

NEWCASTLE ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY INC
MINUTES
30 September 2005

MEETING OPENED: 7.35 pm with 35 members and guests present.

CHAIRMAN: Mr Ghul Hussain

MINUTES: The minutes from August were read and accepted. (George Barnes/Graeme Johnson).

APOLOGIES: David Hough, Tammy Dennis.

GENERAL:

- Prof. Colin Keay introduced Prof. Malcolm Walter of Macquarie University for his talk “The Latest from Mars”. Prof. Walter discussed the geological evidence for life on Mars. It is commonly believed that evidence of life will be associated with water. He compares geological formations on Mars with those on Earth that were formed by water. Apart from the Martian polar ice caps, his evidence for water on Mars includes past oceans that smoothed out impact craters, hematite that precipitated from water, channels formed by running water, and infrared spectroscopy that reveals fossiliferous rock. Most life on Earth is microscopic and it exists in the Earth’s crust down to a depth of five kilometres, and this too may be possible on Mars. Areas of higher than average methane emission, indicative of life, have been detected on Mars. Environmental conditions are extreme on Mars although similarly extreme environments on Earth can support life. Life has existed on Earth for 3.5 billion years, liquid water flowed on Mars for 3.15 billion years, so the odds of life on Mars, past or present, are not negligible. However, Prof. Walter is cautious about what constitutes proof of life on Mars, and nothing so far convinces him.
- Ghul sent around a brochure from Astrovisuals for anyone interested in purchasing star charts and other high quality printed astronomical material in a bulk order.
- Macquarie University is holding an astronomy open night on 8 October 2005, from 6.00pm until 10.00pm, in Building EB7. Professor Fred Watson of the Anglo-Australian Observatory will be giving a talk from 7.45pm entitled “Relatively Brilliant: Einstein’s Amazing Universe”.
- A tentative date of 17 October was set for a public Mars viewing night at Horseshoe Beach.
- The next meeting will be 28 October 2005 starting 7.30 pm.
- The meeting closed at 9.30pm and a light supper was served.