

People wonder about stars

# Star-gazing is popular hobby, inspires sense of awe

By Mick Dyer  
Staff Reporter

Since the beginning of time, people have felt an overwhelming compulsion to look at the multitude of objects which fill the night sky.

These objects were both the subject of curiosity and inspiration to generations of people all over the world.

And these objects that could be seen but not touched had a very real impact on people's lives. From very early on, sky-watchers detected patterns and repeating sequences in the night sky.

During times when daily survival was uncertain, these patterns and sequences gave the universe a sense of order and removed some of the anxiety people had about

how little control they had over their world. Subsequently, these patterns and sequences were incorporated into the mythological framework of cultures around the world.

My, how things have changed. Well, not really.

The human race doesn't have much more control over the planet than it did during prehistory. We've just developed a level of technology that fools us into believing so.

And we still look to the heavens out of curiosity and for inspiration. For whatever reason, star-gazing is a popular hobby.

Don Taylor, associate professor of astronomy at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, said it is easy to get started. All you need is a clear sky and a star chart. He said star charts that can be adjusted to display a map of the evening sky depending on the date and time of

night are available at some bookstores.

He also said he recommends Sky and Telescope and Astronomy magazines to provide information to supplement the star chart. These

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—Taylor

boring galaxy, Andromeda, on a clear night.

"One of the amazing things is that our eyes are sensitive enough to see something several million light years away," Taylor said. "It's really kind of marvelous."

A light year is an astronomical unit of measure and equals the distance light travels in a year, or 5,880,000,000,000 miles.

Of course, one of the disadvantages of naked-eye viewing is the lack of detail that can be seen with the unaided eye, Taylor said.

Taylor said with a pair of binoculars, star-gazers can see some lunar features with some detail follow the four bright moons of Jupiter, see globular clusters and nebulae, as well as many more stars.

"Comets, when they're around are often best seen with binoculars," Taylor said.

With a small portable telescope Taylor said the detail of what you can see is amazing. He said with a 60 mm lens, star-gazers can observe Jupiter's moons and believe Saturn's rings, the polar caps of Mars, many craters and other lunar features, the Orion nebula and much more.

"For about the price of a reasonable stereo system, you can get a pretty nice telescope," Taylor said. "It's amazing to see what you can see with them."

Taylor said star-gazing can arouse and satisfy our sense of scientific curiosity about the universe. But star-gazing also can inspire a sense of awe and wonder.

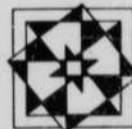


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