# Limpopo Astronomy Public Outreach, South Africa

**TF3 FUNDED PROJECT 2013**

Introduction:

The TF3 funded project for 2013, sponsored by the International Astronomical Union (IAU), through its Office of Astronomy for Development (OAD), saw Limpopo Astronomy and the Soutpansberg Astronomy Club (SAC) visit thirteen venues in Limpopo Province, South Africa, during 2013. These were: - Thohoyandou, Polokwane (twice), Modimolle, Bela Bela (twice), Tshipise, Giyani, Mokopane, Tzaneen, Elim, Mussina, Makhado and Lephalale.

The SAC has built up a strong relationship over the years with the local media, which helped in promoting and advertising this outreach project. Various web sites in the country also carried details of the project, including the Johannesburg Planetarium. The social media was also utilised to promote activities of the Soutpansberg Astronomy Club in conjunction with Limpopo Astronomy, as well as advertised on Facebook. The Club's monthly newsletter has been another source which has been used and with well over 300 recipients it is well represented locally and internationally. This helps in informing some of the targeted population of the outreach activities.

The Soutpansberg Astronomy Club and Limpopo Astronomy remain committed to the "pavement public outreach", and we have thus far been enabled to fulfil these commitments with above average attendance at the various venues we have visited. Public response has been very well received, and we are always asked how soon we will be returning.

From a weather point of view, even sunny South Africa does have overcast and rainy days, but fortunately this did not become an issue, and only one venue had to be rescheduled for this reason.

**Summary of objectives and some of the highlights/achievements.**

The project's objective of reaching large portions of the general public and stimulating their interest in science, and specifically astronomy, were realised, with around 2 500 of the public filling in the attendance register. This, of course, is not a true reflection and that figure can easily be quadrupled as generally only one member of a family or group fills in the register. Based on this the true estimate of individuals reached by this initiative is closer

to 10,000. During busy periods, with only one or two members manning the display and telescope it was difficult to make sure that everyone had filled in the register and policing of this was certainly not going to be an option. A reasonable estimate would put the average cost per person at about R 6.00 per person. This is an awesome return for funds spent on promoting astronomy, science and tertiary education.

The display of cosmic and fossil history going back 2.1 billion years with a South African flavour called "Fossils, Light & Time" was popular, with plenty of interest as well as sparking many debates. The views of the Sun which was often peppered with sunspots elicited many, "Wow's!" and, "Is that really the Sun we are looking at?" Contact with teachers at various schools in the region was made with the view of visiting them in the near future.

The selection of posters sponsored by the South African Astronomical Observatory and South African Advancement of Science & Technology (SAASTA) were eagerly snapped up by the many visitors as well as the handout material that the SAC had on the Sun, Moon, Solar System, the planets and South African Star Lore. Information from SAASTA on Science, Engineering and Technology careers and where to study was also available. It was wonderful to see the enthusiasm our event generated, and we were asked many times when we would be returning again.

Many of the visitors to the stand and telescope during the day made their way back for the stargazing evenings. This entailed pointing out some of the constellations and stars that were visible, projecting views of the Moon, Jupiter, Saturn and some of the brighter deep sky objects onto a big screen, as well as views of all of these at the eyepiece.

Short presentations during the course of the evening on the various objects we were looking at were conducted. Some of these included, Jupiter and the Galilean moons as well as the GRS, The Giant Nebula in Orion designated M42 by Charles Messier and many others. The Moon was always a winner on the big screen or at the eyepiece as was Saturn, eliciting many observers to comment that we had stuck a picture of the giant ringed planet at the working end of the telescope! Various short clips were shown during the course of the evenings, including one highlighting the South African Square Kilometer Array Telescope (SKA). Many questions were asked, with particular regard to the SKA, which shows a growing awareness amongst the general public.

Kind regards,

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