

Sunny Day @ NLO - June 13th 2009

The day before was overcast with thick fog and it looked like we had offended the weather gods, however bright sunshine greeted us at day break for our 140th anniversary celebrations of Lockyer's discovery of Helium. 150 visitors came along to the NLO for a didactic mix of lectures all about the Sun, to hands on science experiments, telescope tours and planetarium shows. Top of the bill was Jack Wicking's magnificently restored siderostat which triumphantly succeeded in displaying the



Fraunhofer lines in the solar spectrum. In the lecture theatre Keith Orrell (NLO) started the proceedings with an historical talk on Lockyer's discovery of Helium followed by Peter Meadows (BAA) who showed us how to safely observe the Sun explaining all the likely solar features we were likely to observe. Pete Lawrence (BBC Sky@Night) succeeded in getting a great image of a large solar prominence with his Solarscope, which he then went on to process. He also showed us some magnificent animations of his solar images taken over the past few months. The Sun may be going through its solar minimum,

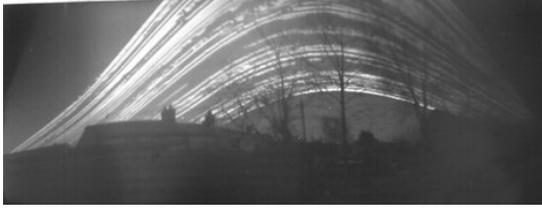


but Pete's images show that the Sun is still amazingly active. By the afternoon however, the sky had clouded over and sadly the solar cookers ran out of power! Karen Young made a very brave attempt at exhibiting a pizza box solar cooker, ready primed with some bacon in a frying pan, which sadly remained uncooked! However, Chris Rudge's solar photovoltaic stand succeeded in powering a mini scalextric race track, and Naturalwatt's huge solar photovoltaic trailer kept an electric fan and lights powered all day.



During the afternoon lecture sessions we welcomed Prof. Douglas Gough from the Institute of Astronomy who explained the inner workings of the Sun and the nature of sunspots. Dr. Francisco Diego (UCL) followed with a talk about solar eclipses and the features to look out for at the forthcoming eclipse on July 21st.





Alan Martin and Carol Boote kept the planetarium occupied for most of the day with back to back shows, and the Institute of Physics operated a hands-on science busking stand where you could learn how to make a homemade sunset, or

understand the forces that allow a malteser to rise up in a wine glass when spun around. Pete Lawrence was judge to our Solargraph competition, and the overall winner went resoundingly to Kate Kay for her magnificent solargraph taken from her garden in Bridport, showing the path of the Sun over four months from December – April. A solargraph is a pinhole camera image with an exposure lasting several months to show the daily path of the sun. The day concluded with the helium balloon launch, and conditions were ideal with a very gentle breeze carrying them all due North. The owner of the balloon that travels furthest will win a radio controlled helium blimp. Funds raised from this event will help towards our target of building a new observatory at the NLO to house a 50cm reflector. Thanks to all those who helped out on the day and to the Royal Astronomical Society for sponsoring this event.



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