



by
Jason Batey

Star Party 3rd Annual VicSouth

Your 'Activities and Events Editor' – Jason Batey – was again a keen and willing participant at the VicSouth Desert Spring Star Party.

Hosted by the Astronomical Society of Victoria (ASV) and Astronomical Society of South Australia (ASSA) this event was again a fantastic success.

Held at the Little Desert Nature Lodge, near Nhill in Western Victoria early November each year, the 2005 event was very well attended with over 90 registered participants ... not to mention approximately 100 local visitors. In addition, there was a busload of well-behaved and now astronomically well-informed children.

Jam-packed with activities and events designed to interest and challenge even the most ardent visual observers, VicSouth enjoys increasing popularity.

Friday night's viewing was superb with late afternoon high-level cloud clearing that revealed near-perfect seeing for the evening. The public viewing session was very popular, with visitors treated to an early evening 'green-laser' guided session taking in constellations, planets, passing satellites and anything else that attracted the "what's that" phrase! A brief volley of questions was followed by some telescopic enjoyment with most registered VicSoutherners happy to share views with the adoring and inquisitive locals.

Particularly pleasing was the amount of children who got a chance to look through some awesome equipment. Typically, the waiting time was brief allowing the kids extended views of objects targeted by experienced owners. With the quality of equipment and interpretation both very high, all who got the chance to peer through an eyepiece did indeed experience something quite memorable.

Numerous fireballs

Everyone was treated to a spectacular meteor shower throughout the evening, with the Taurids not disappointing. Fireballs were numerous, at times leaving trails – evidence of their size and impact on the upper atmosphere.

Saturday's activities saw the usual assortment of presentations, headed by Perry Vlahos and his now-famous list of binocular highlights. Twenty of the best spring objects selected by Perry were presented using handouts and digital projection.

Matthew Lovell, from www.telescopes-astronomy.com.au was on hand for the astro-mart and swap meet, with a wide range of goodies to keep the astronomers very happy (Matt managed to lighten my wallet ... again! Ed.)



Joe Grida, Paul Rodgers and Steve Garth with a 10" f/6 Astro Optical Newtonian.

David Harding with his Meade 8" LX90.



Darren Bellingham and Jon Saul with an 8" f/7.5 Dob.

Field Report – Desert Spring Star Party

Prizes galore

Astro-trivia came up next with twenty of the toughest questions ever devised (these questions would even have Eddie McGuire from Millionaire cringing!). With a hearty choice of DVDs as prizes, brainpower stretched to the absolute limits. To give you an idea of how hard the questions were: the winner only scored 13 out of 20, with most scoring only 8! Congratulations to Tom Richards (ASSA) and Steve Garth (ASV) the only people who scored over 10 (13 and 12 respectively – out of 20).

After dinner, the draw for the SKY & SPACE Door Prize raffle commenced, with the first prize going to Jeff and Emma McLaughlin (\$50 SKY & SPACE Shop Gift Voucher). Shirley and Ian Barry took out the other 1st prize, winning a 1-year SKY & SPACE subscription. Twenty other lucky astronomers also received complimentary copies of SKY & SPACE, which included \$5 gift vouchers. In total, \$350 worth of SKY & SPACE prizes and giveaways went out to twenty-four different people.

Paul Homer with a C-8 on a G-11.



Jeff and Emma McLaughlin with their 18" f/3.9 homemade Dobsonian. The mirror was made by Ken Nightingale circa 1957!



George Seremetidis, Paul Homer and Steven Dang with a homemade 8" Dobsonian telescope – complete with the 'water bottle' balancing system.



Thirty year-long member of the ASV, Ron Garrett, with his four-day old Meade 12" LX200GPS.



Hydrogen Alpha Solar Viewing was popular. Here, Chris Venter is pictured under 'Astro-Towel' – essential equipment for solar viewing!

VicSouth Star Party

Get geared-up for VicSouth 2006

Little Desert Nature Lodge has now proven itself to be an idyllic location for star parties with a good range of accommodation options, excellent amenities, clean safe surroundings, clear views from horizon-to-horizon and, most important of all, immaculate night skies.

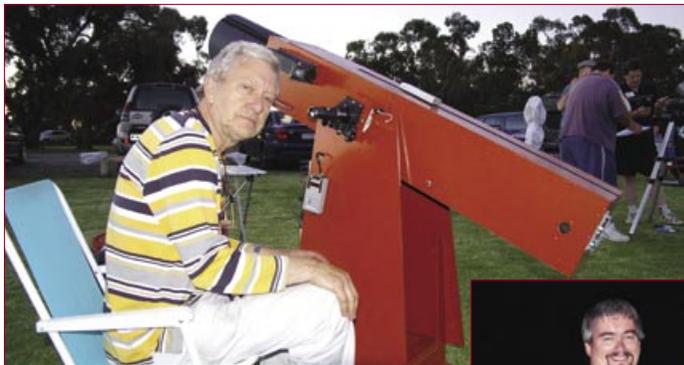
To top all this off, the Lodge offers first-class walking trails, guided tours, and four-wheel drive sojourns – creating the total astronomical weekend package of discovery for all the family to enjoy. Once again, thanks must go to the ASV and ASSA for their wonderful organisation of this great event. Personally, I am very much looking forward to VicSouth 2006.

For further information regarding next year's event visit the VicSouth website at <http://www.vicsouth.com/> **S&S**

Although it was very tempting to write more about this wonderful event, I decided that pictures speak louder than words. This applies particularly to star parties where the central elements are people and their telescopes. So, a huge thank-you to all those people who let me capture the moments when stargazers are in their element ... next to a telescope! Ed

All images in this article were taken by Jason Batey.

Ray Carlton with his homemade 6" f/15 folded refractor. Ray specifically designed this scope for children and disabled astronomers with a 'constant height' eyepiece.



John Huntington and his Celestron C-11 NexStar.

Man vs Machine competitors: Lynton Hemer with his 8" f/7 Dobsonian and the 'New' SKY & SPACE Magazine's comet guru, Michael Mattazio with his Celestron C-11. Suffice to say, Lynton didn't lose by much!



Fraser Farrell with his 'very' homemade 8" f/6 Dobsonian.

Chris Venter and his Takahashi FS-102 on a Mountain Instruments MI-250 and custom-made 8" stainless steel pier.



Some of the more than 90 attendees of this wonderful star party.



Axel, Craig and Frauce Husner with the family's Meade 14" LX200GPS.

