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**PRESIDENT’S CORNER**

Hey, IT’S SUMMER. And the summer observing season is getting off in full swing. Remember the dark sky weekends at the Dark Sky Site (Check each Observer issue for details). You don't need a telescope to get involved, members love to share their scopes—the second word in “Star Party” is party. Also remember the camping trips for the summer are just starting. The premier party of the season is “Star Stare” sponsored by the Colorado Springs group on June 21–24. Next is the Montana Star Watch on July 20–21, and the “Wyoming Weekend Under the Stars” is Aug. 16–18. These are wonderful events with great night-time observing, speakers and activities during the day, great site-seeing, hiking, and lots of events for you and your family. Remember, you don't need a telescope to participate. Often there are 30-inch scopes for viewing pleasure.

If you are interested in getting involved in the Open Houses we could use some help. Bring a scope or just come to help with the other activities. It’s a lot of fun and a great evening. Come have some coffee and eats afterwards—you are welcome to come and stuff your face with us. Please park, unload your car, and pull out. Do not park or drive on the grass. We need to continue our good relationship with the parks department.

The Dark Sky Site committee has completed its plans for the summer. This summer we hope to add several pads and skirt the warming hut; spring 2002 we hope to get a vault toilet, followed by more pads. These improvements are made thanks to the generosity of the membership. We continue to ask for financial and volunteer work experience from you.

Please feel free to call any board member or me if you have questions or suggestions.—Larry Brooks

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**D.A.S. Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>JUNE</th>
<th>JULY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 E-Board meeting, 8 P.M.</td>
<td>6 E-Board meeting, 8 P.M.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22-24 Dark Sky Site Weekend</td>
<td>28 D.A.S. Picnic/Open House</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 Open House</td>
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Public Nights are held every Tuesday and Thursday from 7:00-9:00 P.M. at Chamberlin Observatory.
Costs to non-members are: $2.00 adults, $1.00 children
Please call (303) 871-4333 for reservations.

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**D.A.S. Officers**

President: Larry Brooks (303) 986-5255
Email: lbrooks100@aol.com

Vice President: Patti Kurtz (303) 948-5825
Email: pkurtz@starfirecreations.com

Secretary: Ron Pearson (303) 670-1299
Email: rpearson@ecentral.com

Treasurer: Chuck Carlson (303) 744-7331
Email: chcarlso@du.edu

A.L.Cor: Jerry Sherlin (303) 680-6894
Email: SHERLINJ@aol.com

Chief Observer: Jack Eastman

Executive Board Members
Ted Cox
Jack Eastman
David Shouldice
Joe Gafford
Steve Solon
Greg Marino
Dan Wray
George Jones, Past President

---

**D.A.S. Information Line:**
(303) 986-5255

**D.A.S. Correspondence:**
Denver Astronomical Society
c/o Larry Brooks
3686 South Depew, #8
Denver, Colorado 80235

**Van Nattan Scholarship Fund**
P.O. Box 150743
Lakewood, Colorado 80215-0743

**Webmaster:**
Terry Chatterton
Email: Kiowapages@aol.com

**Newsletter:**
Denver Observer editor, Patti Kurtz
StarFire Creations Unlimited
(303) 948-5825

**The Observer is available in color PDF format from the D.A.S. website.**

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**The Executive Board conducts the business of the D.A.S. at 8 P.M. at Chamberlin Observatory. Please see the Schedule of Events for meeting dates. All members are welcome.**
Note from the editor:

Newsletter contributions (ccd and film astrophotos, members with telescopes, star party candids, short observing anecdotes, observing and imaging tips, etc.) are welcome and encouraged. This is your chance to strut your stuff! Please submit by the 15th of each month as follows:

Film: Glossy prints by mail** or scanned and uploaded (high res.) to the listserv upload area.

CCD: Uploaded to the listserv upload area (resolution as high as possible, please).

Text: Articles should be no more than 250 words, please. Paste into an email and send to me: pkurtz@starfirecreations.com.

If you don’t receive a confirmation email from me, I didn’t get your email. Also, be sure to let me know if you’ve uploaded a file. Thank you!

**Patti Kurtz (call for mailing address) (303) 948-5825

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Observing in the Land of Dry Rainbows
by Sandy Shaw

Sipping my tea on a chilly morning in Big Bend National Park last December, I could see reflected in my amber liquid, the clear blue sky and golden leaves of the cottonwood trees surrounding my campsite. After starting green chiles to roast for seasoning scrambled eggs, I opened my logbook to review recent astronomical observations as strains of fiesta music drifted in from a Mexican village just across the river.

Located in southwestern Texas about 900 miles from Denver, the park is surrounded on three sides by the big bend in the Rio Grande River, giving the park its name. For more than a decade I’ve taken winter camping trips to Big Bend, drawn by its desert environment, myriad hiking possibilities, natural hot springs, varied geology, serendipitous archaeological sites, strange plant and animal life, and relative solitude. Since getting back into astronomy about five years ago, I’ve been observing there as well.

Skies at Big Bend are very dark; the park is less developed, thus less lighted, than most national parks. Almost no towns are nearby, so there are virtually no light domes. Night skies are generally clear, especially in winter when weather patterns are favorable. In summer, winds shift, bringing transparency-killing industrial pollution from Houston, Monterrey, and Mexico City, and particulates from power plants near Piedras Negras. Because the park is uncrowded most of the year, there are many places to set up telescopes conveniently close to paved roads without the annoyance of blasting bright passing headlights. The southern tip of the park reaches just below 29° north latitude, allowing views 11° farther south than we can see from Denver. Another bonus of winter observing at Big Bend is weather much warmer—usually—that of Denver.

A Medley of Color

At Big Bend, bold and delicate rainbows are everywhere—in the rocks, in the plants, and even in the animals. Rising high above my campsite, the multicolored striations in Castolon Peak display layers of wine, brown, orange, ivory, copper, charcoal, and ochre. Sedimentary formations around Ernst Tinaja, an immense natural stone water tank, present amazing bands of purple, pink, white, and gold. Subtle rings of rose and chartreuse on the aptly named Rainbow Cactus smile shyly at me from under translucent golden spines. Javelinas, campground browsers that look like hairy

Dark Sky Site Guidelines

The Dark Sky Site (D.S.S.) is for the use of D.A.S. members and their guests. If you are neither, please contact an officer of the D.A.S. for a “guest pass,” and read the D.S.S. Guest Policy (below). Please remember that any light disrupts your eye’s dark adaptation and can ruin astrophotography. Most members (astrophotographers may be the exception) are happy to share views from their telescopes, however, please introduce yourself and ask permission upon approaching a telescope owner. Please follow these simple guidelines to maintain a positive experience for everyone:

★ Try to arrive before dark. If you must arrive after dark, please turn off headlights when turning into the site, and try to arrive from the north.
★ Don’t park on the graded gravelled roads.
★ Turn off or disable all dome and trunk lights in your car (or cover with layered red tape or duct tape)
★ Use only dull RED FLASHLIGHTS.
★ NO OPEN FIRES. NEVER.
★ If you’re the last person to leave, close the gate.
★ If you leave before everyone else, ask for assistance in getting out of the site without headlights.
Other suggestions:
★ Wear warm clothing.
★ Bring your own toilet paper in case that in the porta-pottie has run out.
Stellar Promises Come True

In December I auditioned a new observing site: a paved parking area with a low southern horizon only about 15 minutes away from my tent in a campground on the west side of the park. As evening’s cloak of darkness slowly swept across the sky, the site fulfilled its promise. Brilliant Venus disappeared beyond the western horizon, trailing a long cone of zodiacal light. With the sky fully darkened, the black silhouettes of Trap Mountain to the northeast, the twin pointed peaks of the Mules Ears, and a low ridge to the west framed a huge expanse of starlit sky. From this site I could completely trace out the enormous constellation of Eridanus, the River, flowing in a great curving line from its source, Beta (β) Eridani, just west of Orion, all the way to bright Achernar, the river’s mouth, a star too far south to be seen from Denver. By midnight another star not visible from Denver had risen: Canopus, the second brightest star in the nighttime sky, sparkled like a desert diamond with red, blue, yellow, and green glints near the horizon. Shortly before dawn, the great globular Omega Centauri, declination −47° 29’, could be seen with the unaided eye.

Another excellent observing place near a campground is a gravel pullout immediately adjacent to the main road on the east side of the park. At this site the night sky is a huge inverted black velvet hemisphere with a low horizon in every direction. It was easy to picture the entire constellation of Orion, not just the brighter bits we see in Denver, but also the faint stars comprising the warrior’s lion skin shield (from 15 Orionis to the six Pi[π]s) and the dim stars outlining the hunter’s upraised club (from Mu[µ] to the two Chi [χ]s). Two drawbacks to this site are occasional headlight cars—flashes are mercifully brief and infrequent—and the necessity to re-erect tents each night. Javelinas in the nearest campground have learned to savor humans’ food and have discovered that the easiest way to get it is to rip into all possible food containers, including tents. It was imperative that I collapse my fabric home when away. Returning to the campground after a long night of observing to set up my tent in the dark was a chore that palled quickly.

A third developed camping area is in the Basin, the cupped interior of a reddish mountain range that is completely contained within the park. Driving up the winding road into the Chisos Mountains for the first time many years ago, the rosy sunset alpenglow on the ruddy peaks made the drop over the pass into the Basin seem like descending into the interior of a glowing copper crown. Stargazing programs are held regularly in the Basin amphitheater. Tent camping thrills here are black bears (although most have migrated, perhaps temporarily, to Mexico) and skunks which, I was told, entertain themselves at night by nosing open zippered tents and prancing about on the formerly sleeping but suddenly alert occupants.

A Nighttime Visitor

Just after setting up my scope one night, the rumbling of a car engine warned me that white lights were coming. As the auto approached in the darkening gloom, I recognized a white van with green stripes—a ranger vehicle. “Oh, oh,” I thought, “busted.” Upon seeing my scope the ranger, who had apparently met other astronomers skulking in the dark beside deserted park roads, immediately recognized my purpose and enthusiastically joined me for awhile to look at some night sky wonders. Before he left to continue his rounds, we enjoyed Jupiter, Saturn, M42, and a few faint fuzzies. On succeeding nights I met the same ranger many times, recognizing him by voice alone because I never saw him.

Attractions Galore

Between observing sessions, Big Bend provides many attractions. Hiking, four-wheel driving, traveling to Mexican border towns, and visiting archaeological sites are just a few of them. Developed hiking trails, primitive routes marked by cairns, and plot-it-yourself route-finding treks allow walkers to hone map and compass skills in three environments—riparian, desert, and mountain. On one hike I came across an unmapped site where a battered tin bathtub and a collapsed water tower lay among the creosote bush out in the middle of the desert. Another time I had a close encounter with a pack of javelinas; when I spotted them in the shadow of an arroyo, they exploded in all directions like a...
volcanic eruption of hairy beasts. I edged away, speaking politely and hoping that the big, burly one staring at me was not offended by my uninvited and unexpected presence.

Several four-wheel-drive roads allow explorers to boldly go where many have gone before. Ruins of a mercuric mine, the trail to Ernst Tinaja, and campsites by the Rio Grande are among the treasures accessible from back roads. One hot afternoon, sharp rocks on a 4WD road shredded one of my tires. I discovered that changing a tire under the blazing desert sun is not as much fun as it sounds.

For two dollars, you can hail the international ferry—a guy with a rowboat—and ride across the Rio Grande to two Mexican villages, Boquillas and Santa Elena. In Boquillas, I enjoyed an impromptu guitar concert while sampling tiny but tasty tacos. In Santa Elena, one restaurant served cabrito, a delicacy of succulent roasted goat simmered in a flavorful red chile sauce. No passport is necessary to visit either town.

**Ancient Ruins**

Archaeological sites abound in the desert landscape. Rock mounds in Mexican cemeteries bear silent witness to the hard lives of border people. Rock and adobe ruins, many with artifacts like dusty lanterns, carefully mended shovels, china shards, and rusted Model-Ts, await the curious hiker. My favorite archaeological site is the ruin of a hot springs bathhouse. Its low limestone walls hold enough transparent blue-green water at a perfect 105° to provide a luxurious soak. Watching the full moon rise over the distant mountains while basking in the warm water is a truly heavenly experience.

The December 25th eclipse rounded out last winter's observing trip. At about 20% coverage, it was a beautiful sight. Wanting to share "my" eclipse, I set up viewing headquarters outside the nearest store, brandishing a pair of solar filters to waylay potential customers.

In February I returned to Big Bend, craving another dose of my desert paradise and eager to complete an observing program. Spring had arrived and the cottonwood leaves reflected in my teacup were no longer golden but green. Tufts of the trees' "cotton," looking like tiny globular clusters in the daytime sky, drifted through my campsite in a warm, lazy breeze. Bluebonnets and purple namas carpeted the desert hills, gifts from the unusually heavy winter rains. Bicolored white and lavender mustard flowers scented the air with a honeysuckle-like fragrance.

After dark I hurried to one of my favorite observing spots, heady with anticipation. I was focusing on a faint galaxy when a green-striped white car pulled up. Footsteps approached hesitantly and slowed to a stop. "Say...," a familiar voice called, "weren't you here in December?"

**If You Go to Big Bend National Park**

Winter temperatures range from the low 20s at night to the 80s in daytime; summer daytime temps often exceed 100°. In addition to three developed campgrounds that charge $8.00 per night, there are numerous primitive roadside and backpacker sites for which permits are free, and one RV area with hookups. Meals and motel-type lodgings are available in the Basin. Avoid visiting during the boisterous spring break season, usually in March, when the park becomes an unruly packed zoo of noisy campers.

Check the website http://www.nps.gov/bibe/home.htm for information including weather conditions and campsite availability. For any DAS member considering a trip to BBNP, this desert lover would be happy to share books, photos, trail and road guides, directions to unmapped sites, and an extensive collection of topographical maps; please call me. Email me at m6m7@hotmail.com if you need my phone number.

Sandy Shaw is an active observer and member of the D.A.S. She currently holds seven observing certificates from the Astronomical League.

**Welcome New Members!**

The following folks have joined the Denver Astronomical Society during April. Welcome!

- Kenneth Bentley
- John Kieser
- David Trumble
- Randy West
- Maciek Ziernicki

**M.A.R.S. Regional Convention News**

As a result of an invitation from the Western Colorado Astronomy Club (WCAC), the MARS region will have a regional convention this year. The meeting will be held as part of the WCAC’s annual star party on Sept. 14 and 15th. The actual meeting will take place at a site (to be determined) in Grand Junction, while the observing part of the star party will take place atop Grand Mesa—about 30 miles east. Work has only just begun on the plans so many of the details remain to be settled and by next month’s issue of the Denver Observer, we should have more to tell you.

An essential part of any convention are presentations by amateur and professional astronomers. If you would like to give a talk at the meeting please e-mail me at sherlinj@aol.com or postal mail me at 17002 East Prentice Dr., Centennial, CO 80015-2412. You may also use my address to request convention information until the WCAC has established its star party web page in the near future.

Skies from the top of Grand Mesa can be dark and transparent so we invite you to mark September 14 and 15th on your calendars and come to Western Colorado for 3rd Annual Western Colorado Star Party.—Jerry M. Sherlin, MARS Regional Chairman.
odds 'n ends

2001 Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship

The Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship Fund Committee, in cooperation with the Denver Astronomical Society, is now accepting applications for 2001 scholarship awards. **These awards are open to graduating high school seniors and undergraduate college students with majors or planned majors in astronomy, physics, astrophysics, or mathematics.**

William R. Van Nattan (1921-1971) loved astronomy. His enthusiasm continues to enrich, enlighten, and capture the interest of others through his many and varied contributions to astronomy. He was a founding member of both the Denver Astronomical Society (DAS) and the National Amateur Astronomers (NAA). As chairman of the Denver Planetarium Committee in 1955, he was instrumental in providing a planetarium for the people of Denver at the Natural History Museum. For many years Van Nattan assisted in teaching astronomy at the University of Denver's Chamberlin Observatory.

Charles Hansen was also an avid supporter of Denver astronomy. Upon his death he left a significant portion of his estate to the Denver Astronomical Society for use in supporting the Fund.

To honor their memories, this scholarship fund was established by the Denver Astronomical Society in 1973. Through the gifts and contributions of many friends of astronomy, the Fund continues to provide scholarships to high school and undergraduate students of astronomy and related sciences.

**How To Apply**

Scholarships will be awarded to students on the basis of demonstrated interests in astronomy and related sciences. All requests for consideration should be accompanied by the following information:

- Enrollment equivalent to a half-time load for the academic term as defined by the institution
- Transcripts showing a grade point average of at least 3.0 on a 4.0 scale (or equivalent)
- A dated and signed letter of intent demonstrating the applicant’s interest and the declared major
- Letters of recommendation from at least 2 reputable sources

Information provided by all applicants becomes the property of the Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship Committee. Please send copies of required information as appropriate. Documents cannot be returned.

Applicants will only be considered if their information is received no later than 1 July, 2001. Please mail to:

**The Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship Committee**
P.O. Box 150743
Lakewood, CO 80215

Scholarship awards shall not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, age, ethnic or national origin, religion, or disabilities. The decision of the Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship Committee shall be considered final.

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**Jerry Hawker at Fox Park on 7/28/00 with his beautiful then-new 18-inch Obsession. The Denver Observer editor would love to publish your photos of you and/or fellow club members at star parties or D.A.S. events, with or without telescopes.** Image: Joe Gafford

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2001 Van Nattan-Hansen Scholarship

June Speaker is Man With a Mission

The D.A.S. welcomes Dr. Robert Zubrin as its guest speaker on June 15 at Olin Hall. The title of his talk is “The Mars Arctic Research Station Project: Launching the Human Exploration of Mars.” Zubrin is the founder and President of the Mars Society, an international organization dedicated to furthering the exploration and settlement of Mars by both public and private means. Additionally, he is president of Pioneer Astronautics, an aerospace research and development company located in Lakewood.

Zubrin, an inventor and author, has published more than 100 technical and non-technical papers in the field, and was a member of Lockheed Martin’s “scenario development team” charged with developing broad new strategies for space exploration. He is known internationally as one of the most creative engineers working in the aerospace industry today, and he and his work have been the subject of articles in numerous publications including The New York Times, The Boston Globe, The Washington Post, Fortune Magazine, and Newsweek. He’s been featured in numerous documentaries on U.S. Public Television, the Discover Channel, and the B.B.C.

Zubrin, the author of *The Case for Mars: How We shall Settle the Red Planet and Why We Must, and Entering Space: Creating a Spacefaring Civilization*, has promised to bring copies of his books to sell and autograph at the meeting.

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About the Denver Astronomical Society

The D. A. S. is a group of amateur and professional astronomers that share a mutual interest in the heavens. The D.A.S. operates the University of Denver’s Chamberlin Observatory, along with its prized 1894 Alvan Clark 20-inch refracting telescope. Our members have been involved with the first public planetarium at the Denver Museum of Science and Nature and the Smithsonian Astrophysics Observatory’s “Moon Watch” program. The D.A.S. successfully petitioned to have the Chamberlin Observatory listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Our Credo is to provide members a forum for increasing and sharing their knowledge, to promote and educate the public about astronomy, and to preserve the historic telescope and observatory in cooperation with the University of Denver. To these ends we have established three tax deductible funds: the Van Nattan Scholarship Fund, the Chamberlin Restoration Fund, and the D.A.S. Dark Sky Site Fund. This last fund was established in order to construct and maintain observing facilities near Deer Trail in eastern Colorado.

Please call our Info Line at (303) 871-5172 and drop by the General Membership meetings. Become a member and enjoy speakers, facilities, events, and our monthly newsletter, The Denver Observer.

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP TO THE
DENVER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
New ☐ Renewal ☐

Name: ________________________________
Address: ________________________________
City, State, Zip: ________________________________
Phone numbers: Home (___) Work (___)
E-mail Address: ________________________________
Occupation: ________________________________

Other Interests: ________________________________
(Associates Only) School: __________ Grade: __________

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Yes ☐ No ☐

Do you want the above information excluded from the yearly roster?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Please Circle All That Apply:

Regular Membership: $30 Associate: $10 (Age 22 and younger)
Astronomy Magazine/$29
Sky & Telescope Magazine/$29.95
Dark Sky Site Fund Donation $__________
Van Nattan Scholarship Fund $__________
Chamberlin Restoration Fund $__________
Total Amount Paid $__________

Complete this form, or a copy, and mail it with your check or money order payable to The Denver Astronomical Society:
D.A.S. Treasurer, Chuck Carlson; 1521 So. Vine St.; Denver, CO 80210

JUNE’S SPEAKER:
Dr. Robert Zubrin,
President and Founder of The Mars Society,
“The Mars Arctic Research Station Project:
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j o i n u s