



DESERT SKY

Presidents Message - November, 2007

British astronomer Edwin Holmes was observing the Andromeda Galaxy on November 6, 1892 when he noticed a bright object nearby. The object, which had not been recorded before was determined to be a comet and it was named "17P/ Holmes". It was discovered because it had flared in a dramatic increase in magnitude, which enabled Holmes to make his observation. Normally the comet is a Magnitude #17 object. The comet's nucleus measures about 2 miles in diameter, and it's orbital period is 6.9 years.

Comet Holmes was not observed from 1906 to 1964. In mid October of this year it began to flare up and in a few days it's coma grew to 70% of the Sun's diameter. This was an increase of magnitude from Mag 17 to Mag 2, which is astounding. No one seems to be able to categorically say why it does this, but the event is a fortunate happenstance for us observers. We are able to view it, due to the fact that it is doing the same thing it did 115 years ago when it was discovered. A few of us were doing some astro-photography of the comet, and some of those images are in a computer file at the Observatory, if anyone wants to see them. They show a bright nucleus and the coma.

17P/Holmes is outbound on it's current trip and is now about 200 Million miles away (aprox 2 AU's) approaching the distance of Jupiter's orbital path. Since comet "tails" point away from the Sun we cannot see the typical tail, so it's like looking at the backside of a bullet travelling away from us. You can see it in the Northeast sky about an hour after full darkness, and roughly 10 or 12 degrees below Cassiopeia. My son-in-law Matt and I were able to see it with naked eye the other evening, and it appears as a bright fuzzy ball through binoculars. Check it out.

Mike Thomas

October 16th Minutes

Mike Thomas called the general membership meeting to order at 7:10 pm. There were 12 members/non-members in attendance. The WNAS currently has a financial balance of \$3168.13. Mike brought up several topics for discussion, first he congratulated Jack Davis on processing the first color image at the observatory, Jack accomplished this in a record number of hours. The date for Adam Blocks imaging workshops were confirmed as Nov 30 and Dec 1. The workshop will be held at the Observatory. Railroad and classic car museum tours will be scheduled early next year. It was decided that November 17th would be designated as this years first Novice Night. These events are for beginning amateur astronomers, they include a lecture on how telescopes work, a tour of the night sky and use of actual telescopes on the observation deck at JDCO. These have been very popular events in the past. A discussion was started on the giving more scholarships in the future and was deferred to a later meeting.

Jim Bean , the WNAS Webmaster, has added many new improvements to the web site and has tried to make the site more user friendly. Announcements about Novice Night will be posted.

A greeter program for the Saturday night star parties was discussed. This person would meet and greet folks as they came into the observatory and direct them to different activities.

Mike closed the meeting at 7:45 pm

Larry Martin presented the attendees with an excellent lecture on the History of Aviation in Northern Nevada.

Next WNAS General Membership Meeting - November 20th

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November WNAS Membership Meeting GUEST SPEAKER!!

Jim Bean will present a lecture on "Solar Weather and Magnetic Fields."

Events Calendar

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
18 Leonid Meteor Shower	19	20 WNAS Meeting	21	22	23	24 Star Party, Full Moon
25	26	27	28	29	30	1 Star Party, Last Qtr Moon
2	3	4	5	6	7	8 Star Party
9 New Moon	10	11	12	13 Geminiid Meteor Shower	14	15 Star Party
16	17 First Qtr Moon	18 WNAS Meeting	19	20	21	22 Star Party

November December



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