

Four asteroids named at Bloemfontein Symposium
 Brian Fraser

During the planning stage of the 7th ASSA symposium that was held in Bloemfontein in September 2006, it was proposed that four of the minor planets that had been discovered at Boyden observatory be named for persons who had been closely involved with the observatory in some way or other.

Nominations were made to the Minor Planet Centre in Cambridge, Massachusetts and after some correspondence with Brian Marsden, now Director emeritus, it was agreed to put forward the following nominations which were accepted and announced in the *Minor Planet Circulars* of 9 August 2006.

(4301) Boyden = 1966 PM
 Discovered 1966 Aug. 7 at Bloemfontein.

Massachusetts mechanical engineer Uriah Atherton Boyden (1804-1879) designed an improved turbine waterwheel for use in textile mills. His bequest to build a new observatory at a mountain site allowed the Harvard College Observatory to establish the Boyden Observatory at Arequipa in Peru. It moved to Bloemfontein in 1927.

(5298) Paraskevopoulos = 1966 PK
 Discovered 1966 Aug. 7 at Bloemfontein.

After serving briefly as director of the

Athens Observatory, John Stefanos Paraskevopoulos (1889-1951) joined the Boyden Observatory staff and was responsible for selecting the site at Mazelspoort, near Bloemfontein. When death ended his superintendency this was one of the finest observatories in the southern hemisphere.

(11781) Alexroberts = 1966 PL
 Discovered 1966 Aug. 7 at Bloemfontein.

Scots-born Alexander William Roberts (1857-1938) emigrated in 1883 to South Africa, where he taught at and became principal of Lovedale Training School in Eastern Cape Province. He was one of the most prolific observers of variable stars in the southern hemisphere, and his records are maintained at the Boyden Observatory.

(14310) Shuttleworth = 1966 PP
 Discovered 1966 Aug. 7 at Bloemfontein.

South African businessman Mark Shuttleworth (b. 1973) was the first citizen of a country in Africa to venture into space. A civilian cosmonaut on a Soyuz mission in 2002, he spent eight days aboard the International Space Station, where he participated in experiments involving AIDS and genome research.

All four of these minor planets were

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discovered on the same night at Boyden. The name of the discoverer is not recorded and it may take some investigating by members of the Bloemfontein centre to try and identify the astronomers who were working at the observatory in August 1966. At the time, there was no permanent director of the observatory, the position being filled by the senior member of one of the consortium of stakeholders who happened to be stationed there.

Members of the organizing committee attempted to get Mark Shuttleworth and Brian Marsden to attend the naming ceremony during the gala dinner at the symposium but this was not possible. Brian sent the following message, which was read out on his behalf at the dinner.

Message from Brian Marsden.

"I send my greetings to the participants of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa's 2006 symposium in Bloemfontein. I am sorry not to be able to attend the symposium myself, but as the now-emeritus director of the International Astronomical Union's Minor Planet Center I am happy to have participated in the recent naming of four minor planets that were discovered at the Boyden Observatory just 40 years ago. The quartet, all of which were found on the night of 1966 August 7, join the three earlier minor planets discovered at the Boyden Observatory. Although South Africa has long played a strong role in the observation of mi-

nor planets, most notably at the former Republic Observatory in Johannesburg for nigh on half a century, I'm sorry to say that there has been very little activity of this type now for many years. Perhaps this is because the discovery of minor planets was considered a dying field, as the use of long photographic exposures on glass plates was itself coming to an end. In recent times, however, thanks to the availability of efficient and relatively inexpensive CCD systems, there has been an enormous resurgence of interest in the field in many countries around the world. Since the southern hemisphere is still very much underrepresented in this activity, I hope that the four new namings will perhaps encourage some South African amateur astronomers again to participate in this work."

Just before the dinner Gerrit Penning received a phone call from none other than the first South African to venture into space; Mark Shuttleworth. He e-mailed a special message to the Symposium which was read out during the asteroid naming ceremony.

Message from Mark Shuttleworth.

"It's a great honour to have an astronomical object named after me, but I think the real honour tonight should be given to the people and organisations that pursue science and discovery in South Africa. Their traditions – of excellence at the cutting edge of understanding, of persistence in the

face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles, of results that transcend the limits that others might think are imposed by geography and equipment, have always been an inspiration to me. South African science and engineering is one of the country's long-standing assets and one we would do well to support and hold to a high standard.

The discoverers of 1966 PP (14310) are representatives of that tradition of excellence in science. I hope perhaps to meet them and thank them for carrying the torch in those days, and I hope to play a small role in supporting and inspiring the next generation of scientists in South Africa. I know that many of you here tonight also are responsible for great work that will push back the frontiers of knowledge, and I would like to pay tribute to you for your dedication in that.

These are exciting times - SALT and the potential of the Square Kilometer

Array offer us new tools and engineering challenges and remind the world that South Africa can be a great partner and ally in scientific endeavors. We have to live up to our predecessors and continue to do great work!

Tonight I hope you are all being treated to one of those amazing displays of the African night sky. For myself, I'm stuck in London which has largely given up on stars. I take some comfort in being able to tell my girlfriend that she's incorrect in saying I come from another planet - it's now officially from a small barren rock a long long way from the sun! Thank you, and I wish you all a great evening."

There are now over 134 000 numbered minor planets in our solar system, with Pluto having been assigned the number 134340. For what they have done for Boyden and astronomy in South Africa it is very fitting that these four people be honoured in this way. ☆

news notes

International Year of Astronomy in 2009

The International Astronomical Union has announced that it will be coordinating the International Year of Astronomy in 2009. This will be the 400th anniversary of the observations by Galileo in 1609, when he turned his telescope on the moon, discovering lunar mountains, on Jupiter, discovering its moons, and on parts of the Milky Way where he

saw many more stars than were hitherto known.

The IYA will serve as a platform for informing the public about the latest astronomical discoveries and will emphasize the role of astronomy in science education. Most IYA activities will span local, regional and national levels. The

IAU will act as the event coordinator and catalyst on a global scale. It plans to liaise with as many as possible of the outreach and education efforts around the world, including those organized by amateur astronomers.

Two of the activities envisioned:

- Bring astronomy to the citizens of planet Earth - enable as many people as possible to look through telescopes by organizing thousands of "sidewalk astronomy events", involving amateurs, professionals, planetaria and public observatories. A special programme, "Universe Awareness" (UNAWA) will be initiated, aimed at underprivileged children in a number of countries worldwide.

the 2009 IAU. A possible aim would be to get as many people as possible to look through telescopes and see what Galileo saw – the four brightest of Jupiter's moons...perhaps in coincidence with a "Wave of Darkness", in which lights are switched off to raise awareness of the night sky. A working group of the IAU has already been formed, chaired by the President of the IAU, Catherine Cesarsky. It will have a web site, www.astronomy2009.org which will serve as a focal point for activities. In the meantime, each country is encouraged to form a IYA2009 National Organizing Committee.

A colour brochure is obtainable from www.iau.org/INTERNATIONAL_YEAR_OF_ASTRONOMY403.0.html

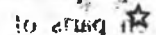
- 24 hours of astronomy – a round-the-clock event possibly coinciding with



Physics Nobel Prize for Cosmology Result

The Academy has awarded this year's physics Nobel prize to two scientists who have provided an insight into the early history of the Universe. They are John C. Mather of the Goddard Space Flight Centre, Maryland, and George F. Smoot of the University of California, Berkeley. Their work involved a satellite called COBE (Cosmic Background Explorer) which could measure the ubiquitous background radiation from the "Big

Bang", at a temperature of 2.7 degrees above absolute zero. Extremely small variations in this temperature reflect the formation of aggregates such as galaxies in the early universe. Their result provided strong support for the "Big Bang" theory for the origin of the Universe. Subsequently, COBE has been followed up by even more precise measurements using the WMAP satellite and soon the Planck satellite will be launched to do better still.



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