

MONTHLY NOTES
OF THE
ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

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South African Astronomical Observatory,

1992 April

Cape of Good Hope

NEWS FROM ASSA

New Members

The following new members were elected at the Council meeting held on 27th January 1992:

Mr B. Davidow, 40 - 6th St, Houghton 2198.

Mr I. Essack, PO Box 3274, Durban 4000.

Mr M. Lyons, O Box 1883 Somerset West 7130.

Mr M.J. McDonald, 3 Tiverton Rd, Plumstead 7800.

Mr W. Neilson,, PO Box 945, Cape Town 8000.

Mr R.Q. Odendaal, Glentui Flats 56, Arcadia Str, Arcadia 0083.

Mr M. Stone, 7 Wellington Mews, Wellington Rd, Wynberg 7800.

ASSA Symposium, 1992

The second newsletter concerning the ASSA Symposium was sent out at the end of February to all - about 100 people - who had expressed interest. It will be held on Thursday 23rd and Friday 24th April at the South African Museum, Queen Victoria St, Cape Town, by courtesy of the Director of the Museum, Dr M.A. Cluver. On the morning of 25th, the participants will gather at SAAO, where there will be tours of the workshops and domes, exhibitions of amateur mirror-making and various pieces of equipment and finally, at lunch time, a braai. The evening of the 24th will be spent at SAAO where the 6-inch and 18-inch refractors will be open for visitors.

The first lecture will be in memory of the late A.D. Thackeray, who directed the Radcliffe Observatory Pretoria throughout its most productive years, and will be given by Prof Michael Feast who will have just retired as Director of SAAO. It is entitled "What the Magellanic Clouds Tell Us, or the Treasure Chest that David Thackeray Opened".

Prof Brian Warner (UCT) will give a lecture named after the famous South African variable star observer, R.P. de Kock (1902-1980). It will be on the subject of "Novae and Other Eruptive Stars".

There will be two planetarium shows, "Home Planet" and "Fifteen Billion BC" and a popular-style evening lecture "A Special Time, a Special Place . . . and a Special Universe" by Prof Tony Fairall of UCT, Director of the Planetarium.

Some of the other lecturers will be our world champion variable star observer, Danie Overbeek, J.V. Vincent (Harare Centre), Tom Lloyd Evans, (President of ASSA), M.G. Soltynski, (Vice-President), Dr Robert Stobie, (new Director of SAAO), D.W. Kilkenny (SAAO), Don Bramwell (HarTRAO), Prof G.W. Milne, Stellenbosch (on the South African SUNSAT satellite).

The topics covered will be many and varied. One session will be devoted to space research and satellites - this year is International Space Year. Another will be on educational and related matters. The last lecture will be given by Dr Dave Laney of SAAO and is somewhat tantalizingly entitled "The Earth is a Wooden Disc - Theory and Observations in Early Astronomy".

Persons interested in attending and who have not yet requested registration material should contact either Dr Tom Lloyd Evans or Dr Ian Glass (who together with Mrs Ann Strauss of the Cape Centre form the organizing committee) at SAAO, 'phone (021) 470025 or Fax (021) 473639. There is space for 120 people.

NEWS NOTES

Symposium in Honour of Michael W. Feast

A symposium entitled *Variable Stars and Galaxies* was held at the Leslie Building, UCT, from February 5 - 7 in honour of Prof M.W. Feast who retires as director of SAAO at the end of March.

The 80 (mainly professional) participants included 25 from overseas institutions. Some of the prominent astronomers among them and their lecture topics were: Alexander Boyarchuk, Chairman of the Astronomical Council of the Russian Academy of Sciences and current President of the International Astronomical Union who spoke on "Symbiotic Stars", Prof Harm Habing of Leiden on "Optical, Infrared and Radio Studies of the Inner Galaxy", Prof Rod Davies of Jodrell Bank on "The Contribution of H-Line Observations to Distance Measurements in the Nearby Universe", Prof R.P. Kraft of Lick Observatory on "CNO Abundances and Abundance Variations in Metal-Poor Stars: Implications for the Age and Formation of the Galactic Halo" and Prof Donald Lynden-Bell of Cambridge on "Absolute Space in Dynamics (Leibniz v. Newton)."

Many of the papers were concerned with issues relating to the distance scale of the Universe and the often related subject of variable stars, subjects close to the heart of Prof Feast. Dr P.A. Whitelock spoke on the growing evidence for a bar-like structure in the bulge of our own galaxy, as revealed by studies of the mira-type variables whose distances can be determined from their period-luminosity law, discovered at SAAO. Supernovae, in particular SN1987A, also received a great deal of attention. The well-known modeller of stellar interiors, Prof Icko Iben of the University of Illinois, talked on the evolution of cataclysmic variables and the enhancement of heavy elements in novae.

J. McGraw of Steward Observatory, University of Arizona, talked on "A Strip-Search of the Universe", an account of work done with a telescope which is not driven but instead observes objects at one particular declination as they transit. They are recorded by a CCD which is continually clocked at the sidereal rate. The data are co-added and also searched for variations, to form a "deep" exposure of the sky.

The participants included many of Dr Feast's colleagues, friends and scientific associates and was designed to cover the multifarious topics on