

Minutes of the AGM

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at the SAAO Lecture Hall, 2005 August 17.

**1. Welcome**

The President, Pat Booth, welcomed all those present which included herself, Andrew McConell, Peter Martinez, Tony Jones, Cliff Turk, Ian Glass, Dudley Field and Case Rijdsdijk from Council and eight ordinary members.

**2. Apologies**

There were apologies from all up-country members and Maciej Soltynski, Auke Slotegraaf, Dave Laney, Bernard Mayer, Rupert Hurly, Daryl Momberg and Chris Forder.

**3. Minutes of the last AGM**

This was held on 2004 August 11 and was published in *MNASSA*, 2004 October. Keith Gottschalk proposed that these be accepted. This was seconded by Cliff Turk.

**4. Matters arising**

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

**5. Report of Council**

This was read by the President.

**6. Reports of observing sections**

These were read. There were no reports from the Variable Star and Imaging Sections.

**7. Reports of other sections**

These were also read. There was no report from the Computing Section.

**8. Financial Report**

The Hon. Treasurer, Cliff Turk, delivered his report. Acceptance proposed by Keith Gottschalk, seconded by Case Rijdsdijk.

**9. ASSA scholarship**

A short report on this was read out.

**10. Endowment Trust**

Cliff Turk gave a brief report on the status of the trust and was thanked for his efforts.

**11. Election of auditor**

Cliff Turk proposed that the same auditors be retained. This was seconded by Tony Jones.

**12. Election of Office Bearers**

Two valid proposals were received for Cliff Turk, as Business Manager and Case Rijdsdijk as a member of Council. There were several other proposals, but these were deemed invalid because they were either late or had not been properly completed. Therefore in terms of Section 10 of the ASSA Constitution the existing Council would serve for another term.

Report of ASSA Council 2004 – 2005

### 1. Membership

At present membership is as follows:

Members with <i>Sky &amp; Telescope</i> subscription	107
Non- <i>S&amp;T</i> subscribing members	115
Honorary members	11
Total	233

These numbers are a little down on last year's total of 241.

### 2. Finance

The current Treasurer is to be thanked and commended for his efforts. The accounting structures he inherited are now almost resolved and the Treasurer has kept council informed of his progress at the regular meetings during the year. Accounts are in order and ASSA is in good health.

### 3. Council Appointees

Mr Cliff Turk stays on as Business Manager as well as Treasurer 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. Mr Dudley Field has kindly taken on the job as Membership Secretary and Council wishes him well and thanks him.

### 4. *MNASSA*

The Editor, Mr Auke Slotegraaf, maintains his firm hand at the helm of *MNASSA* and Council is grateful for his efforts, and the assistance given to the Editor by Dr Ian Glass and Mr Maciej Soltynksi. However it is becoming an expensive publication with limited professional appeal. Ways of saving costs have been and are still being looked into, and it is possible that it may in future appear as an electronic journal.

### 5. *SkyGuide*

The new handbook, *Sky Guide Africa South* has again been very well received. The print run was increased to 4000, which proved a little too much, but costs were more than covered. There were a few problems with the binding and it is hoped that the 2006 edition will overcome this. Mr Slotegraaf, ably assisted by the Editorial Board, are to be thanked for their efforts. It makes Mr Slotegraaf's work a lot easier if he receives details of the Centres and Sections timeously, and in spite of the new timing of AGMs, Centres were still a little slow in sending through details to Mr Slotegraaf.

### 6. Sections of the ASSA

The Imaging Section Directorship is still vacant, as it was last year. Mr Braam van Zyl retired from the Solar Section and Council is pleased to announce that Mr J van Delft has been appointed the new Director. There is little news of the Computing Section and this will

be addressed by Council in the coming year. Reports from Sections are still not coming in on time and sometimes not at all. Mr A Jones has proposed a new approach to stimulate interest in observing. Regrettably, despite his hard work, there was a complete lack of response to this initiative.

### 7. Logo

There had been a move to create a new logo for the ASSA. Designs were asked for and several were submitted. Copies were made and Council had a secret ballot that clearly indicated that members were happy with the existing one.

This means that progress can now be made with the generation and awarding of the merit observing certificates. Ms Magda Streicher has kindly offered to sponsor these and Council is most grateful to her for this.

### 8. Scholarships

Mr Maciej Soltynski, Dr Abe Mahomed and Mr Andrew Gray are to be thanked for their efforts in running the ASSA Scholarship. The Alan Cousins Scholarship is still only an idea and it is hoped that a decision on its future will be taken this year.

### 9. Scope-X

Once again the Johannesburg Centre organized a superb Scope-X. It was very well attended and in spite of some really awful weather, numbers were up again. This was probably due to the invited speaker, Mr Mike Melville, the commercial space pioneer, originally from South

Africa, now based in the USA. A full report has appeared in *MNASSA*.

There was no Scope-X in the Cape or anywhere else, which is a pity as it is a great way to promote the Society, astronomy and recruit new members. Should other Centres wish to hold similar exhibitions they are well advised to consult the people at the Johannesburg Centre.

### 10. Constitution

Amendments to the constitution were accepted and were announced in *MNASSA*. It was a well-timed amendment as it will be used this year!

### 11. Acknowledgements

The Council wishes to express its thanks to the following:

- Prof Phil Charles, SAAO Director, for allowing 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 AGM.

Report of the Comet and Meteor Section

T P Cooper (Director)

**Observed meteor showers**

The year 2004 saw a reduction in the number of hours observation, mainly due to weather. Nevertheless, some useful results were obtained on several meteor showers.

*April Lyrids*: a special watch was arranged due to favourable conditions in 2004. Around 25 hours observations were reported, with best rates of around a dozen Lyrids per hour under LM=6.1 skies on the night of April 21/22. Penning, van Delft and Cooper also observed

the *Pi Puppids*, with 9 hours observation yielding only 8 potential members. From this we concluded there was no enhanced activity in 2004. At Magda Streicher's request, she and Cooper observed the potential *September Taurids*. In 6 hours observation we plotted less than a handful of candidates. The *December Phoenicids*, for which Moon conditions were favourable in 2004, were entirely lost to cloud. The year's observation culminated with a fine *Geminids* display. Highest rates were observed by the Director on

**Table 1.** Meteor showers observed during 2004

Observer (number of showers observed)	Showers observed and duration (hours)	Total time (h)
Tim Cooper (5)	April Lyrids (6.0), pi Puppids (3.9), Eta Aquarids (2.5), September Taurids (3.0), Geminids (8.1)	23.5
Magda Streicher (3)	April Lyrids (5.3), September Taurids (3.0), Geminids (2)	10.3
Jacques van Delft (2)	April Lyrids (0.5), pi Puppids (3.8)	4.3
Ronel du Preez (1)	April Lyrids (3.8)	3.8
Gerrit Penning (2)	April Lyrids (2.7), pi Puppids (1.1)	3.8
Karen Koch (1)	Geminids (3.7)	3.7
Kos Coronaios (2)	April Lyrids (1.0), Geminids (2.3)	3.3
Dudley Field (1)	Geminids (3.2)	3.2
Tony Jones (1)	Geminids (3.0)	3.0
Michael Poll (2)	Orionids (0.6), Geminids (1.9)	2.5
Auke Slotegraaf (1)	Geminids (2.5)	2.5
Barend Botha (1)	April Lyrids (2.5)	2.5
Mia Zeelie (1)	April Lyrids (2.1)	2.1
Cliff Turk (1)	Geminids (2.0)	2.0
H J van Heerden (1)	April Lyrids (1.6)	1.6
Brian Fraser (1)	Geminids (1.5)	1.5
Trevor Gould (1)	Geminids (1.4)	1.4
Wayne Mitchell (1)	Leonids (1.0)	1.0
Koos van Zyl (1)	Geminids (0.6)	0.6
<b>Total</b>		<b>76.6</b>

the morning of December 14 when he logged 56 Geminids and 30 non-Geminids between 00:00 and 01:00 UT under LM=6.0 skies.

**Summary of observed fireballs**

2004 saw a total of 24 fireball reports. The full details have been submitted for publication in *MNASSA* as a separate article.

**Summary of observed comets**

As cloud affected the observation of meteor showers, so too it affected the observation of comets. Nevertheless, eight individuals produced useful observations of several comets. The Director used these observations and observations of several previous comets to prepare a paper co-authored with Mike Begbie and presented at the Sixth ASSA Symposium, entitled 'An Analysis of Comet Brightness Behaviour from ASSA Observations'.

*C/2001 Q4 NEAT* peaked at magnitude 3.0 in May. Coincidentally *C/2002 T7 LINEAR* reached magnitude 3 at about the same time, and observers were treated to two naked eye comets in the evening sky during May. Both comets were well observed. *C/2003 K4 LINEAR* was observed from late May at tenth magnitude, and peaked at magnitude 6 in August. In December the comet was still under observation as a magnitude 7 object crossing the False Cross. *C/2004 Q2 Machholz* was observed from September 11 at magnitude 10, and by year end had brightened to magnitude 4 with a short tail. *C/2004 R2 ASAS* was observed briefly as a ninth magnitude diffuse object before it was lost in the solar glare. With a small perihelion distance of  $q=0.11$  AU it appears the comet did not survive perihelion passage and was lost.

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

**Table 2.** Comets observed during 2004

ICQ	C/2001 Q4 NEAT	C/2002 T7 LINEAR	C/2003 K4 LINEAR	C/2004 Q2 Machholz	C/2004 R2 ASAS	88P Howell
COO02	•	•	•	•	•	•
STR03	•	•	•	•	•	•
BEG01	•	•	•	•	•	—
VAN15	•	•	•	•	—	—
PRI04	•	•	•	—	—	—
VAN13	•	•	—	—	—	—
TUR	—	—	•	•	—	—
JON07	•	—	—	—	—	—

**Key:** ICQ: Observer code; COO02 = Tim Cooper, STR03 = Magda Streicher, BEG01 = Mike Begbie, VAN15 = Koos van Zyl, PRI04 = David Pringle-Wood, VAN13 = Peter van Blommestein, TUR = Cliff Turk, JON07 = Tony Jones. A • indicates the comet was observed.

## Report of the Dark Skies Section

C R G Turk (Director)

It is sad to report that not one reply was received to the two appeals made in the report for 2003. Three people have shown some interest in dark skies, but temporary uncoordinated efforts are not likely to have much lasting effect.

The Director badly needs liaison officers in areas other than Cape Town to whom queries can be directed. These liaison officers would also promote talks on light pollution to clubs and organisations within their area. This is a pretty daunting task to start with, but a little reading will soon produce some ideas for short entertaining talks. It does not have to be technical – in fact that sort of approach usually puts listeners off, unless they happen to be part of the already converted. What we need is to interest many more people in the subject, and that can only be really well promoted if we take their viewpoint into consideration.

Even the IAU has expressed an opinion that there is little to gain from trying to lobby governments to introduce legislation when so few of the population have ever heard of the subject. Many of our own Society members still think of the problem only in astronomical terms and do not consider the enormous waste of money (and sometimes dangers) involved in badly directed lighting. How can we expect non-astronomers to give any support to our cause unless we explain it to them? Not one of our own members showed any interest in receiving

a periodical newsletter following last year's appeal for names and addresses.

During 2004, the Director has had requests for information and advice from one property developer and three individuals concerned about the effects of lighting in new developments under construction. All have been from the Cape Town vicinity. We need to spread an awareness of light pollution, invasive lighting, glare, loom – call it what you will – so that hopefully planners will consider the implications before irreparable damage is done.

The Cape StarWalks held every summer at Kirstenbosch hit very bad luck in the past summer. Some nine evenings were planned, but cloud caused last-minute cancellation of seven of them. Unfortunately, although Kirstenbosch is an ideal location with all the advantages of security, no nearby lighting and a barrier of trees to shield us from the lights of the Cape Flats, its position next to the mountain makes it very prone to localised cloud.

Open nights at SAAO and at Cederberg Observatory continue to inform the visiting public about light pollution, but we do not hear if similar efforts are being made at other astronomical establishments open to the public. It would be nice to be able to include some more such places in this report next year.

## Report of the Deep-Sky Observing Section

A Slotegraaf (Director)

During 2004, deepsky observing continued to be a popular branch of amateur observational astronomy.

Magda Streicher of Pietersburg has continued her systematic recording of deepsky objects, particularly of galactic clusters. She had continued her “star string” project – searching for and recording asterisms – logging 28 new ones in the year under review. She is also working towards her Herschel 400 certificate, and has recorded 70 objects. During the year she visited the UK, visiting various astronomical sites, such as the home of William Herschel, Sir John’s grave, and more.

In Bloemfontein, Gerrit Penning has continued as coordinator of the Centre’s Deepsky Group. Their year began with the introduction of 15 observation logs to help members plan their observing sessions. This culminated in 13 formal observation evenings throughout the year. All the deep sky members obtained binoculars and some members bought 8- to 12-inch telescopes. Binoculars allowed everyone to participate in the evening and effective skills in navigating the night sky were acquired. The experience earned from these sessions was applied during public open nights at Boyden Observatory. During a visit to Scope-X 2004 in Johannesburg, the Bloemfontein Centre kick-started a telescope making project and two 8-inch telescopes were completed at the time of writing this report.

During the year, observations submitted to the Section were added to the growing deepsky database. Some of these, including sketches of selected objects, have been published on the ASSA website.

I’m aware that deepsky observations are often made by folk nationwide, but that only a small fraction is reported to this Section. I’d like to invite all Society members, and especially Centre members (who may be unaware of the Section), to send in their observations for inclusion in the database. Feedback will be given for all observations submitted.

As described in the previous report to Council, the Director continues to search for open cluster remnants by sifting through archival data. During the year, a copy of the 2MASS All-Sky Point Source catalogue was obtained. This 10-DVD database has proved challenging to integrate with the automated cluster-search software.

The Director has also sporadically worked on the development of an exciting observing activity to encourage first-time star gazers and to further develop the skills of beginner and intermediate-level observers. Work on the *SkyGuide* interrupted this project, which was resumed at year’s end. Completion is anticipated during 2005 following discussions with other active observers. [See p 175 of this issue – Ed.]

## Report of the Double Star Observing Section

C de Villiers (Director)

There is, once again, little to report this year.

In order to determine the level of interest in double star observing, an enquiry was forwarded to all Centres. The response was generally positive, and the Section Director plans to establish and maintain regular contact with the Centres and other interested parties in due course.

With this in mind, the document entitled 'Requirements for Double Star Observer Award Certificates' has been updated and will be available in paper as

well as electronic (PDF) format by the end of August 2005. A copy of the paper version will be sent to all Centres.

Some progress has been made with the previously announced project aimed at investigating an alternative means of determining double star orbits from noisy measures. The Section Director hopes to publish this work in *MNASSA* by the end of 2005.

Of note is Tim Cooper's possible discovery of a new binary (or multiple) system while observing comet 9P Tempel 1.

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## Education and Public Communication

C Rijdsijk (Director)

In December 2004 a summary of the Revised National Curriculum Statement, RNCS, was circulated to all centres as requested in hope that this would enable them to help teachers with the "Earth and Beyond" part of the RNCS. There has been little response to this, and so it is planned this year to distribute some of the resources to various centres to help them a little further.

Members of ASSA and the Centres do a huge amount of PR work without them being aware of it. Every time a member helps out at Scope-X, the SAAO Open Nights etc. you are communication astronomy to the public. Please keep a record of the number of people and send them to me: its numbers that generate

money! Scope-X itself is a great promoter of astronomy!

The director has been active in running workshops for an Advanced Certificate of Education, ACE, programmes for WCED, a Space Camp for the SAAO, workshops for UCT's outreach programme "Earthwise" and GeoTeach, an education programme for the Cape Centre and several public talks/lectures including the President's Invitation address for the SA Inst. of Electrical Engineers. In addition in collaboration with the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, CPUT, an Astro-Tourism course has been started, this is at present ongoing and a report on its success will be submitted at the next AGM. The director



would however like to express his thanks for support from the Cape Centre.

I am sure however that many centres have been quite active, but have not let the director know of their activities. One reason why this is important, is that many of these activities require funding, and there is ample money "out there". The problem is accessing this funding. To do this one usually needs to submit a proposal and an important part of the

proposal is a proven track record in what you are seeking money for! I can really only approach funders if I can say that in the course of the last six months (say) the ASSA and its Centres ran workshops/ interacted with schools in their local area etc. and to continue with these efforts money is needed! So please – send me as much detail as possible: this one area where your umbrella organization, ASSA, can help.

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### Historical Section

C de Coning (Director)

#### Introduction

The past year (calendar year 2004) had its highlights concerning the history of astronomy.

#### Website

The part of the ASSA website dedicated to the Historical Section has been updated in August 2004. Some content has been added, especially in regard to the transit of Venus, a few prominent observers, Bronberg and Boyden Observatories and the Grubb 8-inch telescope.

A second update occurred in October 2004. Some content has been added, especially in regard to the early days of the Royal Observatory, Cape of Good Hope, with all the astronomers involved. Many thanks to Auke Slotegraaf, the webmaster, for all his help with the website.

#### Archive

The archive has received new material during the past year from G G Cillié.

During the past year all the material that was stored in boxes at my house, and archival material of ASSA Council were added together and sorted into approximate categories. Due to the complexities and scope of the task the indexing the archive will still take some time.

#### Activities

A transit of Venus occurred on 8 June 2004. Because of the rarity and public relations value, many astronomical groups around the country closely observed the event. Due to its historical significance some of the observing events were at sites of historical value, such as Touwsrivier and Wellington. Major centres also monitored the event and reports were received from Cape Town, Pietermaritzburg, Bloemfontein, Graaff-Reinet and Harare. The events were not organised by this Section but I am sure that in addressing the public some historical content was explained.

Magda Streicher was approached by an estate agent who informed her that a farm with an observatory in Haenertsburg, Northern Province, was for sale. After visiting the farm she realised that it was the place of retirement for Cyril Jackson, a prominent South African astronomer who discovered 72 asteroids and three comets. Due to her initiative the site is now registered at the National Monuments Council and a museum was established. She gave a talk at the ASSA Symposium held at Johannesburg.

### Publications

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

T.P. Cooper, B. Fraser, D. Cooper, M. Hoffman and B. van Zyl for their publication on A.W. Roberts in *MNASSA* (vol 63, nos 11 & 12, December 2004). Roberts worked on variable stars and made approximately 70 000 observations. His work was never published and the Bloemfontein Centre found his observation catalogue. With a grant from the AAVSO the observations are being

captured electronically to add to their database.

Willie Koorts published articles in preparation for the transit of Venus. ("The 1882 transit of Venus: The British expeditions to South Africa", *MNASSA*, vol 63, nos 3 & 4, April 2004).

### Obituaries

*MNASSA* published obituaries on Janet Mattei (not South African but with strong links to this country; *MNASSA* Vol 63, nos 5 & 6, June 2004) and Albert Jansen (*MNASSA* Vol 63 nos 7 & 8, August 2004).

I would like to thank A Slotegraaf and fellow contributors for their hard work in preparing the obituaries.

### Symposium

A committee has been formed to organise an international symposium on the Astronomical History of Africa (AAHS). Everything is coming together nicely and the event will be held at the Observatory grounds in Cape Town, 8 and 9 November 2005. Attendees will have the chance to be present at the official opening of SALT on 11 November.

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### Report of the Occultation Section

✍ B Fraser (Director)

There are very few amateurs joining the observing sections of ASSA and the occultation section is no exception. We rely on a handful of members who continue to enjoy the pleasures of serious astronomy whilst making a valuable contribution to the science.

Once again we have used the predictions supplied by Eberhard Riedel of IOTA for grazing occultations and Edwin Goffin in Belgium for minor planet occultations. The LOW software supplied by Eric Limburg is used for Lunar occultation predictions.

A number of the regular observers continue to enjoy the challenges of occultation observing and have reported the following.

#### **Lunar occultations**

Occultations were observed by Jannie Smit (Pretoria; disappearances 22, reappearances 2), Peter van Blommenstein (Simons Town; disappearances 48) and Cliff Turk (Cape Town; disappearances 31).

Jan Hers was in the Karroo at the time of the May 4th eclipse and observed the occultation of Alpha Librae. This star underwent a grazing occultation at a site near Beaufort West but unfortunately no observers were able to travel to the graze line.

#### **Minor planet observations**

In past years we limited our efforts to observing stars brighter than about 10th magnitude. During the year 2004 there were not many convenient minor planet occultations of stars this bright. However a number of possible events were attempted but no hits were recorded.

Tim Cooper observed misses for all these events: 51361 2000 SS124 (May 02), Tatsuo (June 11), Delia (July 17), Aslog (August 23) and Toutatis (September 27).

Francois de Jager also observed a miss for the Delia event.

The observers who participated are Magda Streicher (Pietersburg), Jannie Smit (Pretoria), Tim Cooper (Bredell), Brian Fraser (Henley on Klip) and Francois de Jager (Vanderbijlpark).

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### **Report of the Solar Section**

J J van Delft (Director)

I would like to thank Council for the confidence they showed by electing me as the new Director of the Solar Section. I feel privileged to serve in this position and hope to develop a sound platform for solar observations in the solar section according to the ASSA constitution.

Everybody started 2004 with only one thing on their mind: the Venus transit. Preparations for this event were made in most of the Centres and in addition to local media coverage, cooperation with overseas amateurs and solar organizations were obtained. Several public gatherings were organized countrywide and the response was very good.

In Bloemfontein a solar observation day was held in February at Boyden Observatory. Participants were introduced to basic solar physics, solar observation and a practical session on how to use the 20-cm coelostat solar telescope at Boyden.

In April 2004 we began to publish a monthly solar bulletin based on sunspot observations. Reports on solar activities also forms part of this publication. At first it was published on the website of the Bloemfontein Centre and at present it is also published on the national ASSA website.

A start was also made with solar photography. Pictures of the Sun showing sunspots were taken and published on the Bloemfontein Centre's web site. Personally I developed a solar observation website where solar pictures are on display.

During the year public demonstrations on the coelostat telescope at Boyden and solar activities presentations were held on open days.

Solar observation presentations were held at the annual congress of Agri Northern Cape in Kimberly, annual farmers committee meeting in Wepener, group gatherings at Welbedacht and

at the ASSA Symposium in Johannesburg.

An article on solar observation and research was published in *Landbou Weekblad* and in *Volksblad* during 2004.

International connections were made and maintained with the AAVSO solar section and the ALPO solar group. Sunspot observations and solar pictures are exchanged on a regular base.

Braam van Zyl played a great role in the activities of 2004 before he resigned as the section's Director and I'd like to take this opportunity to thank him for his dedication and effort.

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### ASSA Scholarship Report for 2004

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. There was no holder of the Scholarship in 2004, although a few inquiries were received. The first holder of the Scholarship, Melissa van Gend, (2002–2003), obtained her BSc degree (which included a number of final year astronomy courses) from UNISA at the beginning of 2004. In 2004 she obtained her post-graduate certificate in education, and advised that she planned to teach science and mathematics.