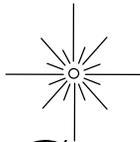




**AAAP 75th Anniversary
1929 to 2004**



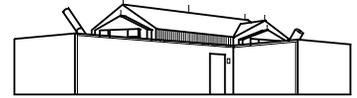
The Guide Star

Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh Inc.

A Section of the Academy of Science & Art of Pittsburgh

January, 2004

Vol. 37, No. 10



Nicholas E. Wagman Observatory

Neither Snow Nor Ice Nor...

Holiday Party Version 2.0 At Jan. 9 Meeting



"I wonder if anyone is up at Wagman tonight?"

If we had just a little more warning about the heavy snow prior to the December 5 holiday party, we could have sent out a timely cancellation/postponement announcement. But the sudden storm cut every one off guard. As it was, about 40 brave souls (out of the usual 100+) made it to the Middle Road Fire Hall amidst the blizzard, carried off a better-than-expected party, then spent several hours spinning and slipping their way home.

With only about a quarter of the usual attendance, we were left with a large number of undistributed door prizes and refreshments, as well as important business items. As a result, our first-ever AAAP Holiday Party Version 2.0 will be staged at the *Carnegie Science Center* on **January 9, 2003**, starting at **7:30 pm**. In addition, we will hear a very interesting lecture on special Internet Access to information on Mars and the upcoming NASA rover missions (see article at right). The complete Jan. 9 agenda includes:

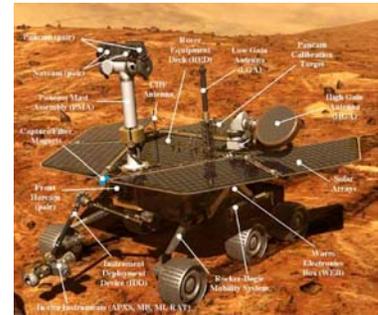
- * The Mars Lander's Lecture
- * Giving away more door prizes saved from Holiday Party 1.0
- * Serving refreshments from same.
- * Handing out more Service Awards and Brunelle Photo contest awards
- * Other standard meeting items such as images and observing reports.

We assume the Laws of Probability will work in our favor this time and that we will not be victimized by another massive snow storm. But to be on the safe side, check with any club officer or the AAAP Listserver if another such storm threatens. We really don't want to stage Holiday Party Version 3.0.!!!

Note: See page 2 for several follow-up articles about *Holiday Party 1.0*.

Tuning In On MER Landers

Jan. 9 Meeting Lecture Brings Mars Even Closer



Even though Mars Close-Approach hoopla is over and the planet is now receding to a Pale Red Dot, we're headed for another media frenzy with the touchdowns of three automated landers ("Beagle 2" from Europe, "Spirit" and "Opportunity" from NASA). Some may recall the 100 million-plus hits on NASA's web site when Mars Pathfinder landed in July, 1997. Similar interest is expected for the new landers. Giving a new and interested perspective on all this at the **Jan. 9** meeting is **Mark Orsatti**, member of both AAAP and the Kiski Club. Along with several former students, Mark will give a presentation on a web-based program called "EventScope", developed by his students. Here are excerpts from Marks program intro:

"The program is called EventScope, currently available as 'client' software from their web site (www.eventscope.org) for free. It contains several lessons that take almost any 'student' from the history of Mars through the principal and theories around crater formation, channel formation, mountains, etc., possible areas for water deposits, life, etc., on Mars. It's written at an upper middle school level, but depending on one's knowledge of Mars, one can learn a lot (I have). At the currently available client level, the client becomes familiar with all of this about Mars, the program's

Ground-Breaking, Big Time, for the Mingo Site

We're pleased to report that the Mingo Park Observatory project has moved beyond the paperwork/meetings stage with the first actual turning of dirt, that is, "construction" of the access road to the site (see photo courtesy of **Dick Haddad**). The road was completed on December 18. We still have a little clean-up to do in the spring, but the road is now usable. If you have any questions about driving up to or otherwise using the Mingo site this Winter, please contact **Ed Moss** at 412-734-0255 or edward.moss@verizon.net. Our thanks to Ed for keeping this early but vital phase of the project on-track.



Working on the "Road to the Stars" at Mingo Park (Photo by Dick Haddad) (see page 8 for more pix)

(continued on page 2 column 2)



Congrats to Lindbloom Award winner **Larry McHenry***



Many thanks to the "Snowflakes and Snowflakettes" from **Emily Bell**



"CONTACT ME about your gift orders" – **Mari-Jo Meyers**

Congrats to Larry McHenry, Bob Kalan

Holiday "Blizzard" Party Reports, Including Service Award Winners

Excerpts from AAAP Listserv

☛ **George Guzik** – December 5th's weather really mistreated our Holiday Party plans! Nevertheless, about 40 members attended and I thank them tackling this challenge with caution and with good cheer. I also thank everyone else who decided to patiently forgo the party and stay home. Unfortunately, the day-earlier prediction of lighter snowfall and more convenient arrival time turned into heavy snowfall that arrived just as we were getting the event under way.

I thank **Emily Bell** for, once again, doing such a fine job with the food service for the party. Outstanding work under difficult conditions! I thank everyone who donated door prizes, donated food, donated to the "food fund" for the event, or helped with setup and cleanup. Great prizes, great food, and great help for the big event. I thank **Tom Reiland** for his dual presentation on maintaining an observer's log and on performing a Messier Marathon. Informative and enjoyable. I also thank the staff of Middle Road Fire Hall for their hospitality and for going so far out of their way to ensure that the arrangements were "just right." I'm told that I probably set a record for the briefest AAAP Business Meeting conducted in recent history! It was quick but we did conduct some very important business.

Our December Business Meeting is traditionally when we present AAAP Service Awards. I'm very pleased to announce that this year's winner of the Nova award is **Bob Kalan**. We present the Nova to new members who perform outstanding service to the AAAP. Bob helped us in so many ways this past year at Star Cruise and at NEWO. We also presented the George Lindbloom Memorial Award to **Larry McHenry** for his myriad contributions to the AAAP. Larry has been a leader in the development of the AAAP and has provided focused attention, plus much of his time, to many of the projects within the organization. On top of those achievements, he is a first-rate observer, video astronomer, and astro-sketching artist.

Given that our Holiday Party was shortened by the weather, we still have some "party" that we didn't get a chance to finish! We will conclude our door prize drawing at the January 9 meeting (a number of fine items to go...) and we will have more service awards to present. I hope to see you there.

(continued at right)

***Sorry. No photo available of Nova award winner Bob Kalan available at Guide Star press time.**

Exploring Mars Via the Internet

(continued from front page)

interface, buttons, and commands, etc., through the use of 3D (sort or VRML) imaging that is pretty cool. It's free and open to anyone."

"Available by the end of the year (hopefully before the MER missions land), will be the 'authoring' software, again free and open to anyone. By downloading the authoring software, you will be 'registered' and when images become available from MER (approximately eight days delay), the 'authors' will be notified by e-mail as to the availability of data through the EventScope web site. 'Authors' will download the data and peruse it as they wish. Based on their eagerness, dedication, knowledge, expertise, etc., authors will be free to annotate the data, 'flag' areas of interest, and upload their package to the web site for others to peruse. Interested and knowledgeable teachers will be able to write and post 'lessons' (or 'projects' or 'labs' - the actual term hasn't been decided) for all to inspect and share."

"In the final turn of this 'loop' of collaboration, the data will be sent to NASA who will look for trends among the observations, areas of common interest. Right now, this last part of the loop is still under 'negotiation' with NASA. My student, **Dana Martinelli** (1988 graduate of Kiski, native of Belle Vernon) feels that this loop will close successfully very soon. So anyone, most particularly the talented resource of knowledgeable members of the AAAP, will be able to participate in a very real way with this mission."



☛ **Emily Bell** – "Preliminary thanks to all the snowflakes and snowflakettes who made it a party! Especially the kitchen goddesses! All hail the kitchen goddesses (and gods)! Thanks for making me look good as the party princess! One member did suggest that perhaps those who showed up this evening might be intellectually challenged enough to warrant being forced to relinquish their Wagman keys ☺"

☛ **Mari-Jo Meyers** - I want to apologize to everyone who was expecting to pick up their calendars and handbooks at the Holiday party. Wayne and I started out and got as far as the Fox Chapel exit. We saw three accidents along Route 28 and police lights flashing ahead at the on ramp. We decided that was a good sign that it was time to turn around and head back home. Any one who was suppose to pick up their items at the party I will have them at the January 9 meeting. Some of you have already contacted me about getting them sooner because they are Christmas gifts. We will do what ever we can to make sure we get them to you. Just call (724-339-3447) or send an e-mail (wmeyers1@comcast.net) and we will make suitable arrangements. Again - sorry we never got there.

2003 Wagman Helper Report: Impressive Support (As Usual)

by Tom Reiland, Director – Wagman Observatory

Here's a summary of this year's stats for all star parties at Wagman Observatory:

- Schedule Public nights: 20
- Private Groups: 7
- Visitors: 3,050 give or take several
- Members Volunteered: 106 a total of 505 times

Here's the list of those who can receive hats or patches. Volunteers with ten or more nights get a choice of a hat or patch or they can pass. Five or more nights or special assistance gets each member a patch.

Fifteen members worked 10 or more star parties: Patches go to these people:

20 Star Parties
Flaccus Stifel

19 Star Parties
Bill Hayeslip
Tom Reiland

17 Star Parties
George Guzik
John Holtz
Bob Kalan

16 Star Parties
Frank Pastin

13 Star Parties
John Diller
Eric Fischer

12 Star Parties
Eric Heckathorn

11 Star Parties
Joyce Osborne- Fischer
Bill Yorkshire

10 Star Parties
Don Hoecker
Bill Roemer
Pete Zapadka

9 Star Parties
John Cheng
Mary DeVaughn

8 Star Parties
Tim Colbert
Ed Honkus
Tim Manka
Bob Novak
Kevin Van Horn

7 Star Parties
John Close
Jeff Kearns
Mari Jo Meyers
Wayne Meyers
Ed Moss
Mike Petro

6 Star Parties
Ariel Kelly
Fred Klein
Trevor Lewis
Jean Roemer
Terry Trees

5 Star Parties
Les Johnson
Roy Lahet*
Cathy Rivi
Dave Smith

(*Plus can recycling)



In addition, these members participated as well:

4 Star Parties
Dennis Derda
Joe McCafferty
Bill Moutz
Ann Norman
Ron Pollack
Charlotte Tunney
Jim Tunney
Frank Wielgus
Diane Yorkshire

3 Star Parties
Linda Bailey
Rich Bailey
Dave Houggy
Mary Jean Kancel
Jim Moody
Cindy Pollack
Mark Schomer
Simon Sloane
Joanne Trees
Grant Van Horn
Pat Wickersham
Sam Wickersham
Devon Yorkshire

2 Star Parties
Becky Beverly
Bruce Cloutier
Leah DeVaughn
Bob Florida
Kenn Lippert
Joe Lutz
Larry McHenry
Maureen Moutz
Dave Mueller
Dan Reed
Judy Schomer
Don Shepherd

2 Star Parties (cont'd)

Geoffrey Trees
Frank Van Mastrigt
Shawn Van Mastrigt
John Wilson
Julie Yorkshire
Jerry Zhu

1 Star Party

Wade Barbin**
Rosemary Barringer
Pat Brinkman
Ray Brinkman
Ed Borrebach
Fran Borrebach
Chrissie Chojnicki
Lori Dzura
Elaine Horner
Helen Houggy
Phil Hughes
Nancy Kancel
Bob Kepple
Truman Kohman
Bradley Kusman
Ed Kuzemchak
Jeff Marsh
Maureen McCafferty
Marca Melchar
Brian Melchar
Mark Orsatti
Mark Plasynski
Brent Samay
Allen Sluder
Beth Stifel
Sean Trees
Lee Wadsworth
Mike Yeager
Jill Yeager

(**Plus repairs and Associate Director)

38 Members are eligible for hats or patches.

- 9 members helped 4 times
- 13 were there 3 times
- 18 assisted twice and 29 once.

Thanks to all **106** of you for making this a very successful year, even if the weather didn't cooperate. Whether you assisted us at Wagman Observatory once or a dozen times, your contributions are greatly appreciated. THANK YOU!



Guide Star Photo Gallery #2: Aurora, Sunsets, Solar Flares Etc.

Notable Southerly Aurora Last Month

On the heels of the great Auroral displays between October 29 and November 14, we had another fine show on the morning/evening of November 20/21. While not as spectacular as the earlier shows, this one had its moments and unique features:

Nelson Merrick – “.....Bright, growing Aurora to the South.... Couldn't see anything as bright to the north, etc.....Now that's different!”

Steve Schafer – “.....saw two patches of bluish-green aurora in southwest....”

John Pane – “....a very bright green aurora was visible to southwest...fainter red above it...shifted to directly south later.”

Gary Shannon – “....saw a faint green white glow from NW to NE in a semicircle....but why the red in the southwest?? I didn't think it would ever happen in that direction.”

Tom Reiland – “.....noticed patches and glows to west and east, and poorly defined band to the north....mostly greenish-white or light, pastel blue, almost turquoise....some faint red glows appeared near and above patches to west and southwest.brightest parts were patches from west to the south.”

Jerry Zhu – “...Aurora in the SOUTHERN sky!.....appeared just after sunset....Two to three green patches were quite bright at times, shining through strong city light....patches went on and off in a matter of minutes, and gradually moved to the southeast....”



Photo by John Pane: 6:40 to 6:50 pm EST, 11-20, toward the SW. 15 sec. (approx.) exposure.

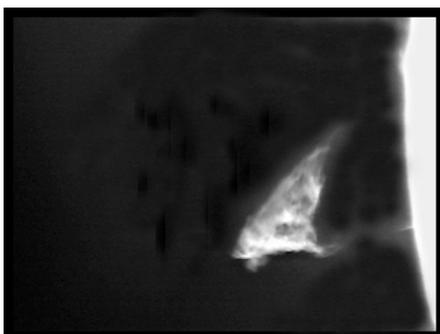


Photo by John Pane: 12:25 am EST, 11-21, looking toward the N. 21 sec. (approx.) exposure.

John Pane's photos: Canon Digital Rebel EOS-300D, with 18-55mm kit lens. Settings: 18mm, f/3.5, ISO 800. Copyright © 2003 John Pane.

Cool (Actually....Hot!) Prominence Photo by Larry McHenry

In the current issue of the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers' (ALPO) journal, "The Strolling Astronomer", (Vol 45, No. 3), Larry McHenry has several photos of an eruptive prominence he imaged last year on April 24th, 2002. The photo below one of the images they used. The article is titled "The Sun: An Interesting Solar Prominence", page 21, and is one of the issue's feature articles. The author is Jamey Jenkins, acting Assistant Coordinator and Archivist for the ALPO Solar Section.



Prominence photo by Larry McHenry



Photo at left by Jerry Zhu: Nikon Coolpix 995 digital camera, f/8.2mm, f/2.6, 8 sec., ISO 800, noise reduction on. Camera on ground.

Nice Solctice Sundown Photos by Jerry Zhu

If you're not tied in yet to the AAAP Listserv, you are missing many fine astro image postings by members such as Jerry Zhu, John Pane, Larry McHenry and others. Here are several images taken by Jerry on December 21 of the setting Sun.



Photo by Jerry Zhu: Slight Green Flash: 8" Dob + AstroSolar filter + Scopetronix 18mm eyepiece + Nikon coolpix 995 camera. 1/2000 second, f/8.2, ISO 100.

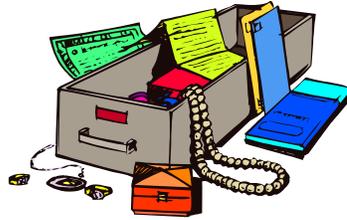


Photo by Jerry Zhu: Audience of Birds: Nikon Coolpix 995, 1/1000 second, F7.3, ISO 100.

Do You Have Any Valuable Documents for Club's New Safe Deposit Box?

by John Holtz (from AAAP Listserver)

The AAAP now has a safe deposit box located at the Fox Chapel branch of Dollar Bank (the most convenient branch that had boxes). The cavernous box contains the original lease with Washington County for our site at Mingo Creek Park, and all of the original certificates for stock owned (Kellogg, 3M, JC Penney, and duPont).



I'm sure that other members have important AAAP papers and valuables that should go into the safe deposit box, such as:

- Lease with Allegheny County
- Papers of incorporation
- Paperwork for tax exemption
- Video tape of equipment owned (for insurance purposes, needs to be created)

Rather than being scattered among the members, possibly getting lost or mixed with personal properties, such items should be placed in the safe deposit box. Please let me know what you have to place in the box, or give it to me at a meeting or other gathering. I will place it in the box.

(Editor's note: If you have any AAAP documents of an historical nature, please contact Art Glaser (412-341-5862, aglaser+@pitt.edu) for potential placement in the club's archives at the University of Pittsburgh.)

Wintertime "Aloha" To New Members

The following folks were voted in as new AAAP members at the Dec. 5 Holiday party (note: We certainly understand if you could not attend that meeting!):

Harry Blair	Ted Geletka	Gary Morrow
Judi Galardi	David Grusch	Lawrence G. Sneider

Wagman Gate/Door Combo's Note!!!

As of New Year's, the Wagman Observatory door combination has been changed. Contact **John Holtz** to obtain the new numbers and fork over your key fee. The gate combination, which was changed several months ago, will remain the same for now. Contact **Tom Reiland** or **Flacc Stifel** for any required info. on opening the gate or observatory door locks.

Deepest Condolences to Dan Reed

We regret to report the death of member Dan Reed's wife, Sharon on December 12. Dan has been a very active contributor to the club for many years now, and most notably is one of the founders of Laurel Highlands Star Cruise. The entire AAAP extends its sympathies to Dan at this very difficult time.

Factor-of-Five Membership Anniversaries Noted

Congratulations to the following members for passing these "5X" membership milestones:

15 Years

Lawrence Peters Jr. (2/89)
Glenn N. Runge (2/89)
Pete Zapadka (2/89)

5 Years

Joshua Barto (3/99)
John F. Froehlich (2/99)
Mike Frynkewicz (1/99)
Rob Graham (2/99)
Richard Y. Haddad (1/99)
Ken Sacks (1/99)
Dan Van Dyke (2/99)
Greg Yoest (3/99)

10 Years

Robert E. Nicklas (2/94)
Robert A. Preston (3/94)
Frank S. Ross (2/94)
Joseph M. Sharick (2/94)
Paul E. (Vondra) 3/94

Speaking of Membership Info.....

One last reminder to contact Membership Secretary **Brent Hudock** if you want to revise your entry in the upcoming AAAP 2004 Membership Directory. Brent can be reached at HOOTY@charter.net or 724-437-5990.

Astro-Quote of the Month

From one of Tom Reiland's old observing log books: "Relax...even some galaxies are on edge."



Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc.

A section of the Academy of Science and Art of Pittsburgh
Founded June 9, 1929 by Chester B. Roe and Leo J. Scanlon

2003-2004 Officers:

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AAAP Member Dues***:

AAAP Dues:	\$18.00
Junior Member (under 18):	\$13.00
Sky & Telescope Magazine:	Add \$33.00
Astronomy Magazine:	Add \$29.00

***Basic Procedure for Paying Dues:

1. Make check payable to "AAAP Inc."
2. Send check to John Holtz, Treasurer, 176 Hidden Hill Rd, Sarver, PA 16055-8907

Orion Rocks!

By Larry McHenry

I swung the scope over to Orion, who had just climbed over the pine trees to my southeast. I settled on the 'Great Nebula' M42, and began my first observation of it for the winter season. I spent the next hour exploring it and the surrounding neighborhood of M43, and the nebulas of NGCs 1973, 1975, 1977, and the open cluster 1980.

But I kept coming back to M42, which filled the screen, exploring the various rifts and swirls visible using the eye of the video camera. I spent many minutes varying the monitor's brightness/contrast knobs, and camera settings, bringing out detail in various parts of the nebulosity. (I Even used the camera's "negative image" setting to view black stars and nebulosity on white sky.)

Having filled my eyes with the nebula's beauty, I flipped on a few red lights, and pulled Bob Kepple's "Night Sky Observer Guide" off the bookshelf to re-learn the science of the nebula, (size, distance, etc), and to read observers' descriptions. Then I reached for Burnham's "Celestial Handbook" to see what poetic snippet he might have to say about Orion. (He had several, along with historical references of the constellation). One particular sentence caught my eye, where Burnham talks about J.R.R. Tolkien and the name his inhabitants of middle-earth have for the constellation. (I had gone to see the 'Return of the King' earlier in the day, second time this weekend - great movie!)

With that I wrapped up my observing session with Orion and his nebula, closed up my observatory, and walked back up to the house. On the edge of the patio, I paused for one last look at Orion twinkling in the frosty air. I knew that sometime soon, I would be back again for another night of Orion's celestial show. What a fine night!

And Other December Observations

Phil Breidenback: *Just wondering if anyone caught the really nice pass of the Space Station this morning. It went from the west into the northeast and passed ALMOST directly overhead. I easily watched it for over 4 minutes before it went behind the building. What a way to start the day!*

Jerry Zhu: *The Sky cleared on Friday night (Dec. 12/13) and I watched for the Geminids meteor shower from 23:10 to 0:10. Because there were so few meteors, the experience was pretty close to watching a soccer game between Geminids and sporadic meteors. The final score? Eight to two—not too bad for one hour. This included a bright red-yellow sporadic in Aries that flashed twice and two long, fast, bluish, fast bluish Geminids in Taurus.*

Bill Hayeslip: *I usually don't notice solar phenomena but this morning on my way to drop my daughter at school, I noticed a terrific solar pillar. I was about 7:30 am and was a very bright, orange pillar contrasting against the dark, cloudy background. I raced home for a camera but five minutes later the sun had cleared the clouds and washed out most of the effect. Lost another photo contest winner.*

John Cheng: *Two prominent features of this evening's five day old moon are the 58 mile wide Posidonius, which is laced with an interesting system of rills or rimae and the stunning trio Catharina, Cyrillus, and Theophilus.*

Jerry Zhu: *I was able to see C/2002 T7 LINEAR for the first time from Green Tree with an 8" Dob last night. The comet was easy to find, but dim and small. No tail. The coma was small and slightly asymmetric. A faint nucleus was visible.*

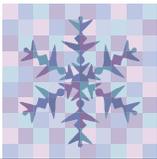
Nerdy Humor

Compiled by Ann Norman

They say, "Give a person a fish and you feed them for a day; teach that person to use the Internet and they won't bother you for weeks." How true. Here are some of other amusing items I've accumulated from hours on the Internet (and AAAP listserv):

- ❖ All of us could take a lesson from the weather. It pays no attention to criticism.
- ❖ There are 10 kinds of people in the world: those who understand binary and those who don't.
- ❖ The Lone Ranger and Tonto are camping in the desert, have set up their tent, and are asleep. Some hours later, the Lone Ranger wakes his faithful friend. "Tonto, look up at the sky and tell me what you see." Tonto replies, "Me see millions of stars." "What does that tell you?" asks The Lone Ranger. Tonto ponders for a minute. "Astronomically speaking, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, it tells me that Saturn is in Leo. Time-wise, it appears to be approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, it's evident the Lord is all-powerful and we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, it seems we will have beautiful day tomorrow. What does it tell you, Kemo Sabi?" The Lone Ranger is silent for a moment, then says, "Tonto, you dummy, it means someone has stolen our tent."

January 2004

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	A tip for New Year's Resolutions: Consider the postage stamp: Its usefulness consists in the ability to stick to one thing till it gets there. Josh Billings			1 New Year's Day	2	3
4 Earth reaches perihelion	5	6 	7 	8	9 AAAP Meeting 7:30 PM Carnegie Science Center	10
11	12 In 1611 Johannes Kepler published a short treatise called...	13 On the Six-Cornered Snowflake...	14 	15 ...which was the first scientific reference to snow crystals.	16	17 Mercury reaches greatest western elongation
18 Johannes Kepler is now chiefly remembered for discovering...	19 ...the three laws of planetary motion ...	20 ...that bear his name, published in 1609 and 1619.	21 	22	23	24 Look for spectacular crescent moon and Venus
25	26	27	28	29 	30	31 

Looking ahead:	<u>AAAP Long-Range Meeting Schedule</u>
Wagman Winterfest! 4 PM February 28, 2004 NEWO	Feb. 6, 2004 Summer Picnic
	Mar. 5, 2004 Sep. 24, 2005
	Apr. 2, 2004 Oct. 29, 2005
	May 7, 2004 Nov. 19, 2005

Classifieds – For Sale

- A. Orion 80 mm Short Tube Refractor, Focal Length 400 mm, f/5.0, 1 1/4" eyepiece rack & pinion focus; NO tripod
- B. Orion 6X by 30 mm(?) Finder
- C. Orion 45 degree erect image prism Diagonal, 1 1/4" eyepieces
- D. Orion 25 mm KE eyepiece, 1-1/4", fully coated
- E. Orion 10 mm KE eyepiece, 1-1/4", fully coated
- F. Orion 90 degree prism Diagonal, 1-1/4" eyepieces

If items A through F are bought new from Orion winter 2003 catalogue, total cost is approximately \$199. Make a reasonable offer > \$130, and it's all yours! Contact Nelson Merrick: Work Phone/VMX: 724-337-5314, Nelson.Merrick@alcoa.com, Home: 724-935-6497

 3.5" (approx.) "Galileo" telescope (model no. FS-1250X). Never out of the box, includes 6.8mm to 16mm zoom eyepiece. Asking \$200. Contact "John" at 724-265-1601.

More Photos of Mingo Road Work (by Dick Haddad)





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