

Minutes of the AGM

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the SAAO Lecture Hall, 2004 August 11 at 20:00.

**1. Opening**

The meeting opened at 20:05.

**2. Apologies**

Apologies were received from: Dr Peter Martinez, Tim Cooper, J D Laing, Willem van Biljon, Chris de Coning, Maciej Soltynski and Jan Hers.

**3. Minutes of the previous AGM**

These had been published in *MNASSA* and Andrew Gray proposed that they be accepted. This was seconded by Peter van Blommestein.

**4. Matters Arising**

There were no matters arising

**5. Report of Council**

The Report of Council was read by Case Rijdsdijk. In this report it was announced that the Gill Medal had been awarded to Mr Berto Monard. Since he was not present, it would be awarded to him at an appropriate time in the future, possibly at the ASSA Symposium, by Case Rijdsdijk or alternatively Dr Ian Glass, who proposed the award.

**6. Reports of Observing Sections**

The reports were read either by their author or an alternate as follows: Comet & Meteor (by Tim Cooper read by Tony Jones), Deep Sky (Auke Slotegraaf), Double Star (by



Outgoing President Case Rijdsdijk (left) and ASSA President 2004–2005 Pat Booth (right).

Chris De Villiers read by Laurie Simone), Occultations (by Brian Fraser read by Peter van Blommestein), Solar (by Braam van Zyl read by Ian Glass) and Variable Star (by Jan Hers read by Cliff Turk).

### 7. Reports of other sections

The Dark Sky Section report was read by the Director, Cliff Turk. The Historical Section report, by Chris de Coning, was read by Keith Gottschalk. The new Education & Public Communication Section was read by

the Director, Case Rijdsdijk. No report was received from the Computing Section.

All reports listed in sections 6 and 7 above were greeted with acclaim and will be published in *MNASSA*.

### 8. Financial Report

The Hon. Treasurer briefly discussed the report and stated that the ASSA was in fairly good health, but was awaiting the final auditors report.

### 9. ASSA Scholarship

In the absence of Maciej Soltynski, this was read by Abe Mahomed and will be published in *MNASSA*.

### 10. ASSA Endowment Trust

The report was read by Cliff Turk who stated that the trust was healthy and the full report will be published in *MNASSA*.

### 11. Election of Auditor

The Hon Auditor Mr Ron Glass, of Messrs Horwath, Zeller Karro was re-elected on a proposal by Andrew Gray, seconded by several members.

### 12. Election of Office Bearers

The following were elected *en bloc* as they were the only nominees, on a proposal by Peter van Blommestein seconded by Keith Gottschalk.

President	Ms P Booth
Vice Presidents	Dr C D Lancy Mr C L Rijdsdijk Mr A B Jones
Members of Council	Dr I S Glass Dr P Martinez Ms M Streicher Mr M Poll
Hon. Secretary	Mr C L Rijdsdijk
Hon. Treasurer	Mr C R G Turk



Present at the AGM were Richard Sessions (top, left) and Laurie Simone (top, right). Chris Forder (bottom, left) and Dr Ian Glass (bottom, right) discuss the late Albert Jansen's book *Star Maps for Southern Africa*, published in July by Struik.



### 13. Presidential Address

The retiring President then handed over the chair to the incoming President and wished her a successful year of office. Ms Pat Booth thanked Case Rijdsdijk for his hard work during the past year and called on him to present his presidential address. This consisted of two parts; the first was an overview of the role of Council, that will be published in *MNASSA*, and the second was an illustrated talk entitled "The Sun – A typical star". This consisted of some spec-

tacular images that he had obtained from Dr Helen Mason of Cambridge University and the SOHO satellite. Many of the images were short time-lapse video clips showing in great detail the dynamics of the visible Sun in ordinary and ultra-violet light as well as the X-ray Sun.

### 14. Closure

After conclusion of the address there was some discussion on the address, after which Pat Booth declared the meeting closed.

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## Report of Council 2003–2004

Council notes with regret the passing of Dr Janet Mattei during the year. Her energy within the AAVSO will be sorely missed. The President and Council did send condolences to her family and friends on behalf of the ASSA.

complexities of taking over the accounts without the benefit of the advice and mentorship of the previous treasurer, Mr Colin Gray who passed away last year. Accounts are in order and the ASSA is in good health.

### 1. Membership

During the year subscriptions were increased to R100 with the registration fee being increased to R25. Council felt that these were reasonable bearing in mind that there had not been an increase for some years. At present membership is as follows: members with S&T subscription (99), non-S&T subscribing members (130), Honorary members (12) for a total of 241.

The ASSA thanks acting Director SAAO, Dr Peter Martinez, for enrolling the *MNASSP* students as members, and one hopes that they will remain members into their careers, either as astronomers or engineers and technicians working in the astronomical arena.

### 3. Council appointees

Dr Abe Mahomed has retired as membership Secretary and Council will need to fill this important position as soon as possible. Council thanked Dr Mahomed for his services over the years and were unsuccessful in persuading him to stay on! Mr Cliff Turk stays on as Business Manager and has taken on the job as Treasurer as well and Council thanks him for his efforts. Distribution of *MNASSA* and the *SkyGuide* requires an enormous amount of work, and several discussions have been held in the course of the year to try and alleviate some of this work. The year was unique in that the President continued as Secretary as well.

### 2. Finance

The current treasurer is to be thanked and commended for his efforts in sorting the

### 4. *MNASSA*

The Editor, Mr Auke Slotegraaf, maintains his firm hand at the helm of *MNASSA* and Coun-



cil is grateful for his efforts, and the assistance given to the editor by Dr Ian Glass and Mr Maciej Soltynski. The publication continues to be well received both locally and overseas with contributions from amateurs and professionals alike, and Council is looking forward to receiving observational contributions from NASSP students. Dr Ian Glass has been corresponding with the Institute of Scientific Information, ISI, to get *MNASSA* recognized and thus get more substantial contributions from the scientific community in SA.

### 5. Annual *SkyGuide*

Council wishes to publicly thank Ms Pat Booth for her many years of dedicated service as editor of the *Handbook*. The new

handbook, *Sky Guide Africa South* has been very well received and it is hoped that the 2005 edition will be even better than the 2004 edition. Mr Slotegraaf, ably assisted by the ASSA's Editorial Board is to be thanked for their efforts. It makes Mr. Slotegraaf's work a lot easier if he receives details of the Centres and Sections early, and it is hoped that the new timing of Centre and ASSA AGMs will help this situation.

### 6. Reciprocity

Council is glad to announce that a Memorandum of Understanding between the ASSA and the South African Institute of Physics, SAIP, has been agreed to. This enables full members of the ASSA to attend



(left) Dr Abe Mahomed, who has been Membership Secretary since 1995, has retired his position on Council. (right) Mr Cliff Turk, elected Honorary Treasurer, has also taken on the position of Business Manager.

SAIP conferences and meetings and vice versa. It is hoped that members of both the SAIP and ASSA will take advantage of this arrangement.

### 7. Sections of the ASSA

The Imaging Section Directorship is still vacant and it is hoped that it will be filled in the coming year. In the course of the year Council received requests for the formation of two new Sections: Cosmology and Astrophysics and Education and Public Communication (EPC). Council discussed both and decided that the former, Cosmology and Astrophysics was probably too complex for members of the ASSA. It was suggested to the proposer, Mr Frikkie de Bruyn, that in view of the recent arrangements established with the SAIP, that a home for his field of interest in fact already existed within the SAIP and that members with an interest in this field could present papers at SAIP meetings. This was accepted by the proposer. Council did agree to the setting up of an EPC section and the Director is Case Rijdsdijk. (Further details appear in the Report of Sections, pp 151–152 of this issue – Ed.)

### 8. Scholarships

Mr Maciej Soltynski, Dr Abe Mahomed and Mr Andrew Gray are to be thanked for their efforts in running the ASSA Scholarship. A full report will appear in *MNASSA* in due course.

The Alan Cousins Scholarship, proposed by Dr Dave Kilkenny will hopefully be established in the coming year. A trust needs to be set up and it is intended that this scholarship be for Ph.D or possible M.Sc students in astronomy.

### 9. Scope-X

Once again the Johannesburg Centre organized a superb Scope-X. It was very well attended and each year the numbers seem to increase. A full report has appeared in *MNASSA*. The Cape Centre also had a Scope-X held at the MTN ScienCentre. Attendance was disappointing but Council expresses its appreciation for the efforts that are being made to promote astronomy in South Africa. Should other centres wish to hold similar exhibitions they are well advised to consult the people at the Johannesburg Centre. One thing however stands out: the selection of a venue is crucial to the success of such an event.

### 10. Transit of Venus

Virtually every person even remotely interested in astronomy turned out to participate in or observe this rare event. Some retraced historical routes and events whilst others, from around South Africa, and the world, came out to actually observe and time the event. All centres were involved and many amateurs helped out in innumerable ways and again Council wishes to express its gratitude to members for their efforts in making the entire event in South Africa a success. Prof Jay Pasachoff from the US, who came out for the partial eclipse, gave talks on the transit of Venus for members.

### 11. Constitution

Amendments to the constitution were discussed, drawn up and circulated to members after which they were announced in *MNASSA* and voted on. It is expected that the results will be announced after the next Council meeting, but no problems are expected.



### 12. The Gill Medal

Only one nomination was received and a worthy one it proved to be. The Gill Medal for 2004 is to be presented to Mr Berto Monard for his outstanding work on the discovery of supernovae. Also his remarkable discovery of a gamma ray burst (GRB) afterglow, which enabled major observatories around the world to make significant follow-up observations again highlighted the important role that amateurs can play in world astronomy. Dr Ian Glass will write the citation to appear in *MNASSA* and the medal will be presented to Monard by the current President, Case Rijdsdijk, at the earliest opportunity.

### 13. Acknowledgements

The Council wishes to express its thanks to the following. Dr Peter Martinez, acting SAAO Director, for allowing the Council to use the SAAO Lecture Hall for its meetings and also the use of many other of the Observatory's resources. The Directors of the various Sections within the ASSA for forwarding data to their respective international bodies and for their support. Finally to all members of the various Centres, especially the Cape Centre for hosting this years AGM.

### Report of the ASSA Endowment Trust (ASSET) for 2003 Cliff Turk (Secretary, ASSA Endowment Trust)

During the calendar year 2003 the Trust received donations of R1570.00 which is slightly down on the previous year. Capital increased to R22 816.

Income from investments amounted to R5114 from which grants totalling R1500 were paid leaving a nett increase of R3614 in disposable funds which then stood at R36 698. The full year-end accounts will be

published in *MNASSA*.

Members and Centres are reminded that the Trust will consider assisting with funding of worth-while projects. One such project is currently under consideration and it is hoped others will follow. Initial enquiries should be motivated in writing to the Trust Secretary, 20 Nerine Ave, Pinelands, 7405 or via e-mail to [cliffturk@yebo.co.za].

#### Balance Sheet as at 31st December, 2003

	2002		
	Trust Capital:		
	19 476.25	Balance at 31st December 2002	21 246.25
	1 770.00	Donations received during the year	1 570.00
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	R 21 246.25		R 22 816.25
	6.20	Sundry Creditors	6.20
		Distributable Reserve:	
	33 353.56	Balance of Income and Expenditure Account	36 967.39
	<hr/>		<hr/>
	R 54 606.01		R 59 789.84
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2002	Represented by:	
	Investments:	
38 000.00	ABSA Bank Ltd. Fixed Deposits	38 000.00
1 387.57	ABSA Bank Ltd. Equity Shares (at cost)	1 387.57
Nil	Sundry Debtors	Nil
15 218.44	ABSA Bank Call A/c	20 402.27
Nil	Cash	Nil
<b>R 54 606.01</b>		<b>R 59 789.84</b>

**Income and Expenditure Account for the year to 31st December, 2003**

2002	Income:	
4 536.12	Dividends and interest received	5 113.83
	Deduct expenses:	
1 500.00	Grant to ASSA	1 500.00
4.00	Stationery	Nil
R 3 032.12	Excess of income for the year	R 3 613.83
30 321.44	Excess of income from previous year	33 353.56
<b>R 33 353.56</b>		<b>R 36 967.39</b>

Notes:	ABSA Fixed Deposits:	
	11.79% p.a. maturing 8 Oct 04	R 18 000.00
	9.78% p.a. maturing 28 May 05	R 20 000.00
	ABSA Bank Ltd. 362 Equity Shares(cost)	R 1 387.57
	(Market value R15 312.00)	R 39 387.57

**Report of the Comet and Meteor Section  
T P Cooper (Director)**

**Observed meteor showers**

The year 2003 saw meteor observations reported by no less than 25 individuals (see Table 1), largely as a result of a number of specially organised campaigns. The year again saw less than desirable coverage due to adverse weather conditions. Nevertheless, useful work was done where weather permitted.

*Beta Tucanids:* A special watch was organised with Dr Peter Jenniskens in order to observe a potential outburst due to the passage of the Earth through the dust stream of comet C/1976 D1 Bradfield. Stations were set up at Bredasdorp, Stellenbosch and Cape Town, with visual observers and image intensified video at each site. All stations were badly affected by clouds, and a single Beta

Tucanid was observed by Jenniskens. Members of the Weather Bureau at SANAE base in Antarctica were also enlisted as observers. They confirmed no activity from their site.

*Alpha Centaurids:* Tony Jones, Karen Koch and Tim Cooper observed a total of 8 hours. The shower showed its usual low activity of around 2–3 per hour.

*April Lyrids:* Magda Streicher continued her coverage of this shower. Cliff Turk supplemented this with observations he made in 2001.

*Pi Puppids:* A special watch was organised based on Peter Jenniskens's notification,

and based on a prediction by Jerome Valbaillon, of a possible outburst on April 23. Weather conditions were not entirely favourable, but a watch by several observers indicated no outburst, apart from a brief flurry witnessed by Mike Begbie. Since other observers at the same time witnessed no activity, Begbie's activity may have been due to a narrow, localised streamlet.

*Eta Aquarids:* Yet again clouds played a role in limiting the coverage of the most southern major shower. Cooper, Streicher and Penning still managed a reasonable 13.6 hours between them, with best rate observed

**Table 1.** Meteor showers observed

Observer (number of showers observed)	Showers observed and duration	Total time (h)
Tim Cooper (5)	Beta Tucanids 1.2, Alpha Centaurids 3.0, Pi Puppids 1.5, Eta Aquarids 6.0, Geminids 1.5	13.2
Magda Streicher (6)	Pi Puppids 1.5, April Lyrids 3.0 Eta Aquarids 1.9, June Bootids 0.9 Delta Aquarids 3.8, Leonids 1.4	12.5
Gerrit Penning (4)	Pi Puppids 1.1, Eta Aquarids 5.7 Geminids 3.3, Velids 2.4	12.5
Cliff Turk (3)	Delta Pavonids 1.0, April Lyrids 2001 4.0 Orionids 4.0	9.0
Mia Zeelie (2)	Geminids 6.9, Velids 2.0	8.9
Michael Poll (2)	Leonids 0.8, Geminids 3.6	4.4
Auke Slotegraaf (1)	Beta Tucanids 3.6	3.6
Ed Foster (1)	Beta Tucanids 3.6	3.6
Vito Basso (1)	Beta Tucanids 3.4	3.4
Herman Wiechers (2)	Pi Puppids 1.8, Geminids 1.5	3.3
Rui Henriques (1)	Beta Tucanids 3.2	3.2
Jacques van Delft (1)	Pi Puppids 3.0	3.0
Tony Jones (2)	Beta Tucanids 0.5, Alpha Centaurids 2.5	2.7
Karen Koch (2)	Beta Tucanids 0.5, Alpha Centaurids 2.5	2.7
Mike Begbie (1)	Pi Puppids 2.2	2.2
Andre van Staden (1)	Pi Puppids 2.1	2.1
Trevor Gould (1)	Geminids 2.0	2.0
Berto Monard (1)	Pi Puppids 2.0	2.0
Elfrieda vd Berg (1)	Pi Puppids 1.8	1.8
Brian Skinner (1)	Beta Tucanids 1.7	1.7
Dudley Field (1)	Beta Tucanids 1.7	1.7
P van Blommestein (2)	April Lyrids 0.5, Pi Puppids 1.0	1.5
Braam van Zyl (1)	Pi Puppids 1.1	1.1
Peter Jenniskens (1)	Beta Tucanids 0.7	0.7
Herman Bonnet (1)	Pi Puppids 0.5	0.5
Total		103.3



by Penning on the morning of May 6 with 28 Eta Aquarids in one hour under limiting magnitude 5.4 conditions. During observation, Cooper detected a brief but strong meteor outburst on the morning of May 4 with a radiant at around RA 22<sup>h</sup>20<sup>m</sup>, Dec -27.5° in Piscis Australis.

**Leonids:** No outburst was predicted for 2003 for South Africa. Due to poor weather very few observations were made, apart from brief watches by Magda Streicher and Michael Poll, who confirmed very little activity.

**Geminids:** The year culminated as usual with observations of the Geminids. Trevor Gould observed for 2 hours on December 13/14, and despite a bright moon saw 11 Geminids and 4 sporadics. Tim Cooper observed on December 14/15 for 1.5 hours before moonrise, seeing 23 Geminids and 7 other meteors. The Geminids included a -4 fireball, which travelled a full 3 seconds across the sky. The event was reported also by Herman Wiechers and Michael Poll. Gerit Penning and Mia Zeelie also observed the Geminids from Bloemfontein, including up to December 16 when rates had dropped to almost zero.

### Summary of observed fireballs

2003 saw a total of 17 fireball reports, summarised in Table 2. The full details have been submitted for publication in *MNASSA* as a separate article

### Summary of observed comets

*Comet NEAT (C/2002 V1)* was observed by Andre van Staden, Mike Begbie, Mauritz Geyser, Peter van Blommestein and Tim Cooper from January to March, peaking at magnitude 4. *Comet Kudo-Fujikawa (C/2002 X5)* was observed by Tim Cooper

and Peter van Blommestein in February and March and reached magnitude 6. *Comet LINEAR C/2002 (T7)* was observed by Mike Begbie and Tim Cooper. The comet brightened from magnitude 10.8 in October to 9 by year-end. This comet may become quite bright in 2004. *Comet Encke (2P)* was observed by Mike Begbie during October and November as the comet headed towards perihelion in its 3.3 year orbit. It reached magnitude 7 before being lost in the Sun's glare. An extended period of cloud prevented observation by the Director. *Comet NEAT C/2001 (Q4)* was observed by Mike Begbie and Tim Cooper, finishing 2003 at magnitude 9. This comet is also expected to become quite bright in 2004.

All observers of meteors and comets are heartily thanked for their contributions.

**Table 2.** Fireballs recorded in 2003

Date 2003	Reporter	m <sub>v</sub>	Time (UT)
Jan 30	Ivor Paul	-6	18:20
Mar 06	Cliff Turk et al	-6 to -7	18:22
Mar 06	Cliff Turk et al	-6	18:55
Mar 30	Bill Hollenbach	-6	16:37
Apr 08	Chris de Coning	>-3	19:50
Apr 20	Magda Streicher	-4	21:39
Apr 25	J. van Blommestein	-3?	19:20
May 29	Jacques Cilliers, Jane Trembath	>-3	19:03
Jun 01	Auke Slotegraaf	-4	23:22
Jun 06	Brian Skinner	-5	05:15
July 17	Rob Scott	-5	16:30
Aug 28	Trevor Gould	-6	17:22
Aug 28	Bill Hollenbach	?	19:59
Aug 31	Trevor Gould	-3	18:00
Sep 28	L v. Amersfoort	?	18:45
Nov 09	Trevor Gould, Mauritz Geyser	-6	01:18
Dec 14	Herman Wiechers, Michael Poll, Tim Cooper	-4	20:11

Report of the Deep-sky Observing Section  
Auke Slotegraaf (Director)

The year under review has seen a marked increase in activity in the work of the Section.

Magda Streicher of Pietersburg has continued to document southern sky splendours, sketching upwards of 120 objects. She revisited the Bennett catalogue, observed the 23 obscure Hogg open clusters, and initiated her own project on star chains.

The Bloemfontein Centre Deepsky Group, under the capable leadership of Gerrit Penning, has established their own observation program for the year, consisting of 20 deep sky logs. The logs are considered a great method for recording observation history and to serve as a future reference point. In addition, the logs also contain other observation exercises (e.g. navigational) and contain guidance for the observation of satellites, planets etc. On 28 February 2004, observations officially started as members were introduced to the activity plan for the year. The deep sky group consists of about 12 highly motivated members. Observation evenings are organized twice a month as the Moon and clouds allow. It usually takes

place from members' homes in the city. One reason why the Centre considers its deep sky group to be effective is the use of binoculars during such evenings and the fact that ordinary backyard astronomy is done. A dedicated deep sky webpage was also constructed for the Deep Sky group.

The Director has continued work on open cluster remnants, and is well-along with the development of software to extract data from various catalogs (currently, the UCAC2 and 2MASS catalogues) in order to analyse cluster stars in terms of proper motion, photometric membership, etc. The software is able to generate and partially interpret colour-magnitude and two-colour diagrams using isochrones, radial density profiles and vector point diagrams. It is intended that these routines will eventually be used to automatically search for clusters in large stellar databases. Analysis of various star-groupings is underway, including those groupings listed by Loden, Isserstedt and Uranova, as well as those presented by the director at the previous ASSA Symposium.

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Report of the Double Star Section  
Chris de Villiers (Director)

Observing: No active observing was done by the Section Director (SD), and no observation reports were received from other observers. The SD hopes to encourage observers to take an interest in double stars by publishing regular double star lists and related information in future issues of *MNASSA*. The Editor of *MNASSA* has agreed to make space available for this purpose.

Book review: The SD submitted a review

on *Observing and Measuring Visual Double Stars* (Argyle, Ed.), which was published in the June 2004 issue of *MNASSA*.

Projects: The SD has embarked on two projects, of which details will be published in *MNASSA* in due course: (1) Comparison of existing methods of determining orbits of double stars, and a proposed new method. (2) Search for new binary stars in the UCAC2 catalogue.



### Report of the Occultation Section

Brian Fraser (Director)

This was one of our less active years for a long time. This was due partly to the director not being able to spend as much time as he would have liked on the running of the section due to work and domestic commitments.

However a number of the regular observers continue to enjoy the challenges of occultation observing and have reported as follows.

Lunar occultations were observed by Jannie Smit (Pretoria; 10 disappearances, 3 reappearances), Peter van Blommestein (Simons Town; 48 disappearances) and Cliff Turk (Cape Town; 26 disappearances, 13 reappearances).

In November 2003, there was an occultation of a star by Titan, one of Saturn's moons, and this event caused much interest

in Europe. A team of observers from France and Germany travelled to Southern Africa to observe the event and amateurs all over the country were alerted. Unfortunately the eastern and northern portions of the country were clouded out. Good results were obtained in Namibia, Cederberg and Sutherland and by Albert Jansen in Prince Albert.

There were not many minor planet occultations of bright stars and far fewer events were attempted. One success was obtained by Tim Cooper who observed an occultation by the minor planet Zerbinetta on 2003 April 9/10.

Obtaining a good time signal is still one of the major obstacles to getting good observations and this problem needs to be solved if we are to attract new members to this interesting aspect of amateur astronomy.

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### Report of the Solar Section

Braam van Zyl (Director)

Solar activities such as active regions, coronal mass ejections, flares and sunspots were relatively constant during the year and provided interesting observation opportunities. The average sunspot count per day numbered 109 with a minimum 11 of and a maximum of 238.

Unfortunately the number of amateurs involved in the counting of sunspots remain only a handful. Hopefully the increased awareness will lead to the enrolment of more members in 2004

Although not one of the two solar eclipses were visible from South Africa, the Mercury transit on 7 May 2003 compensated for this. Public days were organized by the National

Science and Engineering and Technology week (SET) in Cape Town and Bloemfontein as well as at the South African Museum Planetarium of Cape Town, University of Pretoria, Boyden Observatory and Rhino and Lion Nature Reserve at Krugersdorp. Hundreds of members of the public were reached through these events. Various other members of ASSA from all over the country observed from their homes and workplaces. ASSA members from Bloemfontein collaborated and interacted with amateurs from Brazil, Spain and France. Information, photos and data on contact times were exchanged. Invaluable lessons were learnt from this event that could be applied to en-



sure the smooth running of operations during the Venus transit. Mauritz Geyser and his team from Pretoria placed South Africa on the map by means of a live web cast.

The Mercury transit contributed to a greater public awareness and interest in the Sun and its activities. Interested individuals made more inquiries than usual.

An interesting development in the field of amateur astronomy is that more and more amateurs are studying and observing the Sun via the Internet especially those who do not have daily access to telescopes.

#### ASSA Bloemfontein

The centre has an observation group who uses the coelostat solar telescope at Boyden Observatory. The following activities were hosted: (1) The Mercury transit; (2) To act as

tour guides for visiting groups; (3) Counting of sunspots and active areas on weekends using the coelostat. Some members observe and record sunspots on a daily basis from their homes (using small telescopes) and forward data to the AAVSO and solar sections in the USA; (4) Spectrograph measurements; and (5) Involvement in ongoing research projects namely (i) the influence of the Sun on climate changes and (ii) the influence of solar activities on the navigational abilities of racing pigeons

As this past year has proven to be exhilarating and provided spectacular solar events, I urge all ASSA centres to become involved with or to organize solar observation groups – even if you are only one or two dedicated amateurs, you can make an invaluable contribution!

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#### Report of the Variable Star Section Jan Hers (Director)

The following observers reported variable star observations during 2003:

Peter Bosman - Midrand	2
Tim Cooper - Pretoria	153
Dave Gordon	3
Jan Hers - Sedgefield	95
Berto Monard - Pretoria	123
Johannes Mostert - Prieska	12
Jan Plomp - Queenswood	18
Michael Poll - Gezina	97
Jannie Smit - Pretoria	1348
Cliff Turk - Cape Town	66
Peter Wedepohl - Somerset West	307
<b>Total</b>	<b>2224</b>

**Report of the Dark Sky Section**  
Cliff Turk (Director)

Over the past few years the section has acquired a small monetary reserve from admission fees to the StarWalks held at Kirstenbosch in the summer months. This year the weather was against us and we barely broke even. However, the funds held will allow us to develop our activities further.

To make the public aware of the problems of light pollution is a long process but some progress is being made and a number of enquiries answered as our efforts are becoming better known.

We now require interested members in various parts of the country to help with publicity in their home towns. This would entail mentioning light pollution as a problem in as many forums as possible, e.g.

astronomical lectures or public demonstrations and viewing sessions. The director will assist any volunteers with copies of pamphlets and news items from similar groups around the world and will assist with the supply of suitable slides to illustrate the problems which are encountered and their solution.

Last year it was hoped to start a regular newsletter, but this had to be postponed for various reasons. It is now requested that anyone who would like to receive such a newsletter every six months passes their names and addresses to the director so they can be added to the distribution list.

Contact details appear in the *Sky Guide* and *MNASSA*.

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**Report of the Historical Section**  
Chris de Coning (Director)

The past year had its highlights concerning the History of Astronomy.

**Website**

The ASSA web site has undergone a major overhaul during the past year. The part of the web site dedicated to the Historical Section also greatly benefited from the overhaul. The layout of the site is much improved, and it is easier to read and find information. Some content has been added, especially in regard to the Natal Observatory. Many thanks to Auke Slotegraaf, the webmaster, for all his help.

**Archive**

The archive has received no new material

during the past year. Due to the complexities and scope of the task of indexing the archive this will be done sometime in the future.

**Activities**

The Bloemfontein Centre of the Society is once again very active in the historical field. They are the only centre with a dedicated historical section, and with a website [<http://www.geocities.com/assabfn/spacetides/historicalnotes.htm>] dedicated to the topic.

A great deal of basic research was done especially regarding the Lamont Hussey observatory. Persons who had dealings with the observatory were interviewed, lost and forgotten instruments were recovered and stored for safekeeping at the Ehrlich Park

Fire Station Museum (now also an Astronomy Museum).

### Publications

Individuals in their private capacities wrote articles with historical content. Please note my appreciation to the following people:

During the past year articles were published in *MNASSA* covering the proceedings of the Fifth Astronomy Symposium. Contributions with historical content were made by:

- Jan Hers (“Variable Stars in South Africa – A Historical Review”)
- Rupert Hurley (“de la Caille at the Cape”)
- Tim Cooper (“A History of Comet Discovery”)
- Dr Wayne Orchiston published an insightful article titled “J.F. Skjellerup: A forgotten name in South African cometary astronomy” (*MNASSA* 62, 3&4).
- Dr Ian Glass published an article titled “A Biographical Index to *MNASSA* and *JASSA*”. This is an index of all the mentions made of prominent astronomers in *MNASSA*, and its predecessor *JASSA*.

This is a necessary and excellent publication and a great example of the essence of historical research. To the historian sources are the core of his trade and this article directly addresses this issue (*MNASSA* 62, 11&12).

- Willie Koorts published articles in preparation for the transit of Venus. One article was on the British expeditions to South Africa, and another about the American expedition to Wellington. (“The 1882 transit of Venus and the Huguenot Seminary for Girls” (*MNASSA* 62, 9&10) and “The 1882 transit of Venus: The British expeditions to South Africa” (*MNASSA* 63 3&4)).

### Future plans

The Historical Section is proud to announce that it will host an international symposium on the astronomical history of Africa. Interested persons were contacted and a committee to organise the event and referee the papers was put together. It is too soon to give details except that we plan to hold the symposium at approximately the same time as the official opening of SALT.

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### Report of the Education and Public Communication (EPC) Section Case Rijdsdijk (Director)

This new section was formed this year. With the rising popularity of astronomy around the world and particularly in South Africa there is a growing public demand for information, materials and talks. The latter as a result of the building of the Southern African Large Telescope (SALT), the completion of the High Energy Stereoscopic System (HESS) and the bidding by SA for the Square Kilometre Array (SKA). It is

also quite clear that the National Facilities (SAAO and HartRAO) cannot do this by themselves and it is here that ASSA can play a significant role in promoting and informing the public of these, and other, developments in astronomy.

Many members have done this for years, but it is as well if there can be some sort of consistency and also to distribute press releases from SA and around the world that



can be used internally as news items and also for mentioning in talks etc. As Director I will be asking for centres to appoint an EPC liaison person to whom news items can be forwarded for local distribution. In return it would be really useful for me to have a record of the number of talks given and to whom. I mention this as it helps enormously for fund raising!

In addition to this I think that the ASSA Centres should be trying to take a more active role in supporting schools. It is therefore necessary to have a knowledge of the new curriculum and to develop appropriate resources. I have a variety of educational resources, topics and ideas that are available on request.

During the year I was invited to deliver the Bernard Price Memorial Lecture for the Institute of Electrical Engineers. Entitled "Fingerprinting the Universe with SALT", it was delivered on consecutive days in Johan-

nesburg, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town in October. Audiences were excellent, both in number and in the quality of questions asked. A shortened version was presented at the dinner of AFCON conference in Cape Town in December.

In addition numerous talks were presented to schools, adult groups such as Rotary, Cognoscenti Club, MENSA, Scope-X and the ASSA Cape Centre. In addition teacher training workshops on the theme "Earth and Beyond" were given to teachers in Beaufort West, Grahamstown (SciFest), Sutherland and at two Space Camps set up by the SAAO.

Advice was also given to various organizations on astronomical and related displays at the MTN ScienCentre and the SAAO Visitor Centre.

I will in future be writing the newspaper column and the radio broadcast under the auspices of the ASSA rather than the

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#### ASSA Scholarship Report for 2003 Maciej Soltynski (Convenor, ASSA Scholarship Committee)

The ASSA Scholarship was established in 2000 to encourage the study of astronomy at any Southern African university at the 2nd and 3rd year level. The holders of the Scholarship for 2002 were Melissa van Gend and Chris de Villiers.

Melissa van Gend completed her year of Astronomy study at UNISA successfully and re-applied for a further year of study and was granted the ASSA Scholarship for 2003.

Chris de Villiers passed two of the three Astronomy modules he undertook at UNISA in 2002.

My thanks go to fellow committee members, Andrew Gray and Dr Abe Mahomed, for their contributions to administering the ASSA Scholarship.