



The festive season is upon us. Just think of it. The anticipation of retrieving your present from under the Christmas tree, tearing off the wrapping paper, and discovering with excitement that the box contains a fully equipped 15-inch refractor for your lunar and planetary observations... followed by the disappointment of finding that your other present is only an 11-inch Schmidt-Cassegrain, as you wanted a 14-inch for your deep-sky work. Never mind: the CCD, the filter wheel, the spectroscope, and the socks provide some consolation.



This issue of *I&I News* contains a few unusual items, and though I do not normally accept advertisements I have included publicity for some less well known commercial organisations.

Bob Marriott, *Director*



An interview with the legendary Jim Spong

Dir I understand that over many years you have produced millions of drawings of the Moon. What observing techniques have you developed and used?

Jim I am right-handed, so I draw with my left hand to minimise bias, and because the Moon is so bright I wear an eye-patch to prevent glare.

Dir How many of your drawings have been published?

Jim None.

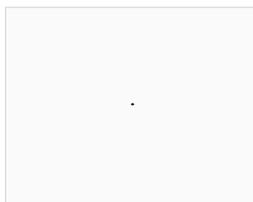
Society News

Members of Scurvythorpe Astronomical Society have begun plans to build a 60-inch reflector and run-off-roof observatory. Funds will be raised by holding jumble sales, and more than two members have postponed domestic plans for the next 782 weekends so that work can be started. It is hoped that King William V will accept an invitation to the opening ceremony during his jubilee year.

... and you fell for the old 'magnification 600', and bought it?

A keen observer

It is always good to encounter enthusiastic observers, and included at right is another of Horace Wombat's fine drawings of Jupiter observed with the naked eye.



For reliable observations use an ORTHOSPOGNOGOMETER
 Mk. I, original design; Mk. II, with extra flange
 Prevents eyepieces from dewing up, and repels bats. Comes with handy adapter for removing wallpaper, tea stains, and unwanted facial hair.
 Patent registered with the East Dulwich Slag-Shovellers and Clog-Bolters Friendly Society
£6.99 – three for £7.99
 Available from:
 Lucan Enterprises, Abattoir Gardens, Vladivostok

Did you know...?

The concept of relativity first formed in the mind of the young Einstein when his Auntie Winnie pointed out the constellation of Leo. This epochal event was immortalised by Stanley Holloway in his rendition of Marriott Edgar's monologue 'Albert and the Lion', although the words have since been changed to avoid offense to tram-drivers.

KEEP WARM ON THOSE FROSTY NIGHTS

Step into a sturdy all-in-one undergarment, specially designed for the discerning astronomer. Made of industrial-strength hessian, and delicately lined with polystyrene and horsehair, it will keep you warm and cosy, and also stop you falling over if you doze off. At little extra cost you can acquire the *de luxe* version, with hand-sewn non-reflecting sequins on the cuffs.

Write, quoting size of wallet, to:
 The Oliver Reed Home for Retired Distillery Workers
 15 Newt Lane
 Scotland

Book Now!

Total Solar Eclipse, 23 September 2090

Observe this rare British event in luxury from the cockpit of a Sopwith Camel. Chase the shadow for more than 800 yards over the rugged Cornish coastline, and then relax with a jam butty and a mug of Bovril.

Helmet and goggles provided; parachute optional. If cloudy, fuel will be dumped on the local populace. Early booking is advisable, as the number of applications is limited to 1. This is an all-in trip, including transport to Penzance (bus departs Inverness, 3.05 am).

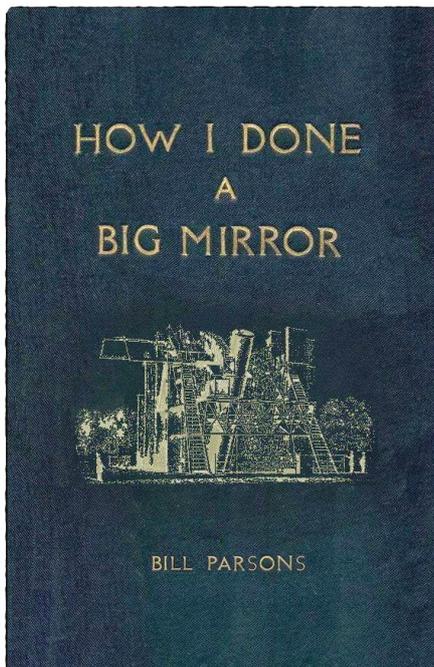
Price negotiable (not including tip or coast-guard call-out fee)

A lower-priced ground-based tour is also available, and a track will be cleared to allow an unimpeded run. Plimsolls supplied, but state size of feet when booking.

Apply to: Len Soddington, 837 Whelk Street, Cleethorpes

(Applications written on brown paper cannot be accepted)

A recently discovered gem



A personal memoir, c.1857, privately printed for distribution among a small circle of the author's friends.

Had enough of neighbours' floodlights?
Tired of illuminated nights?
Sick of the sight of orange-grey skies?

Well – it's payback time!

Now you can install a patented

BLACK FLOODLIGHT

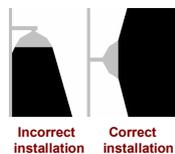
Have your revenge by switching it on at any time and turning day into night

With the sensor activated, anyone walking past your house will be plunged into darkness

Point it at your neighbours' windows, and listen for the noise of accidents

Aim it at their gardens, leave it turned on, and wait for all their plants to wither

And, of course, reveal a starlit sky in the daytime



Also available:
Automatic silence generators

Apply to:
VAINHOPE INSTRUMENT COMPANY
WOLKENKUCKUCKSHEIM

Observing Tip

If you cannot afford binoculars or a telescope, stand closer to the object you want to observe.

If you have difficulty using a telescope while wearing spectacles, try the new

TELECTACLES

The elegant lines and subtle curves of this specially commissioned design by a leading welder will blend with any form of dress. For balance, the side-pieces are attached to a stylish wire-framed hat. Suits any occasion. Can be used with a telescope, or on their own.

Recommended by Neighbourhood Watch

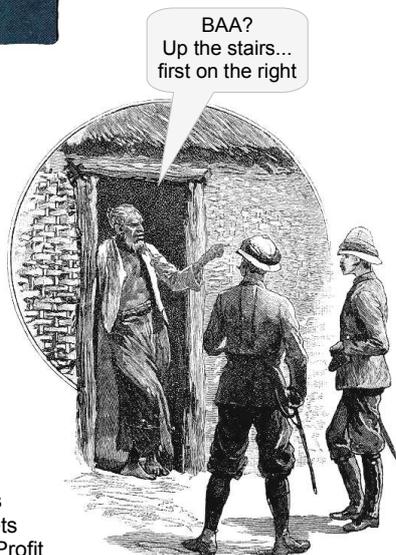
Weight: 6½ lbs Price: £170 (lenses extra)

All remittances should be sent somewhere



Books wanted

- Teach Yourself to Read
- A History of the Tank-Top
- Japanese-Welsh Dictionary
- Build Your Own Sludge Tank
- The DIY Tracheotomy Manual
- Emulsion Blending as a Hobby
- Half-Hours with a Bottle Opener
- A Collector's Guide to Ice Cubes
- Quantum Mechanics for Thickies
- Egyptian Ice-Skaters Annual 1931
- Famous Astronomers with Beards
- Goat-Stretching for Office Workers
- Fly-Paper Mechanics for the Beginner
- Index of Society Nutters (UK edition)
- The Boy's Book of Epidemic Diseases
- One Hundred Facts about Paving Slabs
- The Reader's Digest Book of Slug Pellets
- Organ Transplant Surgery for Fun and Profit
- Lunar Rainfall Statistics 1979: Government Paper
- The Scratch-and-Sniff Book of East Anglian Cowsheds



— NEW —

Inflatable tripods

No more rusty knobs and grazed shins. Will take camera, telescope, or binoculars. A boon for the astronomer on holiday, and particularly useful for underwater photography.

Top of the instrument range is the

Floatascope LX Ghia

... an equatorially-mounted telescope with slow motions, setting circles, and elastic bands. Simply inflate the components, clip them together, and insert the lens.

Supplied with 25-litre gas cylinder and heavy-duty trolley

Also available:
puncture repair kits and bricks

For a comprehensive price list send £25 in used notes to:

Mobile Traders Ltd.
St Elmo's Car Park
Fort William

How to run an astronomy meeting

Bob Marriott

In practise, the organisation of an astronomy meeting differs from what could be expected theoretically. As in other disciplines, experience is all, and the present guide is based on activities that I have witnessed and been subjected to at astronomy meetings around the country over many years.

The Venue

... should be as distasteful as possible: boot-prints above the door, a variety of holes in the walls, a few broken windows, knife-marks in scattered chairs, and bare wires extruding from light switches... all these add to the nuances. The meeting room should be either much too large or far too small. The best venues are either a few yards from a dual carriageway in the middle of a city with no parking facilities within a mile, or in a hamlet that is not marked on a large-scale map. For evening meetings on clear days in spring and summer, curtains and blinds should be removed from west-facing windows; in winter, cold, sharp air-currents should be used for ventilation; and at least one 2kW flood-light should point directly into the room. Arrangements should be made for a caretaker to regularly interrupt the meeting by walking into the room and rattling his keys.

The Chairman

... theoretically controls the initial progress of the meeting. Announcements can be dragged out for some time, and irrelevant topics can be introduced to invoke lengthy discussion, hence throwing out the timing of the entire meeting. In this way, speakers with prepared talks can be forced into either presenting them in a fraction of the allotted time or cancelling them. The Chairman's position is particularly powerful with the presence of a guest speaker, who should be introduced as blandly as possible: for example, 'someone who has been interested in astronomy for some time'. Alternatively, the Chairman can describe the speaker's talk at length and pre-empt most of what he has to say. The speaker then has to repeat what has already been said, and if he comments on the Chairman's introduction then an atmosphere of embarrassment pervades the room.

The Secretary

... holds a somewhat less powerful position than the Chairman – at least during a meeting. However, he too can begin unnecessary discussion, and if a guest speaker is present he can introduce him before the Chairman has a chance to say anything. The Secretary should also ensure that a very loud alarm clock will remind the speaker that he has five minutes left. When a guest speaker has finished it is a good idea to insult him by including two or three previously unannounced poor-quality talks by members. If the Secretary has arranged an informal meeting he can give a previously unannounced talk himself, and can also change the running order without telling anyone – a subtle move that disorients potential speakers and also leads to a hasty rearrangement of slides by the projectionist, who can then take full advantage of the opportunities presented.

The Projectionist

... can obviously contribute only during illustrated talks, but when doing so he is in probably the most powerful position of all. If a screen has to be set up it should preferably be an old curtain or sheet with yellow patches, with a convenient current of air to produce a rippling effect. The most skilled practitioner will drop all the slides as soon as they are handed to him, but this is an advanced move which should not

be attempted unless it can be made to appear like an accident. Otherwise, he must first ensure that the projector's position is not adjusted until the first slide is shown, as he can then move it about while mumbling 'hang on a minute' until it is perfectly adjusted with a slight tilt. Just before a talk, slides can be positioned so that they spring out of the carrier, as after replacement there are always a few the wrong way round, and the projectionist can then claim that this is not his fault because the slides are not spotted (an essential omission to be ensured by the speaker). Replacing slides in the wrong order can disrupt the talk, and specks of dust which appear up to several inches in diameter on the screen can obscure details which the speaker wishes to discuss. Jamming of the projector will cause a delay resulting in the speaker losing track of what he is saying, especially if a particularly important slide falls in and becomes stuck next to the bulb. Projected slides should be left slightly out of focus so that the projectionist can claim that the fault lies in the photograph. He should also ensure that the remote control does not work, that if the bulb blows there is no replacement, and that the lead plugged into the projector be left slightly loose so that eventually a small column of smoke and its accompanying smell will cause a minor panic. Finally, he should turn off the projector before the lights are turned on, and then wait for the sounds of shins on chairs. These days, of course, with the use of laptops, the challenges are different: incompatible systems, unreadable disks, failed and unchargeable batteries, missing cables, ghost images due to low-quality connections, movies that refuse to run... All of these, and more, can be incorporated, resulting in a cluster of people mumbling and rebooting, an increasingly impatient audience, and intakes of breath at a flicker on the screen.

The Tea-Maker

... should always be someone who does not want the job. He can then take revenge by clattering cups, saucers, and cutlery, and with the speaker in full flow he can turn on the lights and shout 'tea's ready!' Tea for meetings should be made with one tea-bag, fifty-seven spoons of industrial varnish, and six pints of warm water. Milk should be either sterilised, from a goat, or powdered, in which case it should be outdated and jaundiced. White sugar should have brown lumps in it, and all biscuits should be soft.

The Speaker

... can make or break the meeting, especially if he is the only speaker. If an informal meeting is planned, never volunteer to give a talk, as the fewer the speakers the more work for the Secretary. One technique to avoid speaking is by pretending to be an inhibited introvert, even if in the habit of running naked through the town centre every Saturday lunchtime. When giving a talk there are several ways of annoying the audience, either by speech or with actions. A popular technique is to sway from side to side or, even better, to pace back and forth, preferably in line of sight, so that for half the time the speaker is facing the wrong way. If pacing is carried on continuously over a distance of several yards it can be very annoying. If a microphone is present it should be avoided, and when slides are shown the speaker should be facing the screen so that no-one can hear him – both of which are particularly important if the talk is being recorded. During a talk, pauses of several seconds will create tension, as will the slightest reference to anything political. If a torch or laser pointer is used it should be wobbled so that no-one is quite sure what is being pointed out. If a stick with a padded end is used it should be reversed so that the non-padded end can be occasionally scraped across the screen. When showing amateur slides, one or two of nebulae should be included. These need not show

the nebulae, and the speaker can then utter remarks such as 'it shows up better with a slide viewer' or '... on my monitor', and 'you can probably see it better from the back'. A photograph taken with the 200-inch Palomar reflector or the Hubble Space Telescope should always be included, presenting the opportunity to use the worn-out and fatuous comment, 'this is one I took last week – no, not really', which for some incomprehensible reason always produces a laugh from the audience. The speaker should also include slides which should not be there and others which he does not have time to discuss, and he can then repeatedly say 'sorry about that'. If an overhead projector is used, the transparencies should always be in the wrong order, and at least one of them should be lost. These days, with PowerPoint the speaker can display all of his notes and reveal his illiteracy, so that the entire talk can be read by the audience, and no pictures need be shown. Finally, the talk should be much shorter or longer than planned – especially the latter – either to inconvenience subsequent speakers or to frustrate members of the audience who are desperate for an alcohol fix. Speakers visiting smaller societies should travel by first-class rail and taxi, and then claim expenses that bankrupt the organisation. For the guest speaker the *tour de force* is to telephone the Secretary about two hours before the meeting to say that he cannot attend; but the above procedures are then relinquished, and further opportunities may well be reduced.

The Audience (Hoi Polloi)

The possibilities for audience participation are endless, and can here be described only briefly. Before the meeting starts, the first move can be made by sitting on the projectionist's chair, despite the presence of several rows of empty chairs. Once the meeting has started, several techniques can be developed. The beginner should start with habits such as rustling sweet papers or swinging the legs – the latter being a visual annoyance as well as making the chair squeak. With confidence, progress can be made to even more annoying habits, including the jingling of coins in the pocket, which is particularly irritating. Changing seat in the middle of a talk should be attempted, but only if the projector lead can be tripped over on the way. Holding a conversation while someone is giving a talk is particularly effective, especially if the lights are out, and if two or or three conversations break out at the same time then so much the better. An isolated chuckle or laugh for no apparent reason can often interrupt the speaker's flow, as can the occasional loud utterance of 'I can't hear you', although the latter usually results in the speaker lowering his voice. The more experienced member of audience should sit in the front row, as near to the speaker as possible, so that he can interrupt at irregular intervals to either ask a question to which the answer is obvious, ask an awkward question to which he already knows the answer, present his views about something totally irrelevant and preferably nothing to do with astronomy, or tell the speaker he is wrong, especially if he is right. Whichever option is taken, it is essential that regardless of the subject of the talk the speaker should be asked 'Do you believe in UFOs?' Failing all these, the additional advantage of sitting in the front row is that of standing up in front of everyone, struggling to put on an overcoat, and leaving early. If the speaker invites questions at the end of his talk, then protracted conversation with him should be attempted, but with occasional pauses for someone else to ask a question, which can then be interrupted. This should be continued until the speaker feels as uncomfortable as possible, especially if he is a guest. Anyone with false teeth should visibly and overtly remove them before asking a question, which should be directed to the audience rather than to the speaker.

The Vote of Thanks

... should be given by someone with a large supply of personal anecdotes. If he has carried out similar work to that described in the talk then he should discuss it, particularly if his results are better. Finally, after asking the audience to 'thank the speaker in the usual way' he should applaud for a maximum of two seconds and then put his chair on top of another one. This will induce the audience to begin stacking chairs while the speaker is still standing and before the Chairman has a chance to close the meeting. Alternatively, the Chairman can say that there is no time for questions, put on his coat, and leave.

After the Meeting

A speaker should never be offered hospitality after he has served his purpose. With a concerted effort by members he can be suddenly left alone; or, if he has been met in a layby and guided through country lanes to a mysterious location, he can be abandoned outside a hut in a remote field.

Whatever the approach and methods, the event should be memorable for everyone.

