

The Tombaugh Telescope - a Truly Fantastic Treasure

by Gary Hug

This year we closed a segment of NEKAAL's history with the climax of the NASA grant-funded 'Near-Earth Follow-up' program at Farpoint. It has been an honor to work with all of you on this project. Although we made few headlines, we nonetheless were part of a program designed to protect the earth from potentially hazardous asteroids. Our diligence is rewarded by the continuing use of a telescope which I believe has no equal in Kansas. (OK. Maybe on par with ASKC's Powell 30" telescope - but none better).

Farpoint's NEO Follow-up program also was part of a longer term asteroid search/discovery program. Farpoint Observatory is listed as 42nd in the world by the Minor Planet Center in number of asteroid discoveries (we currently have 172 numbered asteroids). We also have the distinction of being the only place in Kansas to have

- discovered a comet
- discovered a NEO (Near-Earth Object)
- discovered not 1, but 3, Jupiter Trojan asteroids.

Add to this list an asteroid in the very rare Griqua family of which there are only about 15 members. There also have been a few Hungaria type (those are asteroids residing in the most inner part of the main asteroid belt,) and lately a few asteroids with Mars-crossing orbits.

Many of you have been crucial to operation and continued improvement of the Tombaugh Telescope. Special thanks go to Drs. Bruce and Barbara Twarog of Kansas University who have been enthusiastic supporters of our project and our club as a whole for many years. They were instrumental in arranging the permanent loan of the fabulous 27" (0.69 meter) optics for insertion in the Tombaugh telescope. The primary mirror has an exceptional figure, and in times of "good seeing" provides high resolution and wonderfully sharp imagery.

The Telescope itself has had a steady barrage of contrast improvements made by Dan Tibbets' constant reshaping of the baffling system inside the walls of the telescope, secondary mirror, and camera. Dan's methodical approach (and use of very common and inexpensive materials in just the right configuration) has significantly improved the imaging capability of the telescope.

Graham Bell took over the grant writing at a crucial time, Janelle Burgardt assumed the duties of public outreach, and Russ Valentine worked steadily at getting our internet up and running as well as our internal Farpoint network.

Walt and Nancy Cole sifted through a non-trivial amount of paperwork on the grant in excess of their normal paperwork as treasurer.

The board of Directors of NEKAAL dealt with grant details and negotiated a lot of business details for the Tombaugh. NEKAAL members at large had to put up with their observatory being used nearly constantly for the NEO Follow-up program.

Everyone involved with NEKAAL made sacrifices, and for that you now have a world class telescope and camera system complete with photometric filters and a state of the art tracking system at YOUR disposal.

The Tombaugh is a very precious resource. Few astronomy clubs have such a great resource as the Tombaugh telescope, especially accompanied by relatively dark skies.

Talk to Dan Tibbets about training on the Tombaugh telescope. Hmm, I'm kinda thinking a mosaic of, say, a dozen images of the great Andromeda Galaxy, wait--maybe a color mosaic for a wall-sized high resolution image.. hmm, there's photometric projects... and I wonder how many quasars we can image... of course there's always Centaurs, TNO's to discover.. so many ideas - so little dark time...