



Presidents Message – January, 2012

There have been many objects discovered in the area beyond Neptune, in the region called the Kuiper Belt. They don't quite qualify to be called planets, so like Pluto; they are classified as "dwarf planets". In 2005 the dwarf planet Eris was discovered in the Kuiper Belt. It has a very eccentric orbit, which is inclined 44 degrees from the ecliptic. Eris orbits the Sun in an elliptical orbit which varies from a maximum distance from the Sun of 97 Astronomical Units (about 9 Billion miles), down to within 37 A.U. (about 3 Billion miles). Eris has an orbital period of 557 years, whereas it takes Pluto 248 years to complete its orbit.

Astronomers believed that Eris, named after the Greek Goddess of discord, was much larger than Pluto. However, this last November three observatories recorded Eris's occultation of a star in Cetus; and calculated that Eris has a diameter of 1,445 miles which is the same diameter of Pluto, give or take 30 miles. Although they are both virtually the same size, Eris has been determined to be 27% more dense. Eris also has a much thinner methane atmosphere, and is accompanied by a small moon, Dysnomia. The bottom line is that Eris is the largest known, farthest object in the Solar System.

On another note, this month's membership meeting program on January 17th will be my lecture "2012...The End of the World"; which addresses the supposed prediction of the Mayan Calendar that the world will end on December 21, 2012. This topic will be receiving much media attention this year. The Mayan Astronomy and time keeping is discussed, and the prophecy is discredited in this presentation. Learn how such apocalyptic prophesies originate, and why they have so many believers. The lecture has recently been updated and restructured.

Mike Thomas

December, 2011

December 2011 Meeting Minutes

- Minutes of the December Membership meeting:
- The lack of "members" participation in the November members Only Star Party was discussed.
- The idea of holding a yearly "Student Night" Observatory star party was brought forward.
- John Dykes gave a lecture presentation on his Astro-Photography.

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Evening program for the 7:00 PM, Tuesday, January 17, 2012

"2012 The End of the World"

A slide-show lecture presented by Mike Thomas.

Note: Last month's newsletter was mailed too late for a timely arrival for the membership. In fact, the newsletter mailing was received after the December monthly meeting. My apologies to all members for that.

Events Calendar

~ January 2012 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1 Moon 1 st Qtr	2	3 Quadrantids meteor shower Look @ constellation Bootes	4 Quadrantids meteor shower Look @ constellation Bootes	5	6	7 Star Party
8	9 Full Moon	10	11	12	13	14 Star Party
15	16 Moon Last Qtr	17 <i>WNAS Meeting 7pm JCDO</i>	18	19	20	21 Dark Skies Star Party
22	23 New Moon	24	25	26	27	28 Dark Skies Star Party
29	30	31 Moon 1 st Qtr	Notes:			

~ February 2012 ~						
Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
			1	2	3	4 Star Party
5	6	7 Full Moon	8	9	10	11 Star Party
12	13	14 Moon Last Qtr	15	16	17	18 Dark Skies Star Party
19	20	21 <i>WNAS Meeting 7pm JCDO New Moon</i>	22	23	24	25 Dark Skies Star Party
26	27	28	29	Notes: *(Feb 20-March 12) The planet Mercury will be visible shortly after sunset. Mercury will reach greatest elongation from the Sun on March 5 , reaching a relatively bright magnitude of about -1. This will be your best chance to see the planet this year.		