

The first meeting of 2024 was – as is traditional in January – held on a cold and frosty night, though nothing as cold as last year’s meeting when the car park was an ice rink. The temperature inside the hall was warm, though there was a distinct tinge of jealousy as Bud related his visit to the grand old lady of Mount Palomar.

Bud was on the trip of a lifetime to California and to all of those places he’d heard about and sung about in his youth. He was part of a harmony led rock group which took some inspiration from the Beach Boys and the other surfin’ sound groups of the 60s. Thus he found himself in Oceanside, CA, and realised that Mount Palomar was only an hour’s drive away. Like most of us of that certain age, the Hale 200” telescope was far and away the biggest telescope in the world when Bud was getting interested in astronomy so a visit was a “must do”.

Being Bud, he video recorded the journey and he showed the edited version of his visit. The first noticeable thing was the lack of visitors and the rather limited facilities for a visit. All you can see is the Hale telescope the other side of a thick sheet of Perspex. All a bit disappointing after such a long journey. However, being Bud, he flagged down a passing official looking pick-up and gave his sad story of having come all the way from the UK. Thankfully, the driver of the pick-up was Drew, one of the senior mechanical staff at the Observatory, who offered to take Bud and his son around the telescope.

The rest of the video starred Drew who described how the battleship like construction of the main mount supports the telescope on a high pressure thin film of oil to give a practically friction-less bearing for the telescope to ride on. With hard hats on, our intrepid duo were shown the telescope moving, the aluminising chamber, the prime focus cage and the catwalk that goes around the main dome itself. Drew gave up about an hour of his time which shows just how proud the maintainers of the telescope are of their 75 year old lady. A couple of Drew’s highlights were that he described the telescope area as more like a large garage than a clean room and that the mirror was, quite literally, priceless. If it got broke, they wouldn’t replace it and the whole facility would simply close down.

The 200” was the largest telescope in the world when I was doing my astronomy degree and I, for one, am extremely jealous of the opportunity that Bud seized (and jealous of his blagging ability as well :-).

After the break, Terry showed some images of Venus and a couple of emission nebulae displayed using various different colour palettes. It was noticeable that different palettes showed up different features in the nebulae.

He also described the recent outreach visit to Chard School Chard School on 11th January which was partly successful. We had very nice views of Jupiter with the Great Red Spot

from about 4:30 but cloud started rolling in soon after 5. Two groups got some views of Jupiter but the last two groups were mainly under cloud.

## **Next Meeting**

21st February. Gordon MacKenzie will talk about his Astrophotography Workflow, taking a seemingly blank screen to a colourful, detailed image

# **Upcoming Events**

## **Planets**

Venus is still bright in the morning sky at around 7am. It's moving rapidly south and towards the sun, though. It's now in Ophiuchus heading towards Sagittarius. Antares is about 15 degrees right of Venus at about the same altitude for the next few days. Venus will then be unfavourably placed for us until November when it will become very bright in the evening sky around Christmas

Mercury is now moving towards the sun but may just be visible at around 7:30 in binoculars. The best apparition for 2024 will be around the end of March in the evening sky and around Christmas in the morning.

Mars is starting to creep out from the sun but it probably won't be visible with the naked eye until June or July.

Saturn is setting earlier every evening and the twilight will start to overwhelm it by the end of January.

Jupiter is near the meridian when it gets dark but still doesn't set before 1am

Uranus (near Jupiter) and Neptune (near Saturn) visible in telescopes though Neptune will get difficult soon.

## **Outreach**

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

Manor Court, Chard

Planned for Thursday 15th February but this is half term. Our meeting for February is on the 21<sup>st</sup> so only the 22<sup>nd</sup> or 23<sup>rd</sup> are possible. Won't be dark until 7pm though we can probably see Jupiter and the (full!) moon earlier. We'll probably suggest next November.