



RVAS NEWSLETTER



Vol. 24 No. 8

The Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society

August 2007

Join the RVAS Yahoo Group

- by Mike Overacker – RVAS
President

The RVAS is trying to bring members together in various ways. One such way is the creation of the RVAS Yahoo Group (RYG). The RYG is a group that was formed to allow RVAS members to log into the Yahoo system, and access assorted areas of information involving the club. The RYG members can receive the emails sent through the system. They can also access the RVAS RYG Calendar, which contains meeting times, special event times, as well as days and times of the RVAS “Members Only” observings at the Cahas Mountain Overlook. There is also a “Files” area where members can access files placed there by other members. You may also utilize a photos section for posting photos.

This is an RVAS Member Benefit, so it is a “closed group”, meaning that only current RVAS members will be allowed

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Earthlings on Mars

By Clark M. Thomas

In thirty years or less Earthlings could be walking on Mars. The two overachieving rovers have shown how much can be learned just from roaming around on the surface. Increasingly powerful orbiting instruments will point our Earthlings to the “good stuff” for exploration. Who knows, maybe we will start cultivating Martian life inside laboratories we have set up on Mars itself. I suspect that we will find primitive Martian life is similar to primitive Earth life, just as our Moon shares an ancient origin with Earth.

When those first Earthlings step onto the surface, they will not be humans. They will be comphumans. Comphumans are computer life forms with philosophical consciousness. These emergent life forms were first described in 1995 by me in the book, *Humans and Comphumans*. To better understand this

process, minus the Martian journey, visit <http://astronomy-links.net/HandC.html>.

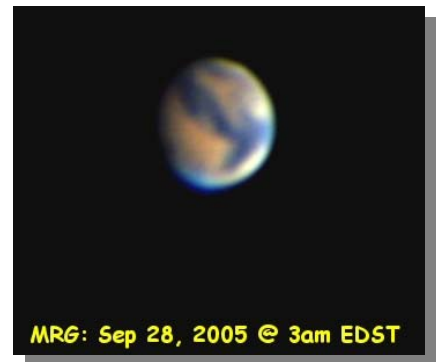


Photo by Michael Good

By the 2030s increasingly powerful astronomical instruments will already have satisfied much of our curiosity. It will therefore be harder to sustain a constituency in Congress for tens of billions of dollars just to have fragile humans walk about briefly on a hostile planet.

Comphumans will be our partners in space travel. Most of the vulnerabilities we humans have in deep space will be irrelevant to properly designed comphu-

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IDA Discounts Memberships

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August Mystery Object



The August Mystery Object inspires dancing, South of the border.

Send your best guess to:
Dave Thomas at
ka-8-inl@hotmail.com

Apple Ridge Farm GE Observatory dedicated

July 28, 2007

The GE Volunteer Observatory was officially opened at Apple Ridge Farm today.



Photo by Dave Thomas

VLT Update

By Dave Thomas

The featured movie at the July membership meeting was a history of the building of the Very Large Telescope (VLT) in Paranal, Chile.

The VLT array is made up of four eight meter telescopes. The scopes can work independently or in concert with each other. When working together they have the resolving power of a 16 foot telescope.



Photo by European Southern Observatory

The four scopes, working with three one meter scopes, make up an interferometer with extremely high resolution. The array will be able to work the spectrum from UV to infrared.

The ribbon cutting was performed by Summer Smith, daughter of GE volunteer Steve Smith. Miss Smith's brother Alex, and project leader Michael Good, assisted

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man astronauts. These new beings need not look or move like us, just think like us at our best. That is how they will qualitatively differ from today's rovers. Today's technology has primitive artificial intelligence, yet still has accomplished wonders. Imagine what a living machine philosopher could discover.

The price tag for advanced science on Mars will be much less when comphumans make the



Mars Rover (NASA)

first trips. The economics will go from fantasy to feasibility. We humans will later walk on Martian soil, but not until our comphumans have set up a protoplasm-friendly community to welcome us. Remember this important fact: Comphumans can "evolve" at warp speed. Humans evolve at glacial speed. By the end of this century comphumans could be androids with extremely high ethical values. We quarrelsome humans could stand to learn from our cybernetic children. Maybe our comphuman progeny will help save us from ourselves.

IDA Discounts Memberships for Astronomy Club Members

July 13, 2007. Tucson, Arizona, U.S.A. For a limited time, from September 1 to November 30, 2007, the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) will offer an introductory one-year \$20.00 membership for astronomy club members. Those wishing to receive this discount can either visit the IDA website at <http://darksky.org/support/membership.php> or contact the main office during the time of the offer.

Increasingly, thousands of members of astronomical clubs and societies are finding their best observing sites threatened by light pollution. Joining forces with IDA can help raise awareness about light pollu-

tion's problems and solutions. IDA strives to help communities control light pollution, which helps to preserve our night skies, conserve energy, and protect the nighttime environment.

The International Dark-Sky Association, an educational, environmental 501(c) (3) nonprofit, is dedicated to protecting and preserving the nighttime environment and our heritage of dark skies through quality outdoor lighting. With over 11,000 members in more than 70 countries, IDA is considered the leading authority concerning the problems and solutions related to light pollution.

Upcoming Events

August 8 - 12
Almost Heaven Star Party
 Spruce Knob, West Virginia
www.ahsp.org



July Mystery Object

The mystery object for July was the Lagoon Nebula in Sagittarius. Located on the sky at RA 18 hrs 3 minutes, Dec. -24 degrees 23 minutes, M8 shines at magnitude 6.

The Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society is a membership organization of amateur astronomers dedicated to the pursuit of astronomical observational and photographic activities. Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. the third Monday of each month at Center in the Square in downtown Roanoke, Virginia. Meetings are open to the public. Observing sessions are held one or two weekends a month at a dark sky site. Yearly individual dues are \$20.00. Family membership is \$25.00; student membership is \$10.00. For information, call the RVAS Message Line at 540-774-5651. Articles, quotes, etc. published in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the RVAS, its editor, officers, or individual members.

RVAS web page: <http://www.roavas.org>

Officers/Executive Committee: **Mike Overacker**, President/Webmaster (776-3092) **Vacant**, Vice President (000-0000); **Mark Hodges**, Secretary (774-5039); **Jeff Suhr**, Treasurer (563-0079); **Dave Thomas**, EC Member-At-Large, Newsletter editor (434-237-5135); **Katherine Hix**, Immediate Past President (334-2443); **Paul Caffrey**, Past President (345-2847)

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into the area. You can set up the events to remind you when the event is coming up. This is a good way to make sure you don't forget about upcoming RVAS observings, meetings, or public outreach events.

So, why not give it a try. All you have to do is go to yahoo.com. If you are already a yahoo.com member, just search for RVAS and the request to join the group. If you are not yet a yahoo.com member, you must, first, join the yahoo.com system, then you can select to join the RVAS Yahoo Group. When you ask to join, you will be put on hold until I can let you into the system, by verifying that you are a current RVAS member.

I hope to see you all on the RVAS Yahoo Group soon.

MONTHLY MEETING: Monday, August 20th, 7:30 p.m. Fifth floor meeting room, Center In The Square, Roanoke. The Guest Speaker for this meeting will be Dr. Neal Sumerlin from Lynchburg College. His topic will be, "Pluto: Planet or Imposter"; We hope that Dr. Sumerlin will also give us an update on the new observatory at the Claytor Nature Center in Bedford, VA.

"MEMBERS ONLY" WEEKEND OBSERVING SESSIONS: Unless otherwise noted, observing sessions are held at Cahas Mountain Overlook, milepost 139 on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

-- **August Sessions: TBA**

FRANKLIN CO. PARKS DEPT./RVAS PUBLIC STARGAZE:

Franklin Co. Recreational Park. For Franklin County residents; RVAS members welcome to participate. Call the RVAS Message Line, 540-774-5651, for information. (Next session: August 4th, 9:00 p.m., Franklin Co. Recreational Park.)

**Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society
3578 Berry Hill Drive
Roanoke, VA 24018**