



THE PANAMA ASTRONOMER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE PANAMA CANAL ASTRONOMY CLUB

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Dr. Carl Sagan Sees Halley for First Time in Panama!

All our preparations worked out at the last minute on the evening of Sunday December 29th, when our club and the Asociacion Panamena de Aficionados al la Astronomia hosted a Comet Halley star party for 107 passengers from the ship, Royal Viking Sea, including Dr. Sagan, his wife and coauthor of "Comet", Ann Druyan, her parents and the Sagan's 3 year old daughter. Although rain and wall-to-wall clouds threatened to cancel the star party, shortly after the tour group buses arrived at the site, the sky opened up and the Comet was easily viewed by all. As you can read in Dr. Sagan's letter shown below, this was his first sighting of the Comet Halley, and it was with OUR group through OUR telescopes!

Although there were a few overly enthusiastic persons who flashed their flashbulbs at Dr. Sagan and crowded around him to get his autograph, you can hardly blame them to try to record this rare event. Dr. Sagan was most gracious in affording all a chance to chat with him and to have their books signed or to have his picture taken with their child.

My personal observation was that he was much taller that I had imagined, at least 6' plus and that he has a certain charisma about him, partly due to his soft spoken manner of speech. All in all, a thrilling moment for any amateur astronomer and surely for all of our members and their families who were there that night.

Halley's Tail

The night following the star party, Dec. 30th, was an excellent night to view the comet, skies were dark and the transparency was very good. It was on that night that several members, including Bob Geddes and myself, saw for the first time a well-defined tail extending upwards (about 1 o'clock) from the head of the comet. Dr. Neal Smith and I and our wives made a trek to Cerro Campana on January 8th and could see the tail even with binoculars, extending at least 2 degrees from the comet. The conditions of a truly dark sky, such as those an hours drive from Panama City are hard to comprehend as it is a bit confusing to see So Many stars! However, I would advise anyone who wants to see Halley the way it should be seen, to drive to the beaches area or to the Campana ridge where the views should be especially spectacular in March and April.

Mel Boreham, Editor



COME TO OUR WEEKLY COFFEE HOUR



AT THE CURUNDU CAFETERIA FROM 11 AM TIL NOON, EVERY SATURDAY
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