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OBSERVING : THE SKY THIS MONTH

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TSFTNTW: 25 Aug - 8 Sep 2010

Contributed by Blake Nancarrow
 Aug 26, 2010, 01:10

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TSFTNTW: 25 Aug - 8 Sep 2010 +

introduction

Blake delivered *The Sky For The Next Two Weeks* presentation at the 25 Aug 2010 meeting. The 2-page handout provided included a calendar for the subsequent 14 days or so (to early Sep) and some descriptive notes. The notes have been reproduced here, on this web page. You may view or download and print [the calendar](#) PDF file (243 KB).

our variable Sun

Tempress!

Our Sun is tempting us. The odd sunspot. Some pretty prominences. Coronal mass ejection this way and that. Manufacturing news-producing coronal holes. Jostling our magnetosphere. Forcing us to roll the 'scope out of the garage or roll back the roof. Bolt up the hydrogen filters and inspect the baader film for pin pricks and tears. Aim toward Leo.

And when we look through the eyepiece or at the digital camera image: nothing. Blank, featureless Sun.

Analogous to evening sessions with some scattered cloud: locate large sucker hole; choose astronomical target; aim or star hop; look through the eyepiece. At cloud. Turn to sky; locate large sucker hole; choose astronomical target; aim or star hop; look through the eyepiece. At cloud. Rinse and repeat.

We are still in this low long trough in the middle of the 11 year peaks.

But the amateur gets lucky every once in a while now and may enjoy an active, churning solar surface.

[image by Blake; from CAO; MallinCam HC; SolarMax 60; Tele Vue 101; 10 Aug 2010; centre spot 1093; archipelago like 1096 above and right; new 1097 on east limb]

Soon we'll be riding the wave, sweeping up to solar maximum. Full boil More sunspots than you can count. A



flotilla of flares. More aurora you can shake a green laser pointer at.

We must be patient.

Keep an eye on the Spaceweather web site. One stop shopping for sunspots, K-index, aurora, links, photos, etc.

<http://spaceweather.com>

northern lights

They're called northern lights for a reason! If you want to improve your chances of see aurora, go north, way north. Recent reports went as low as Orillia, 44.6°. But remember, you need dark skies, free of light pollution and Moon light. It is thusly relatively rare to see aurora inside city limits.

Use the camera! Try these settings:

- 20 or 30 sec. exposures
- f2.8 or f2.0
- ISO 400 to 1000
- set on tripod
- wide-angle lens

Some don't like the quality or grain in an ISO 1000 shot. But then you'll need to shoot longer and that can blur out the aurora and make stars trail.

Aurora will only get better over the next 5 years!

See Robert Snache's photo from Rama:

http://spaceweather.com/aurora/gallery_01aug10.htm

use the Moon

full Moon - Aug 24

3rd quarter - Sep 1

new Moon - Sep 8

1st quarter - Sep 15

Use geologically active Luna to add interest to your photographs this month. Try to capture the Pleiades near the waning Moon on Aug 31.

View and/or photograph your career oldest Moon on Sep 6 or 7. Bright and early in the morning. Don't say I didn't warn you.

[28.1 day Moon; photo by Blake; from CAO; 10 Jul 2010; 5:08 AM]

Use the thin, young Moon a few days later as a marker to find Venus in the day time. See below...

When the Moon is "away," bracketing the new phase on Sep 8, use the opportunity to hunt for dim, large targets, like the zodiacal light before dawn, or comet Hartley near Lacerta.

Zodiacal light is reflected sunlight from fine dust in plane of the solar system. You need dark skies to see it. Come on up to the CAO. It's perfect for that!

Consider double stars and variable stars on moonlit nights.

<http://www.skyandtelescope.com/observing/objects/projects/3304276.html>

planets near the Sun

The wonderful triple conjunction ended, Venus and Mars are now abandoning Saturn, as it begins to drift toward Sol.



The next couple of clear nights probably represent your last chance to see Saturn for a time, before it is opposite the Sun from us (superior conjunction).

Even Venus and Mars are separating, slowly. They are about 3° apart on Aug 24 but double that in about a week.

spotting Venus

Try to see Venus on Sat 11 Sep, any time after noon. They rise in the south-east. They cross the meridian around 4 PM.

This is safe to do since we're following the Sun.

Try these simple steps:

- get in shadow of building or roof
- if nec., check software or a web site to confirm the sky location
- locate Moon with binos (on tripod)
- see a bright point 3° up and to the right? that's Venus!
- use your hand, at arm's length, to gauge distances...
- now try to spot naked eye!

Check out Jerry's photos and notes from Pittsburg.

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~zhuxj/astro/html/daytimevenus.html>

planets in dark space

Jupiter rules the night, gliding slowly from east to west, as we approach opposition, when the planet is opposite us and the Sun. And therefore closest to us.

Jupiter will help you find nearby Uranus. It's a good time, when the Moon's not around, and you're able to get out of the city light dome, to spot Uranus naked eye. Then look for moons Titania and Oberon through a telescope.

Jupiter is putting on a great show with moons dancing about, with the southern belt washed out. Keep watching for Great Red Spot opportunities, single and double shadows on the surface of the gas giant, tiny moons ducking into the deep shadow of the largest planet. Endless fun.

It's less than a week after Neptune's opposition. This is the time to view the last official planet in our solar system. It is 29.00 astronomical units (AU) away. Or 4.35 billion kms. Which would take you, going just over the Ontario speed limit, about 4,300 years to get there. Do you have a gasoline points card?! It takes light 4 hours to travel between Earth and Neptune.

Here's another distant moon opportunity: see if you can tag Triton.

tiny rocks

Asteroid 2337 Boubin we don't have great orbital data on. With a rank of 22, it's a risky asteroid occultation to try for, even though it is to block a bright (mag 7.8) star. The estimated duration for the event, at 5:02 AM on Labour Day, is less than a second. Fire up the video recording equipment. We can use your help. Even from your backyard, within the 1-sigma line, you might catch a glimpse of it. It is supposed to fly over Barrie and Orillia.



After midnight on Sep 11, when many will be at Canada's oldest provincial park, the rock 78 Diana is to fly over Kingston. This occultation has the highest rank rating of 100. But that doesn't mean it is a sure thing. The 11.4 magnitude star should dim for 6.7 seconds.

Or maybe Murphy will have something to say about that.

<http://www.asteroidoccultation.com>

space ice

Comet 10P/Tempel 2 is disappointing visually. While mag 8.6, it sits fairly low in the sky, in Cetus. You gotta stay up fairly late to see this diffuse harbinger.

103P/Hartley 2 on the other hand holds much promise. It is much higher in the sky, flying over Andromeda, arching toward Perseus. It's almost overhead around midnight.

Some say it will reach magnitude 5 in October, which puts it into the naked eye category! Easy in binos.

Start looking at the end of August and early September, particularly when the Moon won't interfere.

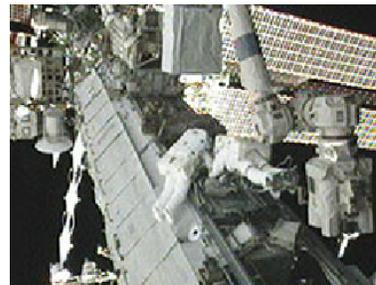
<http://aerith.net>

wanted: plumber

Rate: commensurate with trade employment; with danger pay. Willing to travel. Must work well with others. Required languages: English, Russian, Japanese. Skills: extra vehicular activity, neutral buoyancy, ammonia pump repair.

The International Space Station seems to be shipshape after the on-orbit repair of the cooling system.

[image courtesy NASA TV]



For humans on the ground in Ontario, happily, we get to see the complex fly over once again in evening times. I will attempt to get single or multi-frame images with our MallinCam...

NASA continues to tune the final tasks and dates for the shuttle fleet. It seems like tickets for viewing the last launches will be as popular as unobtainium.

<http://spaceflightnow.com>

summary

- look at Saturn one last time
- enjoy Jupiter
- view Neptune while 29 AU away

- look for moons of Uranus and Neptune
- track the ISS
- see comet Hartley brightening
- catch zodiacal light before dawn beginning Sep 5
- spot Venus near Moon mid-day Sep 11

off to Dew Lake

Many, myself included, will not make the next RASC meeting in 2 weeks. We will be at the **RASC Toronto Centre's Annual Algonquin Adventure** camp out / star party / dark sky fest on the beach of Mew Lake. Ready to view planets and moons, deep sky objects, asteroid occultations, day-time planets, zodiacal light, the odd comet, and more stars than you can count.



Be seeing you.

clear dark skies
Blake Nancarrow
astronomy at computer hyphen ease period com

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