



MICHIANA ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

The Sirius Observer

January 2009

South Bend, Mishawaka, Elkhart, Niles

January's Meeting Program:

We have a very interesting program scheduled for this coming Monday's meeting! We'll start with updates on several projects and have a bit of a preview of the MAS Science Alive plans and a chance to become involved. Canis Major and Minor will be our spotlight constellations for January.



Our main speaker, Dayle Brown, will bring skylore from around the world which she has extensively researched and beautifully illustrated. She has three books published and a fourth in progress. The art shown above illustrates a South African story about the stars we call Orion's Belt. This promises to be a very special session -- you don't want to miss it!

I hope to see you Monday!

Ruth Craft

Event Calendar

January 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
				1	2	3
4 ☾	5	6	7	8	9	10 ☽
11	12	13	14	15	16	17 ☽
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26 ●	27	28	29	30	31

Jan 4: First Quarter Moon
 Jan 10: Full Moon
Jan 19: MAS Meeting, 7:00 PM
 Jan 17: Last Quarter Moon
 Jan 24: New Moon observing, Potawatomi
 Jan 25: New Moon

February 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
1	2 ☾	3	4	5	6	7
8	9 ☽	10	11	12	12	14
15	16 ☽	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24 ●	25	26	27	28

Feb 2: First Quarter Moon
 Feb 10: Full Moon
Feb 16: MAS Meeting, 7:00 PM
 Feb 16: Last Quarter Moon
 Feb 21: New Moon observing, Potawatomi
 Feb 24: New Moon

See Comet Lulin!

(Comet Lulin, photograph by Gregg Ruppel)

A new comet is sweeping into the morning sky. Comet C/2007 N3 "Lulin" was discovered in July 2007 by Chinese astronomers at the Lu-Lin observatory as part of a survey of small solar system objects. The comet has a hyperbolic trajectory, meaning that it isn't in a closed orbit around the Sun. The may be the comet's only pass through our solar system, so if you want to take a look this will be your only chance.

Currently shining at about 6th magnitude in the constellation Libra, Comet Lulin will make its closest approach to the Earth on February 24th, when it may have brightened to 5th magnitude and will be very conveniently located close to the position of the planet Saturn. It will then be an easy binocular or telescopic object, and even be visible to the naked eye from a dark location. Of course, comets are notoriously difficult to predict when it comes to brightness, so it will pay to keep an eye on it any time the sky is clear.

Finder charts are available from Sky & Telescope magazine's website, here: <http://www.skyandtelescope.com/observing/home/35992534.html>

**\$9.99 Binocular Review**

Wandering through the film and battery section at Walgreen's drug store the other day, I noticed that they had boxed 7x50 Vivitar binoculars on sale for \$9.99. While "Vivitar" isn't the first name which comes to mind when thinking about astronomical binoculars, the price was attractive. The box looks pretty good, too.



Inside the box are the binoculars, made of a dark gray plastic, a nylon carrying bag, lens caps for both objective and eyepiece lenses, a strap, a cleaning cloth, and brief instructions. The objective lenses are a beautiful ruby-red color, presumably supposed to be some sort of anti-reflection coating. Eyepieces are uncoated. The right hand eyepiece rotates loosely, to allow the user to focus both eyepieces properly. There is also the expected center focusing knob, which moves very stiffly, and of course you can adjust the barrels for your own particular eye spacing.

So, we know that for \$10 the binoculars have to be the result of merciless cost cutting; how well do they work? I took them out one frigid night early enough that both Venus and Orion were high.

Venus is a tough target, even for premium optics. These are not premium optics and I saw what I expected to see: brilliant, rainbow colors surrounding Venus's tiny oblate orb. Very pretty, and entirely characteristic of inexpensive achromatic optics. You could easily spend a lot more than \$10 and see exactly the same thing.

The Pleiades were next, almost directly overhead. It was obvious that the field of view was quite narrow for 7x50 optics; I expect that there are restrictive field stops in there to cover for edge defects in the molded plastic lenses. The sky wasn't particularly dark, either, because the insides of the optical barrels aren't even

remotely black, being the same shade of dark gray as the rest of the binocular. Still, at least a couple of dozen stars could be teased out, which is much better than grandma's opera glasses could do.

I wasn't quite frozen solid yet, so I turned them to Orion next, rising over the pines to my east. M42, Orion's showpiece nebula, was a very small gray smudge against a medium gray sky, the result of Elkhart's light pollution overwhelming the poorly darkened insides of the binoculars.



The verdict? Actually, better than I had expected. There are a lot of defects but some of them are easily fixed: for example, I'm going to take the objective lenses off and spray the insides of the binoculars with Krylon Ultra Flat Black spray paint, to reduce internal reflections and improve contrast. At the same time, I'll remove the field stops, or at least open them up a bit with sandpaper, to get a wider field of view. This ought to take very little time, almost no cost, and I'll end up with a decent pair of cheap binoculars I won't worry about handing around at public star parties.

One last point: I've read on the net that one might be able to find these things at CVS drug stores for substantially less, if they still have any in stock. Otherwise, for binoculars for the kids or for loaning out at star parties, these cheap plastic binoculars have their uses!

Mike Sherck

This Space For Rent!!

You may have noticed a lack of "stuff" in this column, and perhaps even a lack of columns in this newsletter.

I know, I know: it's boring. Dreary, even.

You can help fix that. How about submitting an article for inclusion in the next newsletter?

Something related to astronomy, maybe. Stars, planets, telescopes, exotic cats, perhaps.



Help fill this space next month!

Michiana Astronomical Society
PO Box 262
South Bend, IN 46624



Like what you see? Come and join the fun – It's out of this world!

Michiana Astronomical Society Membership Application

Please fill out and mail, along with check or money order, to:

Michiana Astronomical Society
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South Bend, IN 46624

Name: _____
Address: _____
City: _____ State: _____ Zp Code: _____
Telephone: _____ E-mail: _____

Type of membership: Individual (\$15) Student or Senior (\$12) Family (\$20)