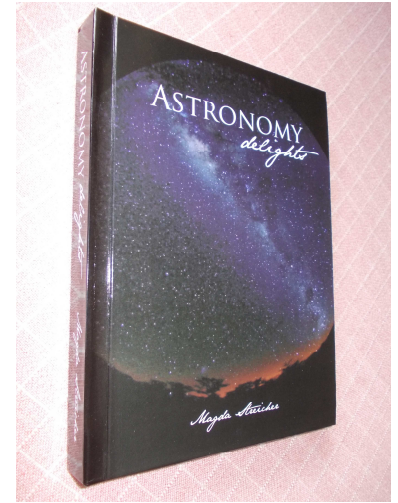


Magda Streicher: Astronomy Delights

BSB Printers Polokwane/Pietersburg 2012
Hard cover, 353 pages
ISBN 978-0-620-51154-4
Price: R480 (+ R40 postage in South Africa)
Available from the author: magdalena@mweb.co.za

Living in the northern hemisphere (Germany), I'm not an expert of the southern sky. Though, over the last years, many Europeans have traveled south to see its spectacular objects. Especially Namibia with its well-equipped astronomy farms has become a prominent location. Unfortunately, I have seen the southern sky only once – without a telescope – in Australia. But I have decided to come back and 2014 will be a chance to visit South Africa.



This country is the home of an eminent visual observer and long-time member of the Webb Deep-Sky Society: Magda Streicher. I'm glad to know her via email for many years. When I will travel to her country, I'm sure that one book is in my luggage: "Astronomy Delights". It is a must for any person who wants to discover the southern sky and its numerous treasures. Though, normally a book can only give a rough impression, this one – written with love, knowledge and experience – will open your mind, still before seeing any single southern star.

Of course, "Astronomy Delights" gives on 353 pages information about interesting southern deep-sky objects, arranged by constellation. But this is only one feature of many. For instance, the book also covers observational methods, history of astronomy and stories about – more or less known – amateur and professional astronomers, like Jack Bennett, Cyril Jackson, Anthony Fairall, Marie Pismis, Arthur Hogg or Karl Henize. All these persons are perfectly sketched by Kathryn van Schalkwyk. The figures, made with a pencil from photographs, are real eye-catchers.

The solid book starts with two chapters about "How to observe the starry skies" and "History". The latter describing Magda's visits of historical places like Bath, Slough and Oxford, the homes of the Herschels and Halley, respectively. The third chapter is dedicated to her very idol, Caroline Herschel. It briefly covers the impressive discoveries of William Herschel's talented sister. Then Magda takes us on an inspiring journey from Antila to Volans, including a few northern constellations like Delphinus, Lyra, Taurus or Ursa Major. Each one is presented on about six pages. Let's look, for instance, on the chapter "Chamaeleon". It conventionally starts with a star map, showing the constellation and the featured deep sky objects (all listed in the object index at the end of the book). But, unexpected, there is a photo of a green Chamaeleon, followed by a poetic text. The object descriptions, illustrated by Magda's accurate pencil drawings, are poetic too – a real pleasure. The chapter is closed by a data table. Other constellation texts are enhanced by amateur astrophotos, comics (Farmer Rabbit in "Lepus") or even treasures from Magda's family photo album. For instance, "Corona Australis" is illustrated by a photo, showing the crowned mother at her wedding in 1945. And in "Horologium" Magda stands beside the master of time and space, Albert Einstein – at Madame Tussaud's Wax Museum. No doubt, the book is full of imagination. When browsing, you're always curious about what comes next.

"Astronomy Delights" ends with chapters on "Old astronomy books" – featuring Dreyer's New General Catalogue or publications by Dorrit Hoffleit and Danie Overbeek – and the "Bushveld". This remote observing place in the north-eastern part of South Africa, illustrated by fine colour photos, is Magda's "heaven". Here he lives on a farm with pretty dark skies, using Schmidt-Cassegrain reflectors with apertures of 12 and 16 inches (Fig.).

The delightful book will fascinate all deep-sky observers. Those who only know the northern sky will get curious to experience the complementary one and those who are already familiar with it, will find new objects, e.g. asterisms discovered by Magda over the years (one in Lyra is named after the "mopani worm"). All readers will be attracted by the inspiring presentation, opening a new look on old targets. There is a good amount of information, which may not be found in any other comparable astronomy book. However, if you are now eager to get "Astronomy Delights" you must hurry – the first edition is limited to only 150 exemplars. But Magda told me that there will be an e-book version available at the end of 2013, which also corrects a few errors.

Wolfgang Steinicke