

Southern Maine Astronomers
Club Meeting
January 2, 2025 7:00 p.m.

Attending were members Ron Thompson, Howie Marshall, Dave Crocker, Russell Pinizzotto, George Bokinsky, Craig Snapp, Dean Ostergaard, Bob Dodge, Dwight Burkard, Dave Manchester, Paul Howell, Kevin Berry, David Gay, John Saucier, Greg Thorup, Marc Stowbridge, Anne Dobriko, Yves Feder, Greg Shanos, Bill Denig, Sara Deane, Joanne Sharpe, Mike Simmons, Anita DeVito, Brian Perkins, Jenna Buckingham, Brad Irish, David Crooks, and new members Stephen Turner, Gil Fraser, Norm Bosse and Tim Walsh, and Rob Burgess and guests Jeremy ____.

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Rob Burgess opened the formal portion of the meeting and welcomed our new members and noted that membership has reached 121, the highest level in club history!

Recent activities by members:

- Paul Howell noted he has been working on a project and utilizing information from the site Astometry.net and has found it very useful.
- Greg Shanos had a new ZWO S30 scope under his Christmas Tree.
- Rob reminded members that they could suggest speakers for future club meetings based on recent articles they've read, podcasts they've listened to, etc.

Announcements:

- Rob noted that the 2025 star party schedule was under development but members should feel free to send out emails or texts to announce if they were doing some impromptu observing and inviting friends.
- The next Director's meeting will be Wednesday, Jan 15 at 7 pm, via zoom. Agendas can be obtained from Rob (rburgess250@comcast.net).
- The next club meeting will be Thursday, Feb 6, with member Greg Shanos providing a comparison of a variety of new electronic telescopes.
- Jeremy Wright and Dean Ostergaard are working on organizing and field testing equipment the club has for sale. As items are vetted notice of their availability will be posted on our website.
- Knit caps with the SMA logo embossed into a leather tag were now available for \$25 from Paul Howell (howellrcp@gmail.com)
- It's membership renewal time. Renewing now through the website is a simple and efficient way to remain a member of the club.

Guest Speakers:

Russ Pinizzotto introduced the evening's format that will consist of shore presentations by club members, designed to provide some basic observing advice as well as updates on some major space news and observing activities within the club.

Rob Burgess provided some basic observing advice, highlighting the club website listing of dark sky sites in our footprint (and encouraging members to submit their favorites to supplement the list). Bringing additional layers of clothing (even on summer nights) was recommended along with waterproof footwear. Dark adaptation was discussed along with the technique of averted vision to see fainter objects. Astronomical weather forecasting sites such as Astrospheric and Clear Sky Clock were recommended along with cell phone apps such as Stellarium and Sky Safari to help with navigation. Other tools such as SkyMaps and planispheres were encouraged. Finally, Rob explained how to turn a cell phone completely red for star party use, and other star party etiquette.

Ron Thompson provided a fascinating report on the Parker Solar Probe and its multiple Venus/Sun elliptical orbits, with each bringing the probe closer to the Sun. The last occurred on 12/24/24 when the probe flew a mere 3.8 million miles above the “surface” of the Sun and survived unscathed. The mission was designed to better understand heat transference from the surface (6,000°) to the corona (1,000,000°) and properties of the solar wind. The probe is the closest manmade object to the sun and the fastest (reaching the speed of about 450,000 mph).

Greg Shanos reported on his participation in NASA-designed Parker Solar Probe Observing Challenge, that involves imaging the Sun before and after the closest approach by the probe and documenting the relationship of the probe to Earth as it made its approach. Greg identified all sunspots in his images and found SolarHam.net a very useful source for the actual sunspot identifiers. Upon the submission of his work he will receive a certificate from NASA.

David Crocker is leading our solar observing group within the club. There are now 6 members. The group exchanges emails throughout the week with observing results, questions and advice. Why solar observing – David provided three practical answers: 1) It’s a daytime event that doesn’t negatively affect his sleep patterns. 2) Site restrictions are less of an issue for observing. 3) It’s dynamic! There are few other targets where you can see changes in real time. Plus, with hundreds of billions of stars in our galaxy, we’ve got one right in our backyard that gives us life, so why not study it! People wanting to join the group can contact David at dcc04444@gmail.com.

Russ Pinizzotto is leading the other observing challenge group in the club, designed to get members participating in the approximately 80 observing challenges offered by the Astronomical League. The group meets via zoom on every other Tuesday night at 7pm. If interested in joining contact Russ at zzotto@icloud.com.

Marc Stowbridge described the Library Telescope Program which was started in New Hampshire by the NH Astronomical Society about 15 years ago. Marc introduced the program to SMA about 14 years ago and he was very praising of how SMA responded (primarily through the efforts of Ron Thompson, Forrest Sumner, Bob Dodge, and others). Maine has about 58 libraries participating with NH having about 200 telescopes in circulation. Nationally, all but two states (Mississippi and Hawaii) have libraries participating in the program. The program has even gone international, with nine countries involved including Switzerland, Portugal and South Korea. A challenge has been the demise of Orion Telescopes. However, Highpoint Scientific has come up with an alternative to the 4.5” Starblast reflector and Highpoint is even doing all the aftermarket modifications! For more information see LibraryTelescopes.org or reach out to Marc at marcstow@aol.com.

Anne Dobriko offered several books she has enjoyed and found very educational in learning about astronomy: H.A. Rey's classic **Find the Constellations; Turn Left at Orion: The Observing Guide to the Messier Marathon; and Cultural Astronomy of the Japanese Archipeligo**. Howie Marshall suggested **The Perfect Machine** on the building of the Palomar Observatory. Russ Pinizzotto suggested the works of Steven O'Meara on the Herschel 400, the Caldwell objects, the Messier objects, and on Southern Skies. Greg Thorup suggested fiction: Perceval Lovell's **Mars and Exploration of Space** by Arthur C. Clarke. Rob Burgess recommended **40 Nights to Knowing the Sky** by Fred Schaaf. Greg Shanos recommended various titles on deep sky objects. David recommended the story on the building of the Palomar Observatory. George Bokinsky recommended **Orbital**, a well-researched fictional account of life on the ISS.

Night Sky Tour - Russ Pinizzotto

Russ highlighted

the [https://d.docs.live.net/853606b1b78fccf0/Documents/Robert/Documents/Southern Maine Astronomers/Meetings/Club Meetings/C](https://d.docs.live.net/853606b1b78fccf0/Documents/Robert/Documents/Southern%20Maine%20Astronomers/Meetings/Club%20Meetings/C) Hubble Space Telescope 35th Anniversary Observing Challenge – observation deadlines monthly in 2025 with a reporting deadline of January 31, 2026. <https://www.astroleague.org/nasa-observing-challenges-special-awards/>

- M 1 – Crab Nebula
- M 42 – Orion Nebula
- M 43 – DeMairan's Nebula in Orion
- M 78 - Reflection Nebula in Orion
- M 79 – Globular Cluster in Lepus
- C 46 – Hubble's Variable Nebula in Monceros
- C 73 – Globular Cluster in Columba (barely 6° above southern horizon for us)
- C 103 - Tarantula Nebula in Dorado (not visible here)

Various certificates will be issued based on whether a minimum of one or four of these are observed during the month, with the project completed after twelve months. February's targets have yet to issued.

Rob Burgess
President, SMA