



Denver Astronomical Society

PRESS RELEASE

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www.thedas.org

Contact Information:

Darrell Dodge

dmdodge@aol.com

Wayne Green

wgreen@infosavvy.com

Safely Viewing Mercury's Transit of the Sun: November 8th, 2006

What: Given clear daytime skies, members of the Denver Astronomical Society (DAS) will be offering safe public viewing of a rare transit of the sun by the planet Mercury. The next visible from Denver will be in 2061.

Where: The University of Denver's Historic Chamberlin Observatory., 2930 E. Warren St., Denver

When: Wednesday, November 8th, 2006 from 11am to 4 pm.

Safe transit viewing will be available through the 20-inch Alvan Clark-Saegmuller refractor in the observatory, as well as DAS member telescopes outside in Observatory Park. **All telescopes will be equipped with special solar filters, which are required to avoid permanent eye damage when observing the sun.** White-light filters will show the tiny orb of Mercury and sunspots – dark magnetic storms on the sun. Hydrogen-alpha filters will show the sun as a red-orange ball with surface texture and prominences arcing into space. Video images of the transit will also be shown. The next Mercury transit favorable for viewing in Denver will be in the year 2061.

Because all eight planets move in nearly the same plane about the Sun, Earth-bound observers occasionally see one of the "inferior planets," Mercury or Venus, pass in front of the Sun. The first such "transit" of Mercury viewed at Chamberlin Observatory was on November 10th, 1894 – 112 years ago almost to the day of this year's transit – by DU Professor Herbert A. Howe, the observatory's first director. Dr. Howe's were the first published scientific observations made with the big new telescope, which is still the 12th largest refractor in the U.S.

By 1894, timing the beginning and ending of the transits was not as important to defining the scale of the solar system as it once was. But meticulous observations made by Dr. Howe were published by the U.S. Naval Observatory, along with those of other famous U.S. observatories.

The Denver Astronomical Society hosts twice weekly Public Nights each Tuesday and Thursday at Chamberlin Observatory, continuing a tradition started by Dr. Howe in 1894. Open Houses are held monthly, on the Saturday nearest the first quarter moon.

For registration and schedule information for the Mercury Transit and Public Nights, please see the DAS Web site at <http://www.thedas.org>. There is a \$1.00 charge to view the transit through the 20-inch telescope in the Observatory. Viewing of the transit through telescopes outside in the Park is free of charge.

Chamberlin Observatory is owned and operated by the University of Denver, and is presently undergoing a \$200,000 renovation funded by a grant from Historic Denver. The Observatory's present Director is Dr. Robert Stencel.

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