



THE LUNAR OBSERVER

Newsletter of the American Lunar Society

February 1997

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Lunar Calendar

February (All Times UT)

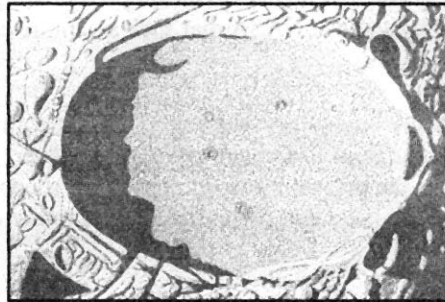
- 6 03:00 Moon 5.3 degrees
North of Mercury
- 07:00 Moon 4.1 degrees
North of Neptune
- 7 15:06 New Moon
(Start of Lunation 917)
- 20:40 Perigee; 356,847 km
- 10 17:00 Moon 18 degrees
North of Saturn
- 21 17:07 Apogee; 406,395 km
- 22 10:27 Full Moon
- 24 23:00 Moon 3.3 degrees
South of Mars

Was it really Albategnius?

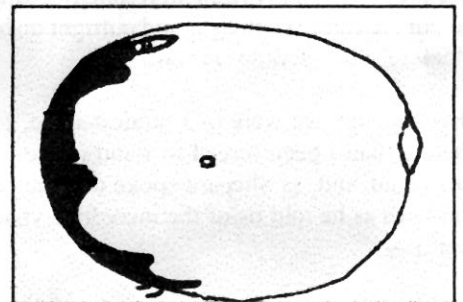
Prompted by a statement in the last issue of *The Lunar Observer* that the prominent crater on Galileo's drawing was probably Albategnius, ALS member Robert Bruce Kelsey writes that Cherrington argues for Deslandres while Kopal dismisses the drawing entirely. Mr. Kelsey has yet to make up his mind on the matter but what about you? Have you any thoughts on the subject? Send them to the above address or E-Mail to: dembow@mail.third-wave.com

Feature of the Month

The Plato Hook



H. P. Wilkins April 3, 1952



Gus Johnson April 30, 1993

On April 3, 1952, H. P. Wilkins used the 33 inch Meudon Refractor to make a marvelous drawing of the crater Plato. It included a curiously shaped shadow near the southeastern "corner" of the crater. On April 30, 1993, Gus Johnson went in pursuit of that shadow with his 6 inch reflector. His sketch was made to show only shadow forms and not crater detail. It does indicate "something" at the correct location, but not quite the same shadow.

Plato is traditionally one of the most frequently observed features on the Moon. Have any of our readers recorded this odd shadow? And what of its nature? Could it be the true shadow of a peak on the crater rim or is it the result of an undulation in an otherwise remarkably flat floor? Send your observations and/or thoughts to the Editor at the above address.

Using Harry Jamieson's ALPO Lunar Observer's Tool Kit we find that there are five dates in 1997 when the lighting conditions will closely approximate those of the Wilkins drawing. Make a note to turn your telescope to Plato on one or more of the following dates and try catching the Plato Hook. Also, make a note to submit your observations, positive or negative, to the Lunar Observer.

March 18 00:11 UT
 May 16 04:19 UT
 July 14 02:36 UT

September 10 21:57 UT
 November 8 20:15 UT

References: Johnson, Gus; personal communication
 Wilkins, H.P. & Moore, P.; *The Moon*

Alan Shepard Speaks at NASA/Ames by Craig D. Wandke

Admiral Alan Shepard spoke in October at the Director's Colloquium at NASA/Ames in Mountain View, California, and, as a consummate amateur astronomer and member of the American Lunar Society, it was a special thrill for me to be in the audience and in the presence of a man who left his footprints on the moon. Shepard's talk focused on the importance of basic research, but he also included fascinating and little-known anecdotes on NASA's early years.

He told us that, before the Houston NASA complex was built, there was consideration of constructing the site at Moffet Field in Mountain View. Citing the original requirement for the center to be near water, other government facilities, and appropriate academic institutions, Shepard talked about the role which Lyndon Johnson played in convincing "the boys from NASA" to accept Houston's offer of real estate with its nearby Rice University. Though he did not make direct references to discussions in smoke-filled backrooms that led to Mission Control eventually being located in Texas, I had the sense Shepard was rather unimpressed with Johnson's gruff manner and role in promoting the move!

He then referred to President Kennedy's swift decision to send man to the moon following the early Mercury flights, and he spoke about the early skepticism and outright disbelief by some at NASA that such a venture could ever be realized, and, in particular, "before this decade is out".

Even though we were in a modest-sized, I took my binoculars with me, intent on getting the best view possible of one of my heroes, had I been forced to stand in the crowd far from the stage. My seat, however, gave me a clear view of the Apollo 14 astronaut, and, as Shepard spoke of Kennedy and the decision to send men to the moon, I could see the emotion that welled in his eyes as he told us of the incredible vision of the president to land men on another celestial body and return them safely to earth.

Shepard's subsequent comments were directed to the employees who were present, encouraging them to continue basic research and to put a premium on quality control. Many in the audience had worked on Apollo and throughout his speech he made reference to some of them and thanked them for the role they played in allowing him to walk at the Fra Mauro region of the moon a quarter of a century ago.

Following his talk, he entertained questions from the audience, and I asked him a question I had long wondered ... could he see stars in the lunar sky during his 9-hr EVA on the lunar surface? He told me that he could see no stars, due to the glaring reflection of the sun on the lunar surface and the various protective layers of his helmet's facemask.

For a brief and magic instant, I was with him there on the moon, his words suggesting the experience of being totally encased in the rather rigid and no doubt basically uncomfortable spacesuit, with the gently-whirring backpack machinery providing the elements to sustain life. I was able to envision Turning clumsily from one side to another, looking out over a dazzling moonscape with the sun low on the lunar horizon, and seeing the gold foil of the legs of the lunar module and on the various equipment deployed on the surface ... with the whole scene made all the more surreal by the gently hissing noises coming from behind; I could easily imagine in my mind's eye the lack of stars, caused by the full fury of the sun's brilliance, undiminished by any atmosphere.

At the end of his talk, he moved over to a small table for autographs, while many dozens of those present pressed hastily forward to obtain a coveted signed picture from this remarkable human being. I handed Shepard my prized moon globe for him to sign, which, in addition to his autograph, proudly features those of Pete Conrad, Alan Bean, Richard Gordon (all of Apollo 12), and Apollo 11's Buzz Aldrin.

Following a regrettably brief autograph session, Admiral Shepard exited hastily to a waiting car, but it was once again a thrill for me to be in the presence of a man who had walked on the moon.

Craig Wandke welcomes correspondence with others interested in the moon and may be reached at CWandke@aol.com

From The Editor: Thanks to all those who took the time to send us their comments on the initial issue of The Lunar Observer. About 17% of the membership responded, all with favorable remarks. We still need additional input, however, in order to reach a decision on the future of this newsletter. We are also anxious to receive more of your sketches and observations; they are the real purpose of this publication. WMD