

We moved from far away astronomy to nearer the Earth space flight for November's meeting. Brian Frazer, from Somerset Levels Stargazers, gave a *tour de force* talk on The Space Shuttle. Much of this was new information for most of the audience (despite having lived through the history of the Shuttle).

Brian started with the early history of Lifting Bodies like the Shuttle and the early requirement specifications which included a very exacting mission to capture a satellite (not necessarily a US satellite :-)) within one orbit. This caused a number of design features which became issues later.

He then took us through the main systems comprising the Shuttle – the Main Tank, the Solid Rocket Boosters and the Orbiter. He showed movies of the SRB separation and the rather tricky landing of the Orbiter (especially if the Autopilot is left on or the landing gear deploys late!). Inevitably, he discussed the Challenger and Columbia disasters and, really, why both were “accidents waiting to happen” as previous missions had got away with similar failures.

The Shuttle, with its compromised design, eventually became too risky to fly and, despite its successes with missions like the Hubble Space Telescope, the ISS and the SpaceLab missions, the programme was cancelled in 2011. Four of the Orbiters are on display at various sites and some of the engines have been repurposed for the NASA Space Launch System.

Brian concluded with a look at the current derivatives of the Shuttle, including the (fairly) secret X-37B unmanned spaceplane.

After the break we had a number of very well produced nebula images by new member Rich (sorry Rich – I didn't get your surname) with processing help from Hannah Rochford. Rich uses a small 72mm refractor but with a high resolution camera giving him a good image scale and a wide field of view. This was followed by some Jupiter images from Bud and a selection of images from Terry including one of Venus and the Moon just after the (inevitably clouded out) occultation on 9th November.

Terry then ran through some upcoming events (attached below) and concluded with :

Next Meeting

December 20th Christmas Social, Arthur Davis Lecture & Short talks

Please bring a little food to share with the other members. There will be the annual Arthur Davis talk which will be on telescopes this year. Short talks (on any subject really) are welcome. Please share with your co-members!

Upcoming Events

Planets

Mercury will be visible very low South West around 3rd to 15th December. Not a particularly good apparition

Venus bright and high in the morning sky from about 3:30 am

Mars too close to the sun. Behind the sun 18th.

Saturn past its best but still prominent. On the south meridian at around 18:30GMT

Jupiter past opposition so rises before sunset

Uranus (near Jupiter) and Neptune (near Saturn) visible in telescopes

Outreach

Chard School are running a Stargazing Evening on 11th January (brr!).
Are we able to support?

Already arranged

St Margaret's School, Tintinhull
Thursday 23rd November
Near full moon Saturn & Jupiter visible.

Redstart School, Chard
Tuesday 30th January 2024
No moon, Jupiter near meridian. Saturn low West
Uranus & Neptune visible as M42, M45, M31, etc

Stockland Primary
Monday 5th February
Same as for Redstart

Telescope Available

Skyshed POD dome

8 inch Meade Schmidt-Cassegrain reflector

Meade #884 Deluxe Field Tripod

Equatorial Wedge

8x50 spotter scope with lens caps

Erecting prism

Flexible Dew shield

f/12 corded illuminated reticule 1.25" eyepiece

Meade Model 647 Flip Mirror System

Meade Series 4000 f/6.3 Focal reducer/field flattener

T adaptor (for mounting a camera)

Meade #1206 Electric Focuser

Meade 18-Volt DC Power supply

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