



# mnassa

Monthly Notes of the Astronomical Society of Southern Africa

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## ASSA NEWS

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### MICHEL DANIEL OVERBEEK (1920-2001)

Danie Overbeek passed away on July 19th 2001, at his home in Johannesburg, after suffering a heart attack.

Born in 1920 and growing up in Ermelo in the Transvaal, Danie went to the University of the Witwatersrand where he studied Mining and Metallurgy in 1939 and 1940. After serving in the South African Air Force during the 2nd World War and being mentioned in Despatches in 1943 (Oak Leaf on Africa Star), he joined South African Airways and South African Railways, becoming an instrument maker. He spent his entire working life there, doing maintenance, training, civil engineering research and administration, retiring in 1980.

Danie's astronomical interest started at a very young age. When he was just 5 years old he once went to his parents in terror to report that "the stars are moving" but when, about 3 years later he heard his grandfather identify Mars, he was so intrigued at the fact that heavenly bodies have names that he started to read all the astronomy books he could lay his hands on.

When he was about 15, he made his first telescope from a reading glass and a pocket microscope, moving on to spectacle lenses and then in 1937 he bought a commercially-made telescope for about \$4.48! In 1951 he constructed a 6-inch Newtonian and started observing occultations and variable stars. This led in 1953 to the building of a 12.5-

inch Dall-Kirkham Cassegrain reflector, which became his main astronomical observing tool for more than 47 years.

He married an old school girlfriend, Jean in 1945 and they brought up 4 children – 2 boys and 2 girls.

In 1958 he obtained a B Sc degree in astronomy from UNISA. Danie received many honours for his astronomical achievements. He served as Chairman of the Johannesburg Centre of the Society in 1956 and President in 1961 and 1999 – a rare feat for someone to be elected President more than once. He was an honorary life member of both ASSA and the Johannesburg Centre. ASSA bestowed on him their highest honour in 1984 when he was awarded the Gill medal.

In 1986 he received a merit award from the AAVSO and in 1994 received the Director's Award and a Prolific Observer's Merit Award. The Astronomical Society of the Pacific presented him with their Amateur Achievement Award in 1996. The Minor Planet Centre announced in November 2000 that minor planet 5038 had been named "Overbeek" in his honour.

Danie was the first amateur astronomer to detect the effects of a gamma ray burst, using a SID/SES receiver that he had constructed. He also built a seismograph in 1990 and monitored the Earth's activity on a continuous basis.

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Danie was instrumental in teaching other amateurs the skills required to do lunar occultations, grazing occultations and, in recent years, minor planet occultations. He visited other centres around South Africa, as well as Namibia, to train observers. He served as director of the occultation section of ASSA for many years.

Danie's contribution to astronomy in South Africa was enormous. He was mentor and friend to all who were interested in doing serious astronomical observing and

encouraged observers in all corners of the country.

He contributed over 287,000 variable star observations to the AAVSO over a period of nearly 50 years, by far the greatest number by any single observer, and was one of their key observers in the Southern hemisphere when critical data was required for scheduling satellite observing time.

The passing of Danie Overbeek has signalled the end of an era, and he will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

(Brian Fraser)

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## NEW MEMBERS

The following new members were elected at the Council Meeting held on 4th September 2001, at the SAAO, Observatory, Cape Town:

Prof A J Buys, 394 Rigel Ave., Erasmusrand, 0181.

Mr J F de Lange, 11 Marriott Rd., Pietermaritzburg, 3201.

Mr R Fuller, 5 Ophir Rd., Plumstead, 7800.

Mr A W Herder, PO Box 4188, Halway House, 1685.

Mr N Johnson, 15 Shiraaz Close, Diep River, 7945.

Ms F Ludwig, 80 Pienaar Rd., Milnerton, 7441.

Mr J H L Scheepers, PO Box 748, Goodwood, 7459.

Mr F van Jaarsveld, PO Box 3233, Louis Trichardt, 0920.

Mr F van Zyl le Roux, 34 Ferndale St., Brackenfell, 7560.

Mr G Bentley, PO Box 760, Uvongo, 4270.

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## DONATIONS

Council wishes to express its thanks to the following members for donations received:

F de Jager, DS Evans, D Gordon, AC Nel, MS Nolte, AG Pestana, T Sawyer, R van Rooyen, KL von Bezing, PT Wedepohl.

## ORDERING SKY & TELESCOPE

*Sky & Telescope* may be ordered through the Society at a current cost of US \$50 p.a. instead of the normal \$59.95 and will always run for 12 months from whatever time of the year it is ordered. The Rand amount required to be paid to the Society has been set at R 425.00. This figure will be updated in every issue of *MNASSA*.

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