

Leonid Meteor Watch

On Tuesday 16th and Wednesday 17th of November there will be a Leonid Meteor Watch at the observatory. The peak of the meteor shower is predicted to be in the early hours of November 18th for those who can stay up late on Wednesday night/Thursday morning.

Other meteor showers to look out for are the Orionids, around 21st October, Taurids around 3 November, Geminids around 13 December and Quadrantids around 3rd January.

Quiz Night

Don't forget to come along to the Quiz Night on Tuesday 14th December. Debby Quertier will no doubt have come up with some fiendish questions but participants will be much more impressed by the food you bring along for the shared supper than any display of astronomical knowledge. Players are divided into two teams so you can bask in reflected glory if you are in the team with the most astronomy buffs. The prizewinner has the dubious honour of setting next year's quiz, so it pays not to try too hard. Hope to see you there.

PML



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Sagittarius

The Newsletter of the Astronomy
 Section of La Société Guernesiae



October - December 1999

Forthcoming events

Public Meeting

Tuesday, 26th October

8 pm at the Observatory
 (Details to be announced)

Leonid Meteor Watch

Tue/Wed, 16/17th

November

8 pm onwards at the
 Observatory

Quiz Night

and shared supper

Tuesday, 14th December

7.30 pm at the Observatory

In addition, the Section meets at the
 Observatory every Tuesday evening,
 and Friday if clear for observing.

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 Lunar eclipse
 Occultation of Mars

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NAM99

The Royal Astronomical Society held its 1999 National Astronomy Meeting in Guernsey during eclipse week, with a day off to see the eclipse in Alderney. Much to the relief of David Le Conte, who had worked hard as NAM99 organiser to make sure the week was a success, all the arrangements worked smoothly. The Section manned a stand throughout the conference. The picture below shows RAS President Professor David Williams presenting Jessica Harris with an RAS plaque which members can now see on display in the observatory.



Fundraising

Fundraising has been a success and we should be able to order a new telescope soon

The summer months have been busy for us. Time has been spent fundraising most weekends and many a Tuesday night at the Observatory has been spent packing eclipse viewers - and taking them home to do. Jessica and Peter Harris made two large display boards about the eclipses and they attracted a lot of attention. They were photographed by

several people and even videoed. We have been out and about talking about the eclipse and advising on safety at several venues - summer fetes, Candie Gardens on three occasions, the South Show and the Harbour Carnival. At the Harbour Carnival we were given our stall to erect (it was like those at the Guernsey Market) and it took six of us quite a while to assemble it... eventually! That Friday evening at the Harbour was great fun and we finished up by watching the fireworks before clearing up after a successful evening's work. The three Sundays we were in

Candie Gardens were all successful. Each time we had glorious sunshine, which did help when demonstrating pinhole projection!

On Tuesday the 3rd August we opened the observatory to the public and lots of people turned up. As it was only 8 days before the eclipse the interest was great and everyone was looking forward to the 11th.

We have had some great publicity and our events have been well advertised. Jessica and I appeared on the cover of the Guernsey Press in July, together with 4' 6" inflatable alien. In case you're unsure who's who, the alien was the one in the middle with the bug eyes. I have been on Radio Guernsey twice, once the day before the eclipse asking people to reply to our eclipse survey and secondly on 'My Favourite Things' when, you've guessed it, the eclipse figured top of the list. All told we have been in the news, people know about the observatory and as a result we have had new members. The fundraising has been a success and the telescope should be ordered soon. Thank you to everyone who has helped with all that's been going on, it's been well worth it and we've had a lot of fun doing it.

Debby Quertier

Maureen Pitman still has some of her lovely eclipse T-shirts available for sale. Anyone wishing to buy one please contact her on tel 720946.

Mark's Mega Challenge Quiz- New Deadline

To give time for those of you who, due to eclipse preparations, holidays or general summer indolence, have not yet completed (started) Mark's quiz, the deadline has been extended to the **end of November**. So have a go. You'll enjoy the challenge and you may win a prize.

Visits to the Observatory

There will be visits to the observatory by Beaucamps Scouts on Thursday, 11th November, at 6.30pm onwards, and by St Martin's Church Fellowship Group on Wednesday, 26th January, at 8pm onwards. **Anyone who would like to come along and assist will be most welcome.** I have suggested the visitors bring along their binoculars and we can point out objects of interest while they wait to look through the telescope.

Currently on Friday evenings we are helping members of the Boys Brigade with their astronomy badge. On Wednesdays 6th and 20th October and 10th November I am helping the 8th Cub Scout group with their astronomy badge. Weather permitting on the 10th November we plan to do some lunar and planetary observing at Rue Mainguy. Again, anyone who would like to get involved please let me know.

Debby Quertier

The Eclipse Experience - Alderney

Geoff Falla, and his brother David, were staying in Alderney for the week of the eclipse

The weather forecast for the morning of 11th August was not very encouraging. Cloud was expected to be spreading in from the the south west, but Alderney could still be one of the best places to view the eclipse. Unless, that is, you had planned to travel to the near certain clear skies of Eastern Europe or beyond.

After a few clear spells overnight the day dawned rather cloudy, with only a few breaks and brief intervals of sunshine.

A f t e r
breakfast, and
as the time
for the
beginning of

*... as the the time of totality approached there
were silvery reflections on the calm sea*

the eclipse drew near, it had become generally cloudy. However, the cloud layer was not too thick and was at a fairly low level, allowing the Sun to be seen through thinner gaps intermittently.

The original idea was to view the eclipse from the harbour area adjacent to Braye Bay. It seemed possible that the elusive shadow bands, sometimes reported to be seen just before or after totality, could perhaps show up on the light sand of the bay. Our view from here to the west however would be obscured by higher ground. As we wanted to have a good view in this direction as the Moon's shadow approached, we decided to go around to the harbour breakwater. Making our way around the inner harbour at about 10.10am we looked up and there

it was - a small bite out of the top right hand part of the Sun. The shape could be seen clearly though briefly through a patch of thinner cloud. The cloud was helping to screen the the sunlight and there was only occasional need to use our solar viewers when the Sun brightened between the clouds.

The walk to the end of the long breakwater took about fifteen minutes.

We passed a few other people who had also chosen the breakwater as a good viewpoint. There were several hundred

boats moored in the outer harbour and bay area for the occasion. Across the bay to the southeast we could see many people standing on the walls of Fort Albert and its surrounding slopes. As a well elevated site with clear views this was reckoned to be one of the best sites.

We reached the end of the breakwater and watched as the Sun could occasionally be seen, reducing steadily to a crescent, like a New Moon in reverse shape. At times the crescent seemed to grow strangely larger as the Sun brightened slightly through the cloud. By about 11 o'clock there was a noticeable twilight and as the the time of totality approached there were silvery reflections on the calm sea. The thin crescent of the Sun was reduced to a sliver and the twilight deepened further.

The start of totality, timed for 11.15, was lost in cloud, but we knew when it had arrived. It became much darker in a matter of seconds. We looked to the east towards the French coast and saw a low band of orange sky where the Moon's shadow had not yet reached. After perhaps half a minute or so, as we were looking up hopefully at the clouds, we were suddenly able to see the eclipsed Sun, a narrow circle of light with several irregularities and some colour evident, the prominences. These were noted at the upper right side and bottom edge of the eclipsed Sun.

We had to keep looking in the direction of the Sun because we found that if our attention wandered during a cloudier patch it was more difficult to find the exact spot as the eclipse emerged again through the cloud. Because we had not seen the beginning of totality we were not sure when the Sun would reappear. Suddenly a star-like point of light appeared at the right edge of the Moon. In a matter of a second or so it seemed to grow into a spectacular, bright star - the famous Diamond Ring effect. All photographs of the Diamond Ring previously seen paled in comparison to the real thing. This was no blob of light as the Sun emerged, but like a brilliant star as it shone through one of the valleys of the Moon's edge. All too soon, almost before we had time to take it in, the brightness at the edge increased. The Sun had returned, and twilight soon gave way to daylight again.

At the end of the eclipse we were well satisfied that we had seen the main stages of the event. Although we had not had a good view of Bailey's Beads or the beginning of totality we had been lucky to see the eclipse at intervals throughout and, of course, that wonderful Diamond Ring.

Geoff Falla

Eclipse Survey

We have not had a huge response to the eclipse survey, although there was a form in the Press and I asked for responses on Radio Guernsey. One aim of the survey was to determine how far south of totality the Diamond Ring and Bailey's Beads were seen. The clouds made that difficult if not impossible. Nevertheless, the replies we have so far received have been very interesting and the intention is to put something together in the future. If anyone wants to reply to the survey with their description of what they saw please do so. Send it to me at Lamorna, Route Charles, St Peter Port. Tel 725760.

Debby Quertier

The Perseids Meteor Shower

The night of the 11th August was cloudy but the following evening was very clear and moonless. Whilst coming home after 11 o'clock, I started to notice quite a few meteors, so once home I did a proper count. Between 11.30pm and 12.30am I counted, with the help of my sister, 32 meteors. 29 were definitely Perseids and the other three were possibly sporadics. There are other meteor showers going on at the same time as the Perseids, notably from Aquarius, and they could well have been these.

The meteors were all fairly bright and fast, with many leaving trains. The brightest one I saw I estimated was about -1 magnitude.

There are now the Leonids to look forward to in November. I don't know what the experts are predicting for 1999 but would expect at the least there will be much increased activity, as there was last year. It's got to be worth staying up on a cold November night,as they just might storm. I certainly have no wish to wake up the next day and read in the papers that I'd missed out on the firework display of the century.

Debby Quartier

New Members

With the increased awareness of the Section's activities in the run up to the eclipse our membership has increased. We would be delighted to see any new members at the observatory on our weekly Tuesday evening meeting nights.

Astronomy and Space - References for further reading *compiled by Geoff Falla*

History of the Royal Greenwich Observatory. Concluding the history of the RGO. The decision to move the facility's home base from Herstmonceau to Cambridge in 1990. Finally the decision in 1998 to close the country's oldest scientific institution. *Modern Astronomer*, July 1999.

The Ranger Programme. Forerunner to the Apollo Programme. The Ranger Programme of automated space probes to the Moon, photographing the surface structure in detail before impacting on to the Moon. *Modern Astronomer*, July 1999.

Life of a Neutron Star. From supernova explosion of a giant star to pulsar. Nature's most accurate clock with a rapidly rotating narrow beam of radiation. *Sky and Telescope*, July 1999.

Images of Jupiter and its Moons. Space probe Galileo has continued its close flybys of the four Galilean moons of Jupiter. Further photographs of the moons' surfaces and of Jupiter itself. *Sky and Telescope*, July 1999.

The Shape of the Universe. Research on the shape of the Universe, which may not be spherical. Its extent at present unknown, knowledge limited by the event horizon. Progress expected from further studies of microwave background radiation. *Sky and Telescope*, July 1999.

Moon Landing Anniversary. The 30th anniversary of the historic first manned landing on the Moon on 21 July 1969. Details of the flight, landing and return to Earth three days later retold. *Astronomy and Space*, August 1999.

Meade ETX-90EC Telescope. Test report on this ultra portable telescope, which can also be fitted with the Autostar computerised star finding system. *Astronomy and Space*, August 1999.

Supernovae, Neutrinos and Amateur Astronomers. Now amateur astronomers could assist in preparations for observing the next supernova in the Milky Way, the last one having been observed by the astronomer Kepler in 1604. *Sky and Telescope*, August 1999.

The Chandra X-Ray Observatory. Detailed article about the new space observatory, and the greatly increased opportunities it will provide for the study of X-ray sources. *Sky and Telescope*, August 1999.

Strange Eclipses. The observation of some unusual phenomena reported during solar eclipses. *Sky and Telescope*, August 1999.

The Surface of Titan. The best image obtained so far of Saturn's moon Titan. Details of how this was achieved from Earth, with better results than from the Hubble Space Telescope. *Astronomy and Space*, September 1999.

Carbon and the Origin of Life. The chemistry of interstellar material, now shown to be far more complex than previously thought and making the emergence of life even more probable. *Astronomy and Space*, September 1999.

Spaceguard. The call for establishing a series of international Spaceguard centres to identify any near-Earth asteroids, and the new Torino scale developed by planetary scientists. *Astronomy and Space*, September 1999.

Satellites in unison

Recently there have been two reports of groups of satellites travelling together. Geoff Falla and others observed a group of three satellites travelling across the sky in a triangular formation about the size of the Moon. On another occasion a local man visited the observatory to report that he had seen four objects crossing the sky in a line. One possible explanation is that groups of satellites are sometimes launched together so would tend to travel in unison.

PML

Yet Another Eclipse Story, but with a Telescope and no Lipstick

Jessica Harris had been looking forward to the eclipse for a long time. The big day had finally arrived.

The telephone rang at four in the morning on Wednesday 11th August, I woke instantly at its first ring, picked up the receiver, apprehensive as to who was ringing at that time in the morning, and what bad news they were going to relay to me. When I heard the recorded voice telling me "this is your reminder call", I was confused as to why I had booked a reminder call at four in the morning, it was still dark and I was still sleepy. Then the realisation dawned on me. It was eclipse day, the day I had been dreaming of and working for. The day

that for 6 years I had waited, and for 6 months had occupied most of my waking hours, and a lot of my sleeping hours,

most of all had driven my husband Peter mad. All of a sudden I was more awake than I have ever been before. Everything had to be right that day, the day was so important. We had prepared everything that could be the night before. I couldn't believe I had slept so deeply during the night. I had gone to bed so excited not expecting to sleep at all, but had dropped instantly into a deep restful sleep. Peter was awake and up immediately. As his usual start is 5am one hour earlier didn't make much difference to him. Barbara Waldron, a section member and friend of ours from the UK, who was staying with us for the week especially for the

eclipse, was downstairs making tea, coffee and toast for us.

Time shot by so fast. We gathered everything together and at 5.05am set off in Peter's van for the docks. In the back of the van we had the 11" Celestron telescope from the Observatory. We had dismantled it the weekend before with David Le Conte and Robert, his brother-in-law, and we were taking it to Alderney with us. When we took it apart, David gave us instructions as to how to put it back together again. He also warned us

All of a sudden I was more awake than I have ever been before. Everything had to be right that day, the day was so important.

that it was very easily put back together back to front, making it not impossible to use but more awkward. Peter and I assured

him we had followed his instructions carefully and understood. We had packed all the right tools, spanners, Allen keys, and screwdrivers, and had the correct lenses, eyepieces, filters and so on. We had eventually found the trunk that the 11" Celestron fits in. There were several trunks of various sizes to choose from (about six all told) each varying in degrees of shabbiness. The one that fitted was the most old and worn, with dents, gashes and rips in it, along with what seemed like 50 years of dust on top, and very little metal showing at the reinforced corners and sides, this being replaced with rust. Never mind, it was

the best and only one we had, and after all it's not what it looks like, just so long as it does the job, and we knew it would. The tripod had to be unbolted from its normal portable stand. Those of you who know it will recognise this as the wheelie platform that we roll out for viewing purposes on a clear evening. This ingenious mobile trolley and bolted-on, home-made tripod was designed and made, I believe, by section member Lawrence Guilbert. It has served us well for

many years and will for many more to come I am sure. The tripod didn't

actually fit into any of the trunks, so we just had to take it as it was (although quite heavy). We also had the drive motor with us to take to Alderney, but there was no power to the particular spot we were going to occupy at Fort Albert, so Peter had removed the battery from my car, and that was going with us as well (at least I knew my car wouldn't be stolen whilst we were away). With all this equipment stowed in the back of the van and our rucksacks with tea, coffee, champagne, waterproofs (just in case), sunscreen, sunglasses, eclipse viewers, radio clock, white sheet and card (all the usual things for a day out in Alderney) off we set.

The boat was leaving at 6.00am. We were meeting Debby Quertier, husband John, sister Mandy and two daughters, Laura and Jacinta, at the docks at 5.15am. We were running late as usual.

When we left home there was little traffic on the roads but once we got closer to town it seemed the whole of Guernsey was awake. Debby & Co met us outside the departure building. I could tell Debby was so excited she was ready to burst. The rest of the family didn't look quite so enthusiastic (her sister confessed to me that they had all been given their orders and bossed around since the early hours). Once there, we had to unload everything from the back of the van. I went and

As we progressed through the crowds, with our battered trunk and Heath Robinson tripod, plus car battery, we discovered that some people were pointing at us and laughing quite openly.

found two luggage trolleys and we put all our baggage on to

them. I assumed they would load the baggage first, so we pushed our way to the front to the check-in desk, asking people to excuse us as we went. I was amazed at how many people were there already; it seemed that we were the last ones to arrive.

As we progressed through the crowds, with our battered trunk and Heath Robinson tripod, plus car battery, we discovered that some people were pointing at us and laughing quite openly. (Just wait until it was set-up and they wanted a look through it, it would be a different story then). Their laughing on any other day would have upset a sensitive creature like myself, but on that particular day, Wednesday 11th August 1999, only the sun failing to appear could have upset me. As I had already witnessed dawn on the horizon whilst driving down to the boat, this one little

anguish had passed. I stood at the front of the queue with the rest of my party, waiting to board with a feeling of great pride and excitement in my heart; the whole matter of getting here had a sense of accomplishment that was almost unrivalled. I was also aware that I was very lucky to have the opportunity of going to Alderney to watch this rare event. I was indeed one of the chosen few (or so it felt) and I know that many people would have swapped places with me at that moment in time. Then I turned around and

what I saw brought me down to earth. There was a large group of press reporters (tabloid

I'm sure) gathered, sniggering and pointing at us. When I looked at their equipment it was all packaged in brand new, stainless steel, shiny travel boxes and trunks, with gigantic long leather lens cases, all state-of-the-art high-tech gear. For one split second my heart sank, and I ticked myself off for being too smug, then instantly reminded myself that this was my day. I had waited too long to let some rag reporter spoil even a second of it, so I gave them a filthy look and turned the other way.

My revenge came along quite quickly. The porters arrived to load the baggage and, much to the news reporters' disgust, took ours first. One particular reporter (the one who had laughed at us the most) said very loudly, for us and all the other passengers to hear, "That's right, take granny first, looks like she could do

with an outing". By that time I really didn't care what anybody thought, but silently vowed to myself that if I ever found out which newspaper he was from I would never buy it again. When the porters returned they signalled for the reporters to pick up their own gear and carry it on board (another 10 points to us I decided).

Then it was time for the passengers to board the boat. People were moving forward, tickets being collected. I was

first ahead, but kept stopping and turning around to check that all my party was still behind me. I was worried that Barbara

might get pushed over or I would lose sight of Peter. We might lose one of the children in the crowd. John might change his mind and not come or Mandy might get on the wrong boat. We were almost at the gangplank and I did a quick reckie as to who was with me. I counted everybody in apart from Mandy. Oh dear, had she changed her mind? I knew Debby had driven her half mad. Mandy didn't quite have eclipse fever like Debby and me. Then, after what seemed like an eternity, she came into view and my heart ticked again. When she finally reached us she told us that, being behind us, she had almost been trampled in the rush and couldn't understand why everybody was in such a hurry. Normally I would have agreed with her wholeheartedly, but on eclipse day I understood why they did it. My next panic was when we reached the boat. The trunk with the telescope in was

sitting on the side of the dock, not loaded. The porters were standing nearby. I went and had a word with them as to why it hadn't been put aboard. They assured me that it would be when all the passengers were on. They had earmarked a space for it, in one of the very wide aisles at the back of the boat, but thought it best to load it once everybody was settled in their seats. I saw the sense in this, agreed, and went to find my party and my seat, although my eyes never left that trunk. Eventually, the last passenger boarded the boat and I saw the trunk being put aboard. I could sit back and relax then and start what was a trip of a lifetime. The atmosphere on the boat was buzzing, everybody was excited and there was a sense of all being part of the one dream.

Alderney finally appeared. As we got closer it finally sank in that this

was really happening. There was another mad panic to get off the boat. Perhaps they thought it would turn around and go back with them still on board. I sort of felt the same. I suppose I felt that once on Alderney I could not be made to leave until I had seen what I had come for, but until I had gotten off the boat I could be made to return. But there was the telescope to think of, so Peter, John and I (along with the reporters and their fancy baggage) waited on board with the trunk, tripod and battery until we could unload it. I know that I had been up very early that morning but I thought I was wide awake, and it had been too early to having

anything stronger than a coffee on the boat, but upon looking out of the window I noticed that a giant Womble was greeting everybody as they disembarked. I decided this was a side effect of eclipse fever and ignored it.

It was finally time to get the trunk off. We had boarded the boat at the second level but we had to get off on the first level, which meant that everything had to be hauled through each deck and upstairs before reaching the gangplank. For us Guernsey folk this was no surprise, but it was obviously most annoying to the press reporters. Once again the gods were looking down on us, for when we were halfway there the porters came along and took our baggage and unloaded

it for us. Once everything and everybody were stood on the docks

There was a feeling that we were finally here, and nothing could stop us now, even if we had to carry the telescope the two miles to Fort Albert on our backs.

on Alderney (all breathing a sigh of relief at getting there) the next step was to find the Alderney States Works van, which was to meet us and transport the equipment to Fort Albert.

There was a feeling that we were finally here, and nothing could stop us now, even if we had to carry the telescope the two miles to Fort Albert on our backs. As if by magic, David Le Conte appeared. David had organised the van and, lo and behold, it duly arrived and we loaded everything on. David and Peter went in the van to Fort Albert and the rest of us started to make our way along.

Debby asked me which mode of transport I preferred to take, bus or train. I said that the train might be fun for the children (not wanting to admit that secretly I had been looking forward to the train journey). Barbara opted for the bus as it stopped just at the end of the docks; the train station was a walk further up the road. We left her at the bus stop, saying we would meet her at Fort Albert. We reached the train station and stood waiting for the train to arrive. It seemed to be forever. Next thing the bus pulled up with Barbara on it waving at us. Mandy decided to join her and jumped ship (or train as it was). The rest of us stayed to wait for the train which we could now see in the distance making its way towards us. Once it arrived we all

climbed on board, being filmed by a camera crew

and still being filmed during the journey. When the train stopped and we got off there was still quite a climb up to Fort Albert but, as luck would have it, a bus came along and took us the rest of the way (brilliant Alderney organisation).

When we reached the gates of Fort Albert, Barbara and Mandy were patiently waiting for us, accompanied by BBC Radio Jersey, who wanted an interview. What with being filmed on the train and now the radio wanting an interview, I felt like a real celebrity. I wished I had put more make-up on, then just a bit of lipstick, and I could have done more with my hair, but I told

myself this was radio and nobody could see me. But what was I thinking of, I was here to watch an eclipse of the sun and I didn't care what I looked like, nor did anybody else for that matter.

The queue for breakfast in Fort Albert was very long, so Debby, Mandy, Barbara and the girls waited in the line to get the breakfasts for us. Peter, John and I made our way to the place chosen for us to view from. The trunk, tripod etc was already there. David, Peter and the van driver had unloaded it. David had chosen the viewing spot, and did a great job of it too. He had visited Fort Albert many times prior to the eclipse, in his official capacity as NAM 99 organiser, and had picked an old battlement that

looked out over the coast in a southerly direction, with panoramic views

over the Island, and 280° visibility from Northeast around to the Southwest horizon. A more perfect spot could never be found. First we had to unlock the trunk. I had been in charge of the key and safely put it into a pocket in my rucksack. I searched nervously hoping that it was still there, yes found it, unlocked what seemed to me by now the 'Sacred Golden Chest', and lo and behold, there was the 11" Celestron telescope. Why I doubted that it might not have been there I do not know (but you can't trust a sailor). My worst fears were over. We had managed to get the 11" to Alderney. Now we had to get it back together again and working. We first bolted the forks back onto the

tripod. We remembered the right size Allen keys and found the correct bolts. Now for the cylinder. Line it up onto the 4 slots and slide it down on the forks, and secure it in place by tightening the screws. Everything went like a dream. David then came along, and somebody else followed him up the steps to the battlement and announced that we were being filmed and photographed by the press reporters on the ridge behind us. I was feeling very proud and just wondering whether to go over and demand a large fee from them (also wondering

whether I had any lippy left on and hoping that they had caught my best side) when

It turned out that they were from Sky TV and were transmitting live pictures back to be shown on air on Sky News.

David looked at the telescope and declared that we had put it on back to front. At that moment I wished all the photographers and their equipment would fall over the back of Fort Albert. They probably wouldn't know the difference, but the experts that might read their papers would. It was too late, and I thought that we should just have a laugh about it and put it right. But when Sarah, David's daughter, and Robert, his brother-in-law, arrived with breakfast I made them stand behind us so nobody would see us change it around.

Sarah and Robert had brought enough breakfast for David, Peter and me, a bacon buttie and a cup of tea and very welcome. When we had finished our first breakfast the others arrived with the next. Of course not wanting to offend or

admit to already having had some (and as a person who enjoys food much too much), we settled to down to breakfast No 2. Whilst the catering in Fort Albert was very good considering the number of people provided for, restricted room, lack of power and general catering comforts, Debby got first prize for ingenuity. She found a large old piece of slate lying on the ground and used this as a tray to bring us our breakfasts on. I made a mental note, if ever lost in the jungle or caught in a storm halfway up Everest, I wanted Debby with me. After having

condemned

Debby to a fate she probably didn't relish, I finished my cup of tea.

When we had finally sorted everything out and I next looked up we had been joined by a TV crew. (I wondered whether I had any lippy left on). They asked if they could film us. They had been looking for somebody with a telescope and had been told about us (probably by those tabloid reporters). I was just wondering whether to try and negotiate a fee with them, to go towards the new telescope fund of course, but I had no time. The clock was against me and I had more important things to think about. It turned out that they were from Sky TV and were transmitting live pictures back to be shown on air on Sky News. They stayed with us all morning and filmed us at the telescope, observing and generally doing what eclipse watchers do. Once settled down again, we had to get everything aligned. OK,

who had the compass? Or, who had forgotten the compass? Luckily we had Chris Baddiley, the photographer, along with his wife and two teenage children, next to us, setting up all his gear. He knows David and was sharing our battlement with us. This I didn't mind at all. Chris Baddiley is a proper gentleman photographer, not like the riffraff on the ridge behind. Anyway we borrowed his compass and aligned the Celestron. Now everything was in place and we just had to wait for the sun and moon to perform.

About 9.40am I decided that after several cups of coffee I ought to find a loo. I didn't want to be hopping from foot to foot, or even worse be

in the loo, at the moment of totality. I had read horror stories about things like that happening and it wasn't going to happen to me. So off I trekked in search of the conveniences. I found them, two portaloos on the southside on the ground level of Fort Albert, with a queue of around 8-9 people. Very poor facilities for about 600 people, I voiced to my fellow queuemates. I was soon told by one elderly lady, at the front of the queue, that we should count ourselves lucky that

these were here at all, as anyone who had read the fine print on the booking form would have known that no such comforts had been guaranteed to be on hand in the first place. I then queued in silence, thankful for small mercies. Looking around at Fort Albert the unoccupied parts were all cordoned off and sign-posted as unsafe, and I couldn't help wonder what might have happen in the



event of no portaloos. I didn't dwell long on this thought, as I spied Channel TV on the next battlement above the loos. After my turn, I decided to pay a visit to what turned out to be TV corner.

The first person I saw was Nicky Bougourd from CTV. I went to

talk to her and told her that some of the Section were here with 11" Celestron. She had interviewed me before and remembered. Nicky is very nice and interested in everything, always a true professional. She told me that she was there covering the atmosphere of the occasion and was talking to people about their feelings and emotions during the day. She said she would come over with her cameraman after the eclipse at about 11.30am (I wished I'd remembered to bring my lippy). Before I left she

pointed out the BBC TV crew who were with Jamie Theakston, the well known children's TV presenter. He was supposed to have been in Cornwall but, upon hearing the weather report, had chartered a plane and flown over for the day. Whilst walking back to our own battlement, I found myself being followed and called to by young lady with a notepad in her hand. She explained that she was with the Telegraph and would I do an

interview. She had overheard my conversation with Nicky and would be interested to talk to me. I was flattered and shocked by my newly-found fame. When I started back again, I was stopped once more by another young lady, who said she was from the Observer and could she come along to our battlement for an interview after the eclipse. I agreed readily, and decided that stardom was just around the corner, or maybe it was Jeremy Beagle. (Why didn't I bring that lippy, perhaps I should employ a couple of bodyguards).

Then it was David's turn to do an interview and photo shoot, but first the T-shirt had to be changed from one eclipse logo to another. He whipped off one T-shirt and put on another. This was meet with cheers, whistles and general cries of insults, mainly about scaring the sun away. Robert took a photo, and told him flab could be fixed! Off he went, and joined us again a short time later.

It was gone 10am. Things should have happened by now but the cloud was getting in the way. Earlier at about 9.30am we had seen some wonderful sun spot groups, but now nothing. As luck would have it the clouds started to thin, and as I looked through the Celestron I could just make out first contact. I shouted "first bite" so loudly I was sure

Debby had brought along her fridge magnet thermometer, in the form of a pink pig

all Alderney heard me. The clouds had thickened again and the sight lost, but we got everything ready to start recording the

spectacle. Debby had brought along her fridge magnet thermometer, in the form of a pink pig, and sat it in the open air. The radio clock was placed in full view counting down to totality. Debbie had also brought a flat one-sided cheese grater for multiple pinhole projection, in the absence of any trees, a trick shown to us by Heather Couper in her lecture the Monday night before. Maybe we didn't have the most scientific looking equipment, but at least we had it, and it would do the job. We were then joined by Magnus Buchanan, a reporter for the Guernsey Evening Press. Magnus had visited the Section and written about us a lot in the run up to the eclipse.

The clouds cleared enough for us to see each partial phase. When the moon was covering enough of the sun to see it without the aid of the telescope I literally thought I could not believe my eyes. I had waited so long for this and it was finally happening right in front of me. As the moon slowly moved across the

disc of the sun, things started to happen. It was like watching a clock, time goes by as you stare, but because the movement is so slow you don't actually see the hands move. It started to get darker. When the moon was over half way across the sun's disc the temperature started to drop. Debby was being very scientific and recording data, temperature drops and so on. Everything I had planned to do went out of the window; I was just absolutely in awe of this incredible sight.

The darkness had crept up like a fast twilight, the wind had dropped and it was getting quite cold. My

skin had goose bumps forming, I think because of the cold, but I wasn't sure.

As totality got closer David shouted "one minute to go". He was the only one with us who had witnessed a total solar eclipse before. We were all looking to him to tell us what to do and where to look, copying what he was doing and listening out for his instructions. He then shouted to look west for the advancing shadow of the moon, coming towards us at almost 2000 mph. I could feel it long before I could see it. I stood there waiting for it to pass over me, under me, and through me. All of a sudden there it was on the horizon, racing towards us. I stood completely still, watching it and feeling it as if I was being scanned. David shouted "twenty seconds to go". By now it was extremely dark, not as dark as night, but darker than dusk and with a

quite different feel to it. The air was dry and there was a strange mixture of calm and peacefulness, but at the same time strange and eerie. Just a few seconds to go, the cloud started to get thicker. No this couldn't be happening, please let them clear just for another minute at least. It had gotten so cold every inch of my skin was covered in goose bumps and my hands were like ice. A window in the cloud appeared and Venus came shining through just for a second or two.

The clouds were still covering the eclipse. By this time we had missed Bailey's Beads and the first

Diamond Ring. Please, please let it clear. There was a cheer from the other side of the Fort. Thank you, somebody up there heard me. A few seconds later they cleared for us just in time to catch the rest of totality. We could see prominences and just a small teasing glimpse of the corona. I looked around and saw that, in the strange natural but unnatural half light, the horizon was lit up to just about above sea level. For a few seconds I felt completely alone, stood on a precipice watching the dawn of time. I looked upwards again to the hole in the dark sky where the sun had gone out. This primeval feeling came over me, a feeling that I'm sure must have been felt by many people before me especially before eclipses were understood. I just had to scream. I carried on with this high pitched cry during the whole latter part of totality. It was necessary. I had to get the sun back,

I just had to scream. I carried on with this high pitched cry during the whole latter part of totality.

my life force had gone out and had to be recovered. People remarked on my performance afterward, but at the time it just seemed normal to all around me. I can understand why in other parts of the

world they beat drums, make noises, shout, dance and sing, anything to bring back the sun. Then all of a sudden the second Diamond Ring, this piercing shot of light, appeared from the right side of the hole in the sky. The sun had broken its way through, or so it seemed. All of a sudden the world was light again. The earth awoke and breathed once more. Time had seemed to stop still and the world to have stopped turning in those 107 seconds.

I was made to come to my senses by the cheering going on around me. Still looking up I saw very briefly Bailey's Beads. Then the day was as before, but different. Everybody felt different or at least differently. People were in shock at what they had seen and still couldn't take it all in. I too shared that same feeling and, if I could have done, I would have pushed the moon back again so it would happen all over again. I then vowed I had to see another total solar eclipse, even if it meant journeying to the ends of the world to find it and battling the four winds to view it.

Then all I wanted to do was to hug somebody, anybody, everybody. First was Peter, then Barbara, then Robert, then Debby, even Magnus who really

didn't seem to know what had hit him. It was time to crack open the champagne. Peter opened it for me, as

last time I had managed to smash a pane of glass in next door's greenhouse, although I was

thinking that if I aimed just right I might get that press reporter on the ridge behind. When John opened the second bottle, handed to him by Laura, the scene looked like something out of Formula One Grand Prix, with anybody within a six foot radius getting sprayed by champagne. Laura proudly announced that she had shaken the bottle prior to opening, but Debby was too happy to get cross with her daughter at that moment. Laura could have committed mass murder and gotten away with it. Champagne was being given out, photographs were being taken, everybody was so happy, and everybody that had lived through the months leading up to the eclipse with me were all around me. I couldn't have been happier.

Jessica Harris

Transit of Mercury

On 15 November there will be a rare transit of Mercury, when the planet crosses the Sun's disc. Unfortunately it will only be visible from south Pacific areas. The next transit is in 2003.

PML

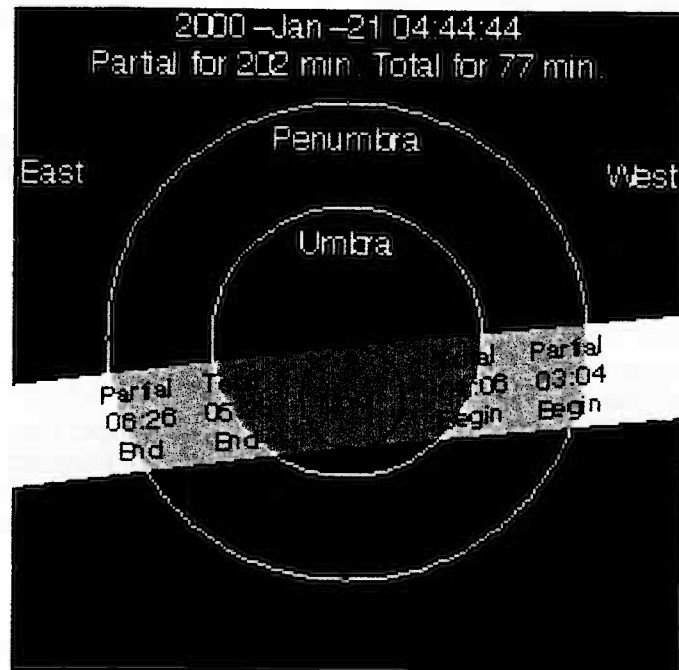
Eclipse Round-up

On 21st September a small group of members was joined by Société President Bill Gallienne and his wife Doreen to share eclipse experiences. In Alderney Bill and Doreen had watched the eclipse from a boat in Longis Bay, Geoff Falla had been on the end of the breakwater and several of us had watched from Fort Albert. It was remarkable how very different the view was from places that were only a few hundred yards apart. Of course even those observing from the same spot were struck by different things but everyone had been impressed by the experience. Frank Dowding had been in Cornwall and was less fortunate with the weather but he did see the eclipse for about a minute just before totality. We watched videos of the eclipse coverage by the main TV channels. The video that best caught the atmosphere at Fort Albert, once you got used to the dizzying changes of camera angles, was Debby Quartier's recording on a hand-held camera. We're still trying to figure out how she did all those somersaults while filming.

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Lunar Eclipse

Looking forward to next year there will be a lunar eclipse in the early hours of 21st January. The graphic below shows the path of the Moon as it passes through the shadow cast by the Earth.



Occultation of Mars

In the early evening of 12 December there will be an interesting occultation of Mars when the Moon passes in front of the planet. The graphic below shows the relative positions of Mars, the Moon and the planets Uranus and Neptune at 7 pm, just before Mars is occulted. The occultation will occur when the Moon is very low in the southwest so to observe it you will need a site with an horizon down to the sea - maybe Pleinmont headland.

Not only does the Moon occult Mars but each month the Moon will occult Uranus and Neptune (though not necessarily visibly from Guernsey). Occultations of Uranus take place on 19 October, 15 November and 12 December. Neptune occultations occur a day earlier.

PML

