

Pajarito Astronomers

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www.la.unm.edu/~beach/pajarito.html

April 26, 2005

Dear Members,

April Dark Night: The April 9th County-Sponsored Dark Night was cancelled due to poor weather.

May Dark Night: The next County-Sponsored Dark Night is scheduled for **Saturday, May 7th** beginning at sunset at Spirio Soccer Field at Overlook Park in White Rock. This should be an excellent night to be out under the stars.

Saturn will be making its last good Dark Night appearance for the year. Saturn will be located near Castor and Pollux in Gemini in the west about 45 degrees above the horizon at dusk. Best viewing will be early in the evening. Take a look at Saturn now - the angle we see Saturn's rings has been closing since 2003. The greater the angle you see the rings at the easier it is to see details such as the Cassini division. The rate of closer is slow but when looking for fine detail every bit counts! In 2009 the rings will be seen edge on.

Shining at magnitude -2.4 , **Jupiter**, will be the brightest object in the night sky. Jupiter is in the constellation Virgo and will be about 55 degrees above the southern horizon at dusk. Its viewing position will improve throughout the evening. As luck would have it the Great Red Spot will be on the other side of the planet and there will be no shadow transits during the evening. However, Jupiter will be an impressive 42.6 arcseconds in size and, if seeing is reasonably good, much detail should be visible on the planet itself.

Omega Centauri, the greatest globular cluster in the galaxy, will grace the southern horizon later in the evening. Scan the southern horizon beneath Jupiter with binoculars. You'll know it when you see it.

Spring is a superb time for observing galaxies. **M81** and **M82** in Ursa Major fit neatly in the same low power field of view for many telescopes and make an impressive pair in almost any scope. M81 and M82 are the major galaxies in the M81 group some 12 million light years distant. **M51**, the Whirlpool Galaxy, and **NGC 5195** some 37 million light years distant in Canes Venatici are another impressive pair. M51 was the first galaxy in which spiral structure was detected. The Third Lord Rosse did so in 1845 using his wonderfully named 72" reflector, the "Leviathan of Parsonstown." There is a fairly good chance that the larger telescopes at Dark Night will be able to duplicate this feat. Another fine set of galaxies is the Leo Triplet; **M65**, **M66**, and **NGC 3628**. This trio is part of the M66 group of galaxies some 35 million light years distant. All three fit in the same low power field of view for many telescopes and again are quite a sight to behold.

There should be plenty of great targets, so bring your telescopes and share the sights with the public and fellow club members.

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Barranca School 6th Grade Astronomy Night: Andrea Spence, a teacher at Barranca Elementary School has contacted the Pajarito Astronomers requesting assistance with a 6th Grade Astronomy Night. The date is tentatively May 5th. If you are interested in helping out please contact David Hollowell.

Messier Marathon: Bob Davenport did a backyard Messier Marathon the night of March 11-12. Using a 4.5" Starblast Newtonian, Bob bagged 72 objects on his first marathon. If anyone else has results of their marathon send it in and we'll put it in the next newsletter.

Survey: Six surveys have been returned so far. Thank you for sending in your comments. The results so far are:

1. Ideas of club events or changes: Messier/Caldwell marathons (2), community space on the web page or expanded web page (2), improved mailing list, information on telescopes and DSO observing in the newsletter.
2. Astronomy related talk suggestions: VLA, VLBA, string theory, relativity, SETI, astrophotography (perhaps a workshop), unexplained phenomenon (2), planetary missions LANL is involved with, invite an astronaut if possible.
3. Talks people would be willing to give: General astronomy, solar system, constellations and DSOs, outreach to schools (3), basic astrophotography.
4. Suggestions for June Dark Night: El Rito, Chaco Canyon, Valle Caldera
5. Organized trip to nearby star party: yes (3 – 1 specifying Enchanted Skies in Socorro Sept 20-24), no comment (3)
6. Interest in Valle Caldera Dark Night: yes (4), no comment (2)
7. Telescope Lending Program for Club: yes (4) with one additional scope identified for loan making four possible, no comment (2)
8. Astronomy photos for web page: yes (2), no comment (4)

The officers will discuss the results so far and discuss any progress in the next newsletter. If you have an opinion you'd like to share on any of the survey questions feel free to contact any of the club officers.