

THE OFFICIAL  
NEWSLETTER  
OF THE ATHENAEUM  
ASTRONOMY ASSOCIATION

Athenaeum  
Astronomy  
Association

# Extra Celestial

January 2020

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BY PETER BRUCE

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SHOPPING LIST OF AN AVID ASTRONOMER...



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# ***Hello and Welcome!***

*Extra Celestial is the official newsletter brought to you by the **Athenaeum Astronomy Association**.*

*This issue is our first, entirely put together by one of our members, Peter.*

*We encourage all of our members to get in touch if you wish to provide content for future editions - after all, these newsletters should be **for** astronomers, **by** astronomers.*

## **IN REVIEW: 2019 EVENTS**

*This year has been a pretty exciting one for the AAA, with a pretty busy calendar of events and activities...*

### **March** *Star Party*

Our bi-annual star party takes place at the walled garden in Bury St Edmunds beautiful Nowton Park - situated behind the building where we hold our regular meetings.

As with all of our events, a schedule of activities and talks are part of the evenings fun, and this one was no different. We had a great turnout, with a few lucky

opportunities for observing, plus a mix of entertaining talks and activities for all ages.

This particular star party was also a chance for us to commemorate the historic 50th anniversary of the Apollo moon landings.

### **May** *The Whitsun Fayre*

We LOVE the Whitsun Fayre. It is a staple of Bury St Edmunds life, and like many of the towns various public events, it gives many an

opportunity for local clubs and organisations to get out there and get people onboard.

It was a hugely successful event, where we had a chance to show off a host of interactive activities - from telescopes to human sundials - all of which went down a treat, and many such activities went on to make a reappearance at the second star party of the year...

## October

### *Star Party (the return!)*

We love a good star party! It's such a fun chance to interact and engage with a new audience. Regulars return as always, but we are proud to say we had plenty of newcomers!

The programme for this event was reliant on indoor activities sadly due to poor weather, however we had plenty to offer, including a wide range of games, puzzles and interactive elements, and of course our live talks and presentations.

We had a wonderful quiz, as well as talks covering everything from the Hubble Space Telescope, to a guided tour around NASA in the USA.

## November

### *Nik Syzmanek talk - Basics of Astrophotography*

Nik Syzmanek is one of the industry leading experts on Astro Photography, and imaging the night sky.

His work has been shown in such magazines as the Sky at Night and Astronomy Now.

He came down to present a talk to the public, at the nearby Quaker Meeting House in Bury St Edmunds.

It kicked off with an introduction by our Chairman, followed by the main talk, where Nik ran us through simple, fun snapping techniques done with mobile phones and small digital cameras, all the way up to the more technical (and frankly very impressive!) set-ups he uses to snap away at the mysteries of the night sky.

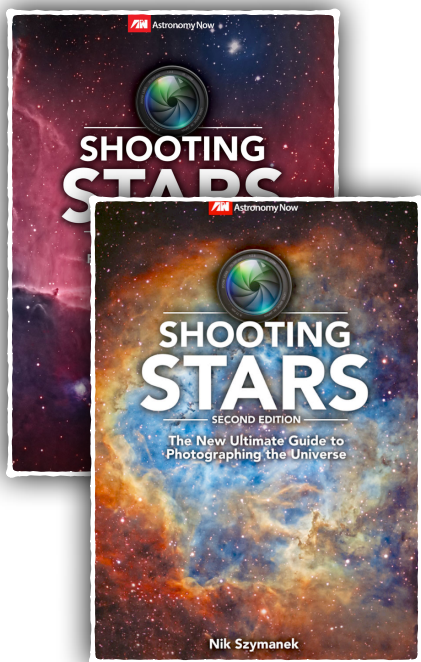
Questions were welcomed, and Nik was a fantastic presenter, adding humour and plenty of enthusiasm which really helped to make this talk equally engaging,





interactive and enjoyable for the varied age groups in the room. Huge thanks Nik, and we look forward to seeing more of your snaps!

Nik currently has a book out which we highly recommend. Check out his website [\*\*HERE\*\*](#) for details.



## **Outreach and Other *Tailored Talks***

The association has been lucky enough to be invited to various groups and organisations to present talks on astronomy.

It is always a great honour to have a chance to inspire young and old minds alike, and the range of opportunities we have had this year have been really splendid.

From cub scout groups, to Women's Institute, to even the National Trust (at the local Ickworth House)

We are able to deliver tailored talks and activities to your needs. All age groups and experience levels can be catered for, ensuring you have a fantastic time learning about astronomy with the Athenaeum Astronomy Association.

If you are interested in booking us, please get in touch via our website!

## **WINTER 2020 DARK SKIES - CHECK OUT OUR PODCASTS!**

*The opening months of this year promise to unveil some fantastic observing opportunities, and we invite you to subscribe to our very own Astronomy Podcast!*

*Written by member Richard Young, and presented by Shirley Young, these podcasts give you a month by month breakdown on just what you can expect to see up above (clear skies permitting!) Click [\*\*HERE\*\*](#) for the latest episode!*





## ***FIRST TIME ASTRONOMER - WHERE TO BEGIN?***

*Written by Peter Bruce*

Like many, I grew up fascinated in the stars. Peering out of my bedroom window, gazing up at the moon, the stars, and wondering what might be out there.

News of satellites, new discoveries, talk of the moon missions... The topic of space, astronomy and the science surrounding it all seemed to always crop up in the news. My desire to learn more led me to book out library books, where I would teach myself on the wonders of space. I would also react with immense excitement when the chance to visit the Science Museum in London came up in family conversation.

I was hooked, and the appearance of the incredibly beautiful comet Hale-Bopp in 1997 served only to reinforce this young love...

Many years passed and I was soon a grown up, and ready to take my first steps into purchasing my own equipment! OOH how exciting... but OH NO I quickly fell into the typical pitfalls and slip ups that so many beginners face... (insert dramatic music here...!)



Comet Hale-Bopp, March 1997, was in the sky for many nights, giving everyone a jaw dropping, magical view and plenty of photo opportunities!

I thought bigger was better... and I knew that in some regards this was true... Your average fisher price 'baby's first scope' job for twenty quid wasn't going to give me much... so I opted for the biggest one I could afford...

... and the coolest to look at. Not always the best way to go, but still, it did set me on a path to exploring my love of the heavens, and everyone has to start somewhere. Thing is, I wish I had the advice and help of an astronomy club to help me at the time...!

The telescope was good, but the mount and tripod weren't... You can buy the best telescope with the best lenses and mirrors, and ruin it all with the cheap mount and tripod... oops!



## ***YOU HAVE MADE A GREAT CHOICE WITH THE AAA***

It's best not to make the same mistakes as me...!

Joining the club, you are surrounded by likeminded people who love astronomy just like you! And they have so much experience and advice to offer.

As a member, you have access to lots of different telescopes available for you to take home with you, on loan, with expert advice and instruction to boot!

Ask a member of the Committee about the loan telescopes - we have a helpful folder to show you what's what, and our members will always be happy to talk you through the options on offer.



The Telescope Loan folder is available for all members to flick through. Just ask!

# IN THE NEWS

## EXTRA CELESTIAL'S LOOK AT THE GREAT STORIES OF 2019

The field of astronomy is one that is highly active, and you would be easily forgiven for missing some of the best bits... So, this little section gives us a chance to review the year, highlighting some of our favourite stories...



### *More Moon Landings*

Three missions have been attempted to get robotic 'rovers' to the moon this year.

Two missions didn't make it (Israel's Beresheet Mission, and India's Chandrayaan 2), citing technical issues, but one made it safely to the surface...

The successful rover was landed by China - called Chang'e 4 - which touched down in January of 2019. The rover is now exploring the Von Kármán crater on the far side of the moon - an area we are still learning about to this day... Hidden from our view, one wonders what mysteries it could hold...

### *A Tour of Asteroids*

Japan's Hayabusa 2 spacecraft (launched summer 2018) rendezvoused with asteroid 162173 Ryugu, landing twice to collect samples.

Hayabusa 2 is now headed home and due to fly by the earth in December 2020, when it will eject its sample return capsule for collection in the Australian desert.

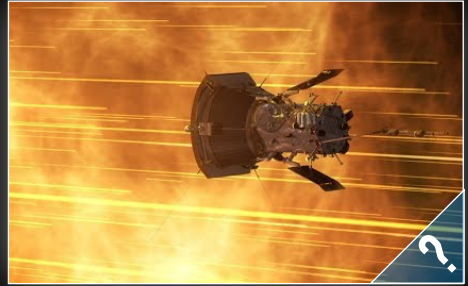




# ***The Parker Solar Probe***

It sounds like the coolest space craft ever launched, and maybe thats true!

Understanding the workings of our Sun and it's 'personality' is of incredible importance.



The probe is on an elliptical orbit of the sun, ever decreasing to bring it closer and closer to its surface each time. This allows for many more readings than a single A to B trajectory, and enables many more opportunities for us to conduct research.

It has currently made 3 of its planned 24 passes of the sun, most recently getting as close as 15 million miles from the surface.

# ***Mars Opportunity Rover says goodnight...***

Designed to live just 90 days, the Opportunity Rover has survived an incredible 15 years on the planets surface. It was driven a whopping 28.06 miles in its lifetime, and changed our understanding of the planets past.

In 2018, an aggressively powerful dust storm passed across the planet, covering the rovers solar panels in a thick layer of dirt. Months upon months were spent by the NASA engineers to try and recover the rover, but sadly to no avail.

NASA officially announced the end of the Opportunity mission in February.



# NOT SO SIRIUS

*The shopping list of an avid astronomer reads much like a typical bond baddie or holiday destination...*

- Island (ideally with volcano)
- Subterranean living quarters under the volcano
- One of every telescope fitted to a private railway network around the island. Ideally monorail because its cooler
- Fish tank with sharks, terrapins or the most terrifying of undersea creatures, the goldfish
- Observatory dome in the top of the volcano
- The worlds largest telescope inside said dome
- Wifi and excellent phone reception
- Coffee Shop and Sandwich Bar
- Crater shaped Swimming Pool or jacuzzi
- Valet Parking for visitors
- Turrets for intruders
- Red Street Light Network on a dimmer switch
- Cinema showing classic space films
- Island-wide tannoy system playing Holst's The Planets on repeat



Thanks for reading our little newsletter!

For our full programme of events, and more on the  
Athenaeum Astronomy Association please visit our website:

[www.3a.org.uk](http://www.3a.org.uk)

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