

What's Up?



BY BARRY DECRISTOFANO

Well, the clouds didn't seem to have gotten the memo that there was a transit of Mercury occurring this past Monday. They kept trying to block our view, but for about half of the time, the Sun shone through! We were able to see the start of the transit (at 7:34 a.m.) and then the clouds came in thick and grey. Around 8:15, it cleared again and from there, viewing was on and off. We were fortunate to have friends stop by now and then during the transit to share the experience with us.

Here is a picture of the Sun and Mercury taken about 20 minutes before the transit ended. Mercury is the round black dot near the edge of the Sun. The grayish patches are clouds.



We don't often get to sky-gaze during the daytime, but when we can it's for something interesting!

Turning our attention back to the nighttime skies, now that Daylight Savings Time is over, we can start looking at the stars and planets earlier in the evening. Right now, in the West at sunset, we can see our planets from summertime (Jupiter and Saturn) low on the horizon and starting to set after the Sun does. But wait! What's that other bright object that's just below Jupiter? If you watch it over the next few days, you'll see it and Jupiter get closer and closer together. What is it? It is the planet Venus.

If you go outside each afternoon at the same time, say, 5:15, and look towards the Southwest, you'll see Saturn and Jupiter a little bit closer to the horizon each day and Venus a little bit higher. And, by the evening of the 24th, they will have passed each other! As they looked up at the sky from night to night, our ancestors noticed that some of the points of light moved relative to the others. They wandered among the rest of the stars. Noticing this, the ancient Greeks called these moving stars the wanderers – in Greek, *planetes*. These planets also moved with different speeds. We now know that this is because of the size of their orbits around the Sun. The fastest wanderer was named for the god that was the messenger of the gods – *Nebo* by the Babylonians, *Hermes* by the Greeks, and *Mercury* by the Romans. I encourage you to go out in the evenings and notice the motion of these wanderers.

Saturn



Jupiter



Venus



Southwest
November 15, 5:15 p.m.

Saturn



Jupiter



Venus



Southwest
November 19, 5:15 p.m.

Saturn



Jupiter



Venus



Southwest
November 23, 5:15 p.m.

In addition to sharing views of Mercury's transit last Monday, over the past two weeks I've had the pleasure of sharing other views through a telescope with some Plymptonian friends from their backyard, and with a group of parents and students at the Hingham Middle School. The middle school event was part of our club's community outreach program. The South Shore Astronomical Society is always happy to work with groups and share our hobby with them. That night, we had nine telescopes of all types and sizes set up. We were able to provide views of and information about the Moon, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, the Ring Nebula, and the Andromeda Galaxy. About 60 students and adults took turns visiting each of the members' telescopes. If you're interested in an event like this, contact me about it and we'll see what can be arranged. Use either my What's Up? email, astroblog@comcast.net, or my club email, bdecristofano@ssastros.org. Speaking of the club, clubs are a great way to learn more about the hobby. If you are new to astronomy, don't let that stop you – our members range from newbies to seasoned veterans. There's something at each of our meetings for everyone. Our home page is at www.ssastros.org.

Are there things in the night sky that you wonder about? Ask me! I look forward to hearing your questions.

Keep looking up!

Barry