

THE HYPOXIC OBSERVER

February 2003

Colorado Springs Astronomical Society
Journal of High-Altitude Observing

Saturday, Feb. 1 provided another reminder that space will not be conquered easily. The seven Columbia astronauts killed upon re-entry join a lengthening litany of those who have given their lives in the cause of space exploration.

For several months in Denver, an exhibit at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science provided up-close evidence of the thin line between man's ingenuity and nature's deadly power. Gazing into the reclaimed remains of the Mercury Project "Liberty Bell" spacecraft, a dumpy tin can whose electronic functions were governed by a mechanical clock, one gets the idea that man is seriously overmatched by nature. The Shuttle Columbia, for all its technological glory, began to take shape on drawing boards only about 15 years after Mercury. Columbia was older than the personal computer.

Liberty Bell's commander, Gus Grissom, escaped disaster after returning to Earth, only to die years later in another spacecraft before it could even get off the ground. The Columbia crew perished mere minutes from returning to Earth. The disaster, more than 40 years after Grissom was plucked from the Atlantic, makes dreadfully real one of the messages of the Liberty Bell exhibit, which several CSAS members saw in late January and write about in this issue of the Hypoxic Observer: Space exploration is as dangerous as it ever was.

Liberty Bell 7

The lost spacecraft on display in Denver

By Tom Preble

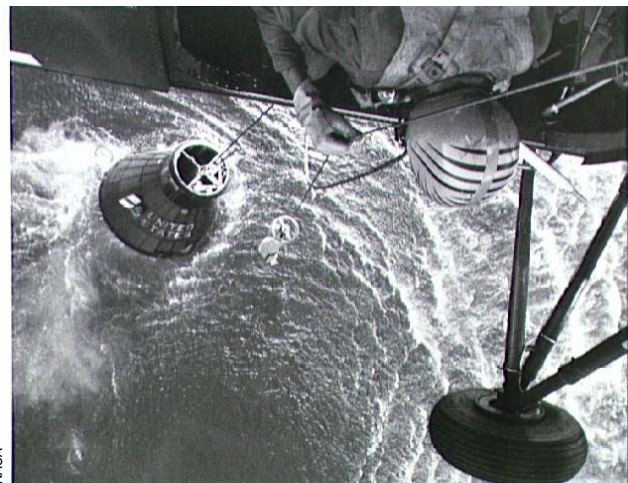
"I don't want to be known as 'Mrs. Squirmy Hatch Blower' "

"I didn't blow the hatch! The hatch just *blew!*"

So went the dialog from the movie, "The Right Stuff". Most of us over 40 years old remember Gus Grissom as one of our childhood heroes. Gus was a brave member of the original astronaut corps. When the Mercury capsule's hatch blew on splashdown, Gus barely escaped with his life. In fact if he hadn't had the rubber neck dam in place at the base of his helmet, Gus had said that his drowning would've been certain.

The Liberty Bell 7. The only capsule from our space program ever lost. And lost it was, in an area of the ocean over 3 miles deep. Expertly recovered and restored only recently, we were anxious to see it. The Colorado Springs Rocket Society and the Colorado Springs Astro-

nomical Society combined forces on January 19th to do just that. A piece of American history, a memory of our childhood awaited. No distant fuzzy black and white image this time, the capsule would be mere inches away. Every burnished screw, every pit and ding awaited our in-



NASA

A Marine helicopter crewman lowers the recovery cable towards the Mercury spacecraft after the emergency hatch mysteriously blew, allowing water to surge into the capsule. Too heavy to lift, the capsule was released and allowed to sink. Astronaut Gus Grissom, tiring rapidly in the open sea, was then lifted to safety.

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Liberty Bell

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spection.

Nice day for a drive. Too nice. Sunny, mild - when do we get winter already? In a display of joint club goodwill, we carpoled for the drive to Denver. CSAS president Chris Earley, however, drove up with only his (trusted) son as company in their tank-like, rocket resistant Ford Expedition. Chris still has a small tic in the corner of his eye around COSROC'ers for reasons those in the know would understand. Dave Virga of COSROCS drove some of us up in his minivan. Walter entertained us with his singing. Well, we *must* have been entertained. Everyone was very quiet, almost eerily so as Walter sang -and no one left. Of course we were going 75 MPH at the time...

Upon our arrival at the Denver Museum the COSROC'ers "inadvertently" maneuvered Chris Earley directly under the upraised crushing talons of the giant T-Rex skeleton! Our feckless club president was rescued from COSROC's sinister saurian plot by the beckoning of a museum ticket agent. (Curses!) Did we actually hear that epithet of frustration? Off we went to the IMAX film on the space station. A great film that gave the audience a feel for space station life with a sprinkling of practical physics humor. (Well, all the engineers were laughing.)

Finally we walked to the Liberty Bell 7 exhibit. What a thing. So well preserved all those years on the ocean floor that the lettering "Liberty Bell 7" was intact, as well as the painted "crack" in the bell. Around and around the capsule we shuffled in a darkened room. The capsule itself was illuminated. So small and cramped, so carefully put together but primitive looking nonetheless. Today's cheapest economy car looks more "space age". How brave Gus Grissom was to ride up into space on a pillar of fire in that unassuming spam can.

But the hatch! Where was the hatch? Is the mystery now solved, did Gus blow the hatch? The hatch was

CALENDAR

CSAS EVENTS

February Events

http://calendar.yahoo.com/public/csas_calendar

Tuesday, Feb. 11, 7 p.m.

CSAS Board meeting
6645 Tin Cup Court

Friday, Feb. 21, 7 p.m.

Novice night
School for the Deaf and the Blind
Kiowa and Institute streets
Novices: bring your equipment and questions

Tuesday, Feb. 25, 7 p.m.

CSAS Monthly meeting
School for the Deaf and the Blind

Saturday, March 1, dusk

New Moon Party
And Messier Marathon practice
Preble's Ranch

never found. To blow the hatch from a Mercury capsule was a forcefully violent endeavor. Any astronaut that blew a hatch in training invariably came away cut and bruised from the process. Gus never had a mark on him and was vindicated by NASA. In fact, Gus Grissom's astronaut career was looking very bright until that fateful day in January of 1967 when he and two crewmates were burned alive in an Apollo capsule fire on the launch pad.

Seeing that Mercury capsule brought back so many memories, memories that melded with the space station film and the optimism of today. We humans are prone to self criticism. Certainly humility is a virtue, but now and then my species makes me proud. This day's trip to see Liberty Bell 7 left many of us with goosebumps, I'm sure. Or maybe it was from Walter's singing?

Pam, Thank you for arranging our wonderful day. We missed you!

STAR PARTIES

Mid-South Star Gaze

April 23-26

French Camp, Miss.

The conference is for amateur astronomers. Teacher workshop, lectures, and informal deep-sky observing.

The Observatory has on the hilltop site over 16 telescopes, a nice picnic area and covered pavilion, a planetarium and lecture hall, an outdoor amphitheater, and astronomy exhibits. The Astronomy Materials Center has over 90 meteorite specimens. Restrooms nearby. Shower house and bunk house may be ready by April. View through our scopes or bring your own.

Info: (662) 547-6377

<http://www.rainwaterobservatory.org/stargaze/>

SKY EVENTS

February

- 9** First quarter moon, 4:11 a.m.
- 11** Moon 3° north of Saturn, 8 p.m.
- 15** Moon passes Jupiter, 11 a.m.
- 16** Full Moon, 4:51 p.m.
- 22** Saturn resumes prograde motion, 3 a.m.
- 23** Last quarter Moon, 9:46 a.m.
- 24-25** Moon passes Mars, pre-dawn
- 27** Moon passes Venus, pre-dawn

Hi !

Last Sunday we went to the Denver Natural History Museum to see the Mercury capsule. First, I saw the IMAX movie about the space station. My favorite part was when they showed the earth. I also saw the Liberty Bell 7. I saw every thing that was in the capsule. Like there was money. There was a game where you could try to rescue the capsule. My dad said it was impossible. Next I made a rocket. There was a contest to see whose rocket went farther. I shot down another rocket. This is what I did on my weekend.

Christopher Earley

BOARD NOTES

We had an extremely good and productive meeting on the 14th of January (note - Board meetings are always on the 2nd Tuesday of the month - at Chris Earley's home and are always open to any club member who would like to attend).

We had some detailed discussions about some of the issues recently raised by various members over the Discuss List including web site issues, star parties and general apathy for club events.

To begin, we want to send out our thanks to Gary Frerking for stepping up to the plate to take over the Webmaster position. He has asked that members forward all requests for changes / additions directly to him as well as comments on those he has already made. Gary's email is: gary@frerking.org. Thanks for your time and effort, Gary!

Traditionally, CSAS suspends all activity during the month of December with the exception of our annual Christmas party. At our November meeting, the fact that the January New Moon party fell over the New Year's holiday weekend was discussed. No one at that time indicated interest in attending a star party on that weekend, so no official one was held. This puts our next New Moon party on February 1st at the Preble's ranch. Instead of doing a full potluck, we thought a dessert selection would be fun so bring your favorite sweet munchie to share - we'll have hot drinks available!

We would like to remind everyone that the club is available to do special group / school star parties. We intended to try and get as many of these types of parties consolidated into our monthly public party as possible, but not to exclude anyone that may need one of their own! Especially when we have elected not to hold our monthly public party in December, January or February, we want to make sure you all are aware that the club is available to do individual parties so feel free to offer our services! Just to remind you,

we are going to be discussing the details of our monthly public parties at the club meetings in the next couple of months, so please bring your thoughts and ideas or if you are unable to attend, contact any board member.

We are going to try something new next month! We have had many requests over the last several months to do a "Beginner Night". We are going to attempt to make this a regular CSAS bi-annual event beginning this year on Friday the 21st of February. The event will be held at the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind so there will be a lighted area available for assisting with scope setup and other questions and also some dark areas for observing. We encourage everyone to attend - novice level folks with their scopes and questions and other members to assist with everything from scope set up to observing techniques. Although there may not be time to put it together for the February event, by 3rd quarter weekend in September (which is when we will hold the other event for this year) we would like to have a presentation with some novice concepts to start the evening off. If you have an interest in putting this presentation together or assisting someone else with it, please contact a board member. Please make a personal invitation to any novice observers you know to attend this evening set aside for them!

Much time was spent on the initial organization of Rocky Mountain Star Stare 2003, which will be held at the "North Field" site (pending Forest Service approval). Although it has now been determined this will not be our 15th but our 17th annual event, we still want to make it great! We hope to have the web site and registration up in February. At this time, the RMSS planning meetings are being held in conjunction with the regular board meetings and all are welcome to participate. Please volunteer your assistance with this event - there isn't any area in which we could not use some help however, in particular we would love speaker contacts and any event ideas

you have. We will be discussing some ideas about the event and equipment we are considering purchasing (including a speaker tent) at the February club meeting and would appreciate any input! Stay tuned for more RMSS details next month...

We now have a combination lock to the "StarGate" area at the Preble's ranch for club-only use. If you have an interest in using this area for some observing, please contact Chris Earley for the combination and the guidelines for using this area.

Lastly, another quick reminder - dues are now due! Please bring to the next club meeting or send in to our PO Box address as soon as possible to avoid any interruption in your newsletters.

After our discussions at the board meeting we came to the conclusion that what CSAS needs more than anything is as usual - your input and participation! Any ideas and comments you have on making our events more fun / worthwhile to attend are most welcome. We have made this concept a major focus for this year's board and welcome anything you have to say. Let's put some excitement back in this club!

Your Board - Chris, Jim, Pam, Mary and Ben

2002-03 Board of Officers

President.....**Chris Earley** 573-6445
Vice President**Jim Baschal** 262-9721
Secretary.....**Pam Warren** 570-0170
Treasurer.....**Mary Trudo** 392-3278
Member at Large.....**Ben Wentworth** 392-4438

Appointed Officers

AL Award Coordinator.....**John Rising** 576-7245
ALCOR.....**Debbie Schermerhorn** 271-7581
EOSOC Administrator.....**Steve Bygren** 599-3612
Newsletter Editor.....**Jeff Thomas** 282-8023
Public Relations Director.....**Bob Littin** 473-6375
Webmaster.....**John Rising** 576-7245

Web Sites

Astronomical League..... www.astroleague.org
CSAS..... www.rmss.org
International Dark Sky Assoc. ... www.dark-sky.org
Listersvver <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CSAS-Discuss>
MARS Region..... www.mars-al.org

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COLORADO SPRINGS ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY
JOURNAL OF HIGH-ALTITUDE OBSERVING

P.O. BOX 62022, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80962-2022

Next meeting: Feb. 27, 7—9 p.m.
Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind
Kiowa and Institute streets

CSAS Membership Application Form

MEMBERSHIP ENTITLES YOU TO NEWSLETTERS, OBSERVING AWARDS, VOTING PRIVILEGES IN CSAS AND THE ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE, CLUB MEMBERSHIP IN THE INTERNATIONAL DARK-SKY ASSOCIATION AND MUCH MORE. CSAS MEMBERSHIP DUES APPLY TO THE CALENDAR YEAR AND ARE PAID EACH JANUARY AT OR BEFORE THE MEETING. RENEWALS ARE PAID AT THE REGULAR COST. NEW MEMBERSHIPS USE THE FOLLOWING TABLE:

JANUARY 1 TO MARCH 31	\$17	JULY 1 TO SEPTEMBER 30	\$9
APRIL 1 TO JUNE 30	\$13	OCTOBER 1 TO DECEMBER 31	\$5

INDIVIDUAL MEMBERSHIP \$17 PER YEAR, PER INDIVIDUAL
FAMILY MEMBERSHIP \$22 PER YEAR FOR 2 PEOPLE; \$5 EACH ADDITIONAL

TO JOIN, PLEASE COMPLETE THE FORM BELOW AND SEND IT WITH YOUR PAYMENT TO: CSAS, P.O. BOX 62022, COLORADO SPRINGS, CO 80962-2022. PLEASE MAKE YOUR CHECK PAYABLE TO "CSAS." ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIPS ARE AVAILABLE: PLEASE CONTACT THE TREASURER VIA EMAIL FOR MORE INFORMATION:

btmt@csas.net

NAME _____ NEW MEMBER RENEWING

STREET ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

(AREA CODE) PHONE _____

EMAIL ADDRESS _____

TELESCOPE TYPE (NOT REQUIRED FOR MEMBERSHIP) _____

YOUR OCCUPATION (OPTIONAL) _____

HOW WOULD YOU LIKE TO RECEIVE YOUR NEWSLETTER? .PDF VIA EMAIL U.S. MAIL

I AM AVAILABLE, ON SHORT NOTICE (CHECK ALL THAT APPLY):

TO ANSWER QUESTIONS FROM THE MEDIA ABOUT MY AREA(S) OF INTEREST/EXPERTISE

TO GIVE TALKS OR LECTURES ABOUT ASTRONOMY AT STAR PARTIES, ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES AND OTHER GROUPS

TO BRING MY TELESCOPE TO PUBLIC EVENTS TO VOLUNTEER MY HELP AT STAR PARTIES



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