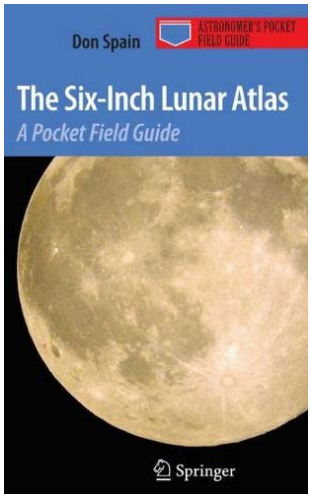
The Six-inch Lunar Atlas

by Don Spain

Springer–Verlag, 2009. ISBN 978-0-387-87609-2. pp xvii+260, £19.99 (pbk)

As a lunar observer of many years the appearance of a new book relating to the Moon always makes me take note, especially when the word 'Atlas' is included in the title. The standard work of interest to the amateur has been established by Rukl's *Atlas of the Moon*, first published by Hamlyn and later by Sky Publishing; sadly both are now out of print.

The author suggests the *Six-inch Lunar Atlas* is 'designed specifically for use at the telescope', being 'pocket size' and containing images of the Moon taken with a six inch telescope. Therefore it will be of use to the 'beginning or casual observer of the Moon... anyone who wishes to locate the major features on the Moon and to acquire a little knowledge about these formations'. Don Spain is a member of the Louisville Astronomical Society whose first view of the Moon through a telescope in 1958 prompted, in his words, a 'lifelong love affair with Selene'.



The purpose of the atlas is to provide 'an easily accessible guide for use at the telescope'. Personally I have never been comfortable using photographic images to navigate the lunar surface. Lighting is seldom comparable with the eyepiece impression and the orientation of the images is often difficult to reconcile with the view in star-diagonal-equipped refractors or catadioptric telescopes. It is refreshing therefore that the author has reproduced the images in the book in three different orientations to cater for the view in most telescope types.

However the fundamental issue with the book is that the images are very poor; firstly the 'base' images taken through the telescope appear in the main to have been secured under poor seeing conditions. The author has then reoriented the images to represent the view in different instruments. Unfortunately as part of this process they have been converted into 'ink outline' images in Adobe *Photoshop Elements*, a process which the author says 'gives the look and feel of topographical maps'. In my opinion these images appear out of focus, pixelated and confusing and bear no resemblance at all to hand drawn topographical maps of the Moon. The images show segments of the lunar surface, which in the main are not continuous; therefore I am sure the beginner would find it difficult to navigate around the Moon relying solely on this atlas. The sections of the lunar surface represented are identified on a full disk image of the Moon at the beginning of the book, but this is too small and shows no surface relief, therefore from this alone it is difficult to identify exactly where a particular image is located.

The topographical descriptions accompanying the images are brief but useful, however in themselves not a good enough reason to buy this book. The idea for a pocket size lunar atlas for use at the eyepiece is a sound one, but I am afraid with its fragmented coverage and poorly reproduced images it is difficult to make a positive recommendation in this instance. There are better alternatives available. The beginner would benefit from downloading outline charts from the Internet, or viewing one of the many 'photographic lunar atlases' on the Web. However for the ultimate in pocket sized comprehensive lunar atlases look for the long out of print *Moon, Mars and Venus* by A. Rukl on the secondhand book market.

Nigel Longshaw

Nigel Longshaw, an architectural assistant for a small firm of building surveyors, is a long-time member of Manchester Astronomical Society and an active member of the BAA Lunar Section.