

The Warren Astronomical Society Paper

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2006 WAS OFFICERS

// December 2006

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The WASP (Warren Astronomical Society Paper) is the official monthly publication of the Society. Each new issue of the WASP is e-mailed to each member and/or available online www.warrenastronomicalsociety.org. Requests by other Astronomy clubs to receive the WASP, and all other correspondence should be addressed to the editor, Cliff Jones, email: cliffordj@ameritech.net

Articles for inclusion in the WASP are strongly encouraged and should be submitted to the editor on or before the first of each month. Any format of submission is accepted, however the easiest forms for this editor to use are plain text files. Most popular graphics formats are acceptable. Materials can be submitted either in printed form in person or via US Mail, or preferably, electronically via direct modem connection or email to the editor.

Disclaimer: The articles presented herein represent the opinions of the authors and are not necessarily the opinions of the WAS or the editor. The WASP reserves the right to deny publication of any submission.

Astro Chatter by Larry Kalinowski



This is the last chance you'll have to get your tickets for the WAS Awards Banquet. Since the banquet is on the third Thursday of the month, there's no meeting at the MCCC. The Cranbrook meeting, on the 4th, will be the last chance to buy your tickets. It's going to be held at the same place as last year, DeCarlo's, on Ten Mile Road, just east of Mound Road, in Warren, Michigan. The cost is \$30.00 per person, which includes food and spirits. Since no prominent speaker has been chosen this year, the club is reverting back to one of its past entertainment features, the continuously rolling slide show. It'll feature people and events from previous years. Members are asked to donate digital pictures to Riyad Matti, our 1st Vice President at riyadmatti@yahoo.com. Door prizes will again be awarded via a raffle at one dollar a ticket. You can also mail your dinner check to Philip Martin, 2452 Crooks, #52, Troy, MI 48084,

provided it gets there before December 10, because the money for the banquet must be paid to the caterer on December 11th. Make your check out to the WAS.

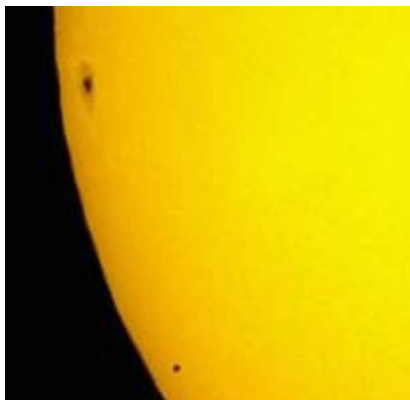
If you have anything to donate to the prize table at the banquet, please bring it with you to the dinner or give it to one of the officers if you're not going to be there. We're looking for books, software, hardware, even clothing if it's astronomically related. You might have two items of the same thing. If one is good enough for you, consider donating the other to the banquet prize table.

As far as the dress code for the Awards Banquet is concerned, I have to go along with what most people want for the occasion. Black tie is certainly the extreme, so I can't go along with that. But I also can't go along with a pair of dirty jeans and a T-shirt either. So please dress for the occasion. This is an event that deserves to be treated as out of the ordinary for our society, not just another meeting.

Over the last few months there has been quite a controversy over what kind of personal information should be made public about members of the society. Some members were concerned about their phone numbers or addresses being made public. Others didn't want their name or e-mail addresses published anywhere, on the club website or on a membership list, even on a list made only to club members. After much crying and gnashing of teeth, it was decided, by the board, to pass around an "opt out list" that would tell the board of directors what kind of information each member would allow to be made public. That list is being distributed among the members at each meeting so that each member can make a note on what personal information will be allowed to be published. If you haven't seen the list and would like to let us know what information you want kept out of the other members or public's hands, you are requested to come to the next few meetings and complete the list. If you can't make it to a meeting, contact one of the club's officers and let them know (see page one of the WASP for e-mail addresses). If you don't want anything revealed about yourself, not even your name, you must indicate that on the list by putting "opt out" after your name. If it becomes necessary to get in touch with a fellow member, you'll have to request his or her information from one of the officers in the club. The list of members that has appeared on our website has now been removed.

Xena, the largest of the asteroids, has officially been renamed Eris. (pronounced EE-sis). Even with Pluto now an official asteroid, Eris is slightly larger. One thing I have noticed about planets is the human desire to give significant heavenly bodies a Proper name, rather than a number. Perhaps this is the best way to determine whether any body should be called a planet, the urge to personalize something out of the ordinary.

Not much could be seen of the planet Mercury from the Roseville and Warren area here in Michigan but the sky seemed to have some large blue



areas north of us. The Stoney Creek observing site may have produced some good observing for a few minutes. The photo shows the planet in the lower center of the picture. Much smaller than the sunspot (#293) in the upper left.

Halloween night gave me a chance to show the First Quarter Moon to about 150 kids. Some didn't understand what they were looking at and some were amazed. The most memorable quote came from a boy that looked about 7 or 8 years old. He said "wow, look at those pot holes"! However, the big kids (parents) were the most amazed. Some, never having the chance to look through a telescope, didn't want to leave, but had to, because their kids were off to candyland. One expected to get a black ring around the eye after viewing the Moon, a common practical joke in the past.

Our treasurer, Dr. Phil Martin, has proposed the creation of a WAS calendar that shows some of the club's astrophotography and special events from the year on a 2007 large wall calendar. It'll have a top page with a club picture for each month and a bottom page with the monthly information. Price is \$19.00. Subscribe for it at the next meeting or contact Phil at drpdmartin@hotmail.com.

December's discussion/computer group meeting will be on the fourth Thursday, the 28th, at Gary Gathen's home in Pleasant Ridge. He lives at 21 Elm Park Blvd., three blocks south of I-696 and about a half block west of Woodward Ave. Meeting will start at 8:00 PM. You can reach Gary at 248-543-3366, or me, at 586-776-9720 for any further information.

All space photos are courtesy of SPACE.COM and SPACEWEATHER.COM, unless otherwise noted.

THE SWAPSHOP



This column is for those who are interested in buying, trading or selling items. Call 586-776-9720 (cometman@mybluelight.com) if you want to put an item for sale or trade in this section of the WASP.

The ad will run for six months. The month and year, the ad will be removed, is also shown.

FOR SALE. Coulter Odyssey 1 , 13.1 inch, red tube model with rack and pinion focuser, University Optics RACI finderscope and a

Seeing was excellent that night judging by tight stars. I made this into a JPG to allow emailing it...the original is 17mb. – Bob Berta



Annual Winter Banquet

Thursday, December 21, 2006
At the DeCarlos Banquet Center
6015 E 10 Mile Rd Warren, MI 48091-3802
east of Mound Rd.

Doors Open at 6:30 p.m. ** Dinner starts at 8:00 p.m.
Cost is \$30.00 per person
All Reservations must be returned by December 4, 2004

Try either of these directions:

I-75 N/CHRYSLER FWY via EXIT 216A	3.2 miles
toward FLINT.	0.9 miles
Merge onto MI-8 E/DAVISON FWY E via	1.2 miles
EXIT 56A.	3.7 miles
Turn LEFT onto MOUND RD.	<0.1 miles
Turn RIGHT onto E 10 MILE RD.	
End at 6015 E 10 Mile Rd Warren MI	

Take I696 E to EXIT 19 toward COUZENS ST/10 MILE RD.	0.1 miles
Stay straight to go onto E HEIGHTS DR/696 SERVICE DR.	0.1 miles
Take the EB 10 MILE RD/RACE TRACK ramp.	0.1 miles
Turn SLIGHT LEFT onto E 10 MILE RD.	2.4 miles
End at 6015 E 10 MILE RD WARREN MI	

Name: _____

in Party: _____ **X \$30 =** _____ **(amount due)**

Make checks payable to: Warren Astronomical Society

Bring it to Cranbrook on December 4, 2004 or mail to:

Philip Martin
2452 Crooks, #52
Troy, MI 48084



Martian Devils

by Dr. Tony Phillips

Admit it. Whenever you see a new picture of Mars beamed back by Spirit or Opportunity, you scan the rocks to check for things peeking out of the shadows. A pair of quivering green antennas, perhaps, or a little furry creature crouched on five legs...? Looking for Martians is such a guilty pleasure.

Well, you can imagine the thrill in 2004 when scientists were checking some of those pictures and they *did* see something leap out. It skittered across the rocky floor of Gusev Crater and quickly disappeared. But it wasn't a Martian; Spirit had photographed a dust devil!

Dust devils are tornadoes of dust. On a planet like Mars which is literally covered with dust, and where it never rains, dust devils are an important form of weather. Some Martian dust devils grow almost as tall as Mt. Everest, and researchers suspect they're crackling with static electricity—a form of "Martian lightning."

NASA is keen to learn more. How strong are the winds? Do dust devils carry a charge? When does "devil season" begin—and end? Astronauts are going to want to know the answers before they set foot on the red planet.

The problem is, these dusty twisters can be devilishly difficult to catch. Most images of Martian dust devils have been taken by accident, while the rovers were looking for other things. This catch-as-catch-can approach limits what researchers can learn.

No more! The two rovers have just gotten a boost of artificial intelligence to help them recognize and photograph dust devils. It comes in the form of new software, uploaded in July and activated in September 2006.

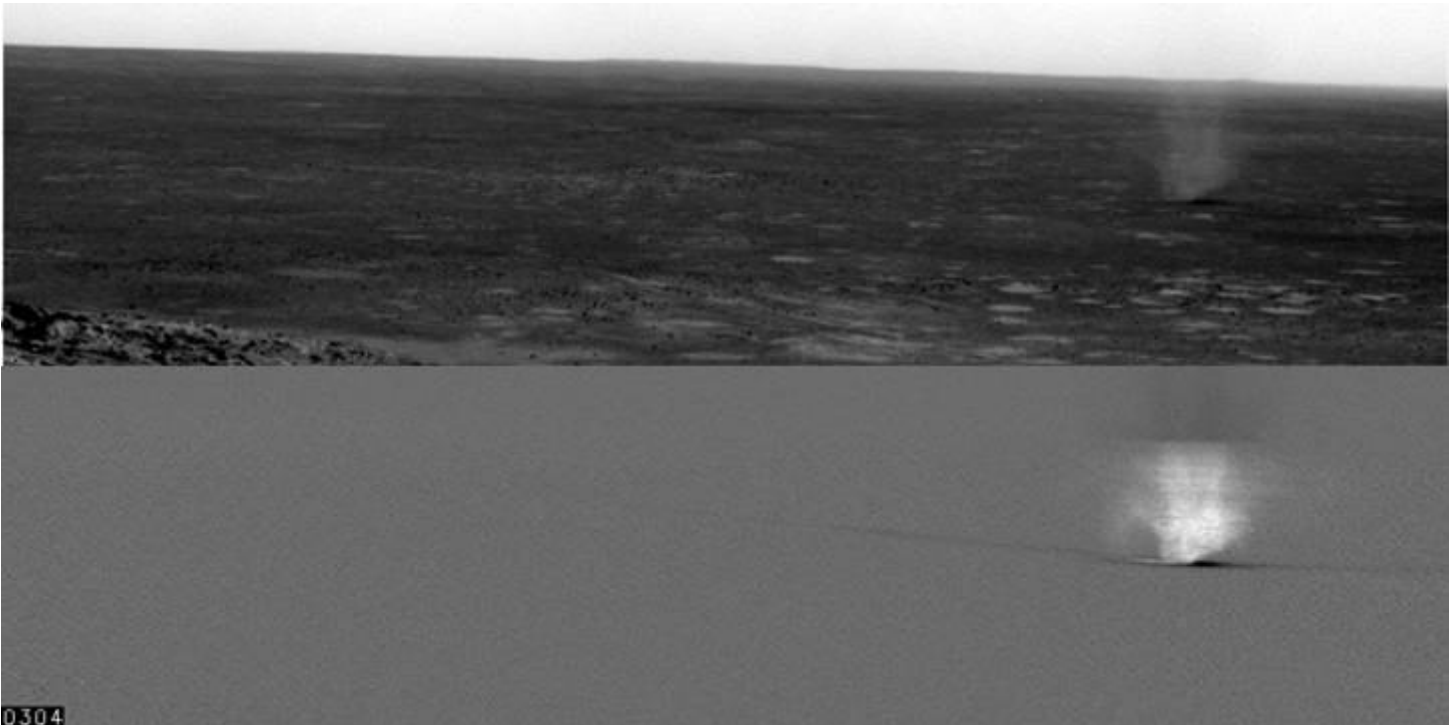
"This software is based on techniques developed and tested as part of the NASA New Millennium Program's Space Technology 6 project. Testing was done in Earth orbit onboard the EO-1 (Earth Observing-1) satellite," says Steve Chien, supervisor of JPL's Artificial Intelligence Group. Scientists using EO-1 data were especially interested in dynamic events such as volcanoes erupting or sea ice breaking apart. So Chien and colleagues programmed the satellite to notice change. It worked beautifully: "We measured a 100-fold increase in science results for transient events."

Now that the techniques have been tested in Earth orbit, they are ready to help Spirit and Opportunity catch dust devils—or anything else that moves—on Mars.

"If we saw Martians, that would be great," laughs Chien. Even scientists have their guilty pleasures.

Find out more about the Space Technology 6 “Autonomous Sciencecraft” technology experiment at nmp.nasa.gov/st6/TECHNOLOGY/sciencecraft_tech.html, and the use of the technology on the Mars Rovers at nmp.nasa.gov/TECHNOLOGY/infusion.html. Kids can visit spaceplace.nasa.gov/en/kids/nmp_action.shtml and do a New Millennium Program-like test at home to see if a familiar material would work well in space

This article was provided by the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, California Institute of Technology, under a contract with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.



The top half of this image is part of a series of images of a passing dust devil on Mars caught by Spirit. In the bottom half, the image has been filtered to remove everything that did not change from one image to the other. Notice the faint track left by the dust devil. Credit NASA/JPL/Mark T. Lemmon, Univ. of Arizona Lunar and Planetary Laboratory.