Mercury & Venus Section

Conjunctions of Venus and Jupiter

The 2014–'15 session both began and ended with spectacular conjunctions of Venus and Jupiter. For the morning of 2014 August 18, Klaus Brasch sent us a digital image of the two planets in the morning sky as observed from the USA (Figure 1), but on that occasion European observers (including the Director) did not enjoy good weather.

Figure 1. 2014 Aug 18: a morning conjunction of Venus and Jupiter imaged with a 250mm telephoto lens. K. R.Brasch, USA.

In 2015 June–July a second conjunction was widely observed from the UK and Europe when Jupiter passed Venus from east to west in the evening sky, the closest separation on the evening of June 30 being just 19 arcminutes. On June 30, Cristian Fattinnanzi (Italy) pictured the planets above his home town of Montecassiano. Damian Peach placed himself in the foreground of his shot taken from Selsey beach in Sussex (Figure 2). He adds: 'I was very lucky to see it due to a large approaching thunderstorm (lightening flashes nearby!). Luckily the clear gap in the sky was in the right place for a change!'

Telescopic images of the event were taken by Fattinanzi, Martin Lewis and the Director (Figure 3). The Director was able to see the planets in the same low power field of a 7.6cm OG at powers of up to ×80, nicely revealing the phase of Venus and the principal belts of Jupiter. Their great difference in brightness was striking, with Jupiter also appearing dull and more yellowish. Venus showed a phase of just below 30%, but the smallness of her phase allowed only the limb brightening and terminator shading to be easily seen.

Figure 2. 2015 Jun 30: taken from the beach at Selsey, Sussex. D. A. Peach.

On June 28, 29 and 30 both cusps looked bright, but on July 1 only the southern cusp seemed brighter than the limb. Alan Heath (20cm SCT) and Stanislas Macsymowicz (15cm OG, France) also found both cusps bright on Jun 30. Gianluigi Adamoli (Italy) also enjoyed seeing the planets in the same low power field with his small Maksutov.

Although of no scientific value, these conjunctions are always a joy to behold and they certainly inspire the Section's members to great artistic feats!

Richard McKim, *Director*

Figure 3. 2015 Jun 30: telescopic view with a 76mm OG, hand-held digital camera image (South at top, and Venus overexposed). R. J. McKim.

A Patrick Moore Moon Mission in Plymouth

Children aged from 6 to 16 have won prizes in Marine Academy Plymouth's 'Moore Moon Mission'. The school offered a city-wide challenge for young people to take a photograph or paint a picture of the Moon in honour of the late Sir Patrick Moore.

Over 140 students from 23 different schools entered the competition. Members of the Plymouth Astronomical Association helped to judge the winners and children received engraved shields and medals. Copies of the new book *The Universe According to Sir Patrick Moore* were donated by Immediate Media, the publishers of the *Sky at Night Magazine*, and pens and key rings were donated by the British Astronomical Association.

Kallum Hoskin, secondary school winner

Kallum Hoskin from Eggbuckland Community College won first prize for secondary school students and Imogen Godfrey of Plymouth College Preparatory School took first place for the primary school age group.

Kallum Hoskin said: 'I have always liked looking at the Moon and stars and my mum and dad got me a telescope for my birthday. I know Patrick Moore has been the big force in all things to do with the stars and space and I am sure humans will live in space as we live here on Earth one day.'

David Wilton, Chairman of Plymouth Astronomical Association, was on hand to present the awards.

Organiser Martin Edmonds said: 'Sir Patrick Moore devoted his life to astronomy and encouraging young people to look up at the night sky and wonder; I think he would be pleased that we are encouraging children in Plymouth to follow in his footsteps and learn about the Moon and stars. Next year we will run the competition again and I hope we will get even more entries!'

Some of the prizewinners with David Wilton of Plymouth AA.

Martin Edmonds