanked for their support.

Conduction of proceedings

The final program is appended to this report. Papers and slides will be published on CD-ROM, which could not be distributed at the event since not all papers had been received in time. Selected papers will be published additionally in *MNASSA*.



Louis Barendse at the eyepiece of the 25-inch.



Magda Streicher presents her Deep Sky talk with meticulously hand-drawn sketches.

Day 1 proceeded with a welcome by the owner of the Aloe Ridge complex, Alex Richter, followed by the Opening Address by the President of ASSA, Tim Cooper. In this he stated the main objectives of the Symposium.

Professor Brian Warner gave his Keynote Lecture on Novae, and Dr Janet Mattei presented the Danie Overbeek Memorial Lecture on Variable Stars. Seven members of the Overbeek family attended the latter as our guests. The six sessions saw 29 papers, of very high standard. Tim Cooper gave a closing address in which he concluded the Symposium had been a success, most objectives achieved, and thanked the members of the Organising Committee. Honorary Membership of ASSA was conferred on Dr Janet Mattei as a token of her contribution to astronomy in Southern Africa.

Poster papers

In addition to the lectures, a number of poster papers were submitted and displayed in the lecture hall. These included papers on *MNASSA* and deep sky objects by Auke Slo-tegraaf, the International Dark Sky Association by Dr David Crawford, a montage of



Sigie Liebner, Neville Young and Tony Viljoen relax at the end of the day.

solar eclipse pictures by Tim Cooper, the Bosman Theodolite by Rupert Hurly, and a demonstration of very fine astro-photography using the Boyden 13-inch telescope by the Port Elizabeth Technikon.

Feedback and comments

Herewith a selection of comments received after the event, mainly by e-mail:

“Congratulations on a superb symposium.” (Braam van Zyl)

“I would like to congratulate you and your team for putting on such an interesting and well organised symposium. I enjoyed it very much, and it was nice meeting the people there.” (Michael Poll)

“It was a privilege to be there and it was like a dream coming true. Congratulations on a very successful and well organised event.” (Frikkie de Bruyn)

“Thanks for a really enjoyable symposium which went very smoothly – and I know how much work that means.” (Cliff Turk)

“Congratulations on a great symposium. I really enjoyed it. The papers, and meeting with other people interested in astronomy, was a wonderful experience.” (Herman Wiechers)

“Well Done! again to you and your team for a well-run and informative symposium.” (Lerika Cross)

“I thought that the conference was a success. The interaction between professional and amateur was valuable.” (Brian Warner)

“Congratulations on organising what I am told is the best attended biennial symposium to date!” (Joy Hodgson)

“Congratulations on a great symposium! I thought the balance between intellectually-stimulating, historically-interesting and practically-useful papers was just right. Congratulations to you and your organizing committee.” (Ad Sparrus)



Tim Cooper, ASSA President, delivers his closing address.



Janet Mattei and Brian Warner with their speaker gifts. Their attendance was sponsored by Vodacom.



Speaker gift presented to Janet Mattei for her ‘Danie Overbeek Memorial Lecture’.



Speaker gift presented to Brian Warner for his Keynote Lecture on Novae.

Photographs used in this article were taken by Neville Young, Louis Barendse and Theo Pistorius. Their permission to reproduce them here is gratefully acknowledged.

“Thanks again so much for an excellent job well done. All your hard work has been appreciated.” (Magda Streicher)

“The symposium has taken my love for astronomy to a new level and I’m charged with new ideas and observing projects that will keep me very busy until the next symposium in 2004. The organisation and event management was impeccable to the credit of the Pretoria Centre. Was the price charged for the event reasonable? Yes! Was it worth it? More than worth it. The personal growth and advancement from an event of this nature will be felt for many years to come.” (Dave Gordon)

“The Symposium organized by the ASSA Pretoria Centre and held between November 29 and December 1, 2002, was excellent, well attended, and had an impressive set of papers covering wide areas of astronomy. It was very touching for me to have seven members of Danie Overbeek’s family in attendance when I presented my talk titled ‘Contributions of (mostly) South African Amateur Astronomers to Variable Star Research’. I was very honored when after my talk Tim presented me a beautiful plaque

with an impressive clear quartz crystal and proposed to make me an Honorary member of the ASSA. At the Symposium I met many of our South African observers together with many other enthusiastic amateur astronomers.” (Janet Mattei)

Conclusions

Based on our experiences, organisation will fall on a handful of dedicated individuals. The event was largely driven by the amateur fraternity. Commitment to attend was largely due to direct canvassing through *MNASSA*, talks to Centres and announcements in Centre newsletters. We found little gain by advertising outside these media. Obtaining sponsorship was difficult and different approaches need to be considered.

Despite the few uphill struggles, we consider the Fifth Symposium to have been a great success, based on the smooth running of the event, the very positive feedback, the high standard of papers and the attendance figures. We look forward to the next Symposium, to be hosted by the Johannesburg Centre, but this time as attendees! Now where is that Registration Form ??.....

Appendix: Final Program of the Fifth Biennial ASSA Symposium

29 November

Invited Speaker Session

- | | |
|---------------|--|
| 09:00–09:15 | Welcoming address (Alex Richter, Owner Aloe Ridge) |
| 09:15–09:30 | Opening address (Tim Cooper, President ASSA) |
| 1 09:30–10:30 | Keynote Lecture – Classical novae: Stellar apoplexy, convalescence and recovery (Prof Brian Warner, University of Cape Town) |
| 2 11:00–12:00 | Danie Overbeek Memorial Lecture – Contributions of amateur astronomers to variable star research (Dr Janet Mattei, AAVSO) |
| 3 12:00–13:00 | Pulsars (Prof. Fabio Frescura, University Witwatersrand) |

Open Session

- | | |
|---------------|---|
| 4 14:00–14:15 | Recent developments at Boyden Observatory (Hannes Calitz) |
| 5 14:15–14:30 | The Lamont-Hussey Observatory: the old and new (Gerrit Penning) |
| 6 14:30–15:00 | The W Uma star V759 Cen (Prof Derck Smits) |

fifth assa symposium

- 7 15:30–16:00 The formation of O₂ in the early atmosphere (Brian Fraser)
8 16:00–16:30 Why space geodesy? (Dr Ludwig Combrinck)
9 16:30–17:00 Supernova search program (Berto Monard)

30 November

Observing Sections of ASSA

- 10 09:00–09:30 Recent ASSA results on comets and meteors (Tim Cooper)
11 09:30–10:00 delta Scorpii, a strange variable (Brian Fraser)
12 10:00–10:30 The SA Meteorite Recovery Program (Trevor Gould)
13 11:00–11:30 Variable stars (Jan Hers, read by Michael Poll)
14 11:30–12:00 The ASSA Historical Section website (Chris de Coning)
15 12:00–12:30 Deep sky dedication (Magda Streicher)
16 12:30–13:00 Construction and use of an Audine CCD camera (Theo Pistorius)

Historical Session

- 17 14:00–14:30 Early history of astronomy in southern Africa (Peter Smits, read by Neville Young)
18 14:30–15:00 A history of comet discovery from South Africa (Tim Cooper)
19 15:30–16:00 De la Caille at the Cape 1751–1753 (Rupert Hurly)
20 16:00–16:30 Invention and development of the telescope (Louis Barendse)
19:00 Demonstration of the Aloe Ridge 25-inch telescope

1 December

Open Session (Research Session)

- 21 09:00–09:45 Touching history: The life of Jack Bennett (Neville Young)
22 09:45–10:30 A quantum perspective of the creation of matter in the early universe (Frikkie de Bruyn)
23 11:00–11:45 An amateur looks at the period–luminosity law (Eben van Zyl)
24 11:45–12:30 Investigation of optical and near-infrared surface brightness profiles of spiral galaxies (Dr Barbara Cunow, UNISA)
25 12:30–13:15 Light pollution: A growing worldwide problem (Robbie Yates)

Solar Eclipse Session

- 26 14:00–14:30 Preview of the solar eclipse, 2002 December 4 (Cliff Turk)
27 14:30–15:00 Reminiscences from the last solar eclipse (Louis Barendse, Tim Cooper, Neville Young & Theo Pistorius)
28 15:30–16:00 Observing solar eclipses (Cliff Turk)
29 16:00–16:30 Footage of the 1940 solar eclipse (Rupert Hurly, Eben van Zyl)
16:30 Closing address and remarks (Tim Cooper, President ASSA)

Exhibits and Poster Papers

- International Dark Sky Association (Dr David Crawford)
Astrophotography (PE Technikon)
Nonstellar objects in early star catalogues – Part I (Auke Slotegraaf)
Solar Eclipse Montage (Tim Cooper)
The Bosman Theodolite (Rupert Hurly)
Monthly Notes of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa (Auke Slotegraaf)