

The transit of Venus, 2004 June 8

As is now well known, the Earth's sister planet passes directly between the Earth and the Sun only rarely, due to the relative inclinations of the planets' orbits. Indeed before June 8 last year, there was no-one alive who had seen such a transit, for the previous one occurred on 1882 December 6. The whole of last year's event was visible, weather permitting, from almost all of Europe and from the whole of the British Isles (see Figure). Unusually for an important astronomical occasion, the weather was favourable across much of the UK, and southern and eastern England in particular enjoyed one of the hottest and clearest days of the year.

Many local astronomical societies arranged hugely successful public viewing sessions, and elsewhere groups of friends came together with telescopes and refreshments to savour the occasion. Recognising the historical importance of the area from which Jeremiah Horrocks first calculated and observed a Venus transit in 1639, the International Astronomical Union Commission 41 (History of Astronomy) arranged a conference at the University of Central Lancashire near Stockport, and attendees observed the transit from the grounds of Horrocks' original location at Carr House. Many observers from Britain, not trusting the weather at home, travelled abroad to more reliable climates. The BBC broadcast the transit live from Sir Patrick Moore's Sussex garden (see page 140), and altogether the 2004 transit of Venus was one of the most successful European astronomical events for many years, both in terms of observations made and recorded by BAA members, and in terms of general public interest.

This special edition of the BAA *Journal*, with its associated CD-ROM (see below), has been compiled to commemorate the event, and to bring the

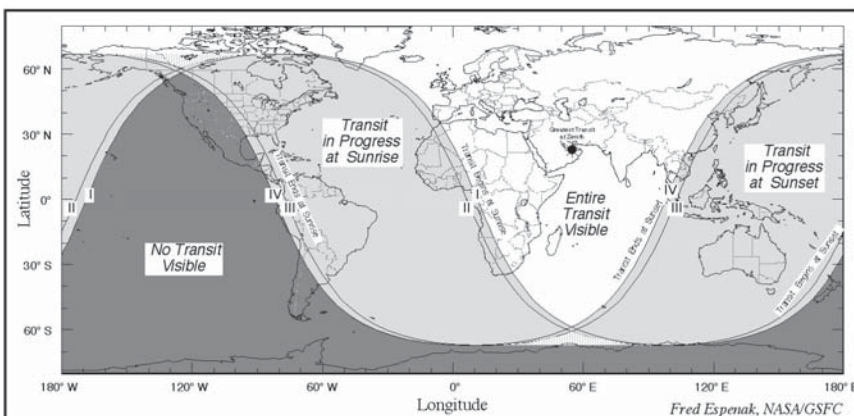


Transit mosaic by Nigel Evans in Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt, using a Canon 10D digital camera with 1000mm lens and $\times 2$ converter. Images were made at 20 minute intervals. *N. S. Evans*

submitted observations and reports together in one place as a lasting historical record of a remarkable and successful occasion. In addition to your images of the event itself, we have some reminders of the historical context of the transit, including a substantial refereed paper by Peter Hingley on the British naval expeditions of 1874 and 1882, and reports of observing sessions across the country and overseas. We hope you enjoy

this special issue, and would especially like to thank all the many contributors who made it possible.

Hazel McGee & Nick James,
Editors



World visibility of the 2004 transit of Venus. *Fred Espenak/NASA GSFC*

The transit of Venus CD-ROM

The BAA has produced a CD-ROM to record all of the material submitted following the 2004 Venus transit. Over 300MB of images and notes are included with another 200MB of video. Many of the photographs contained in this *Journal* are included on the disk together with much unpublished material.

The CD-ROM is designed to be viewed using common web browsers so it will work on practically any computer. The price is £2.50 to members, £5.00 to non-members (including postage) and it can be ordered from the office or online from the BAA sales page at <http://www.britastro.org/sales/sales.html>.