



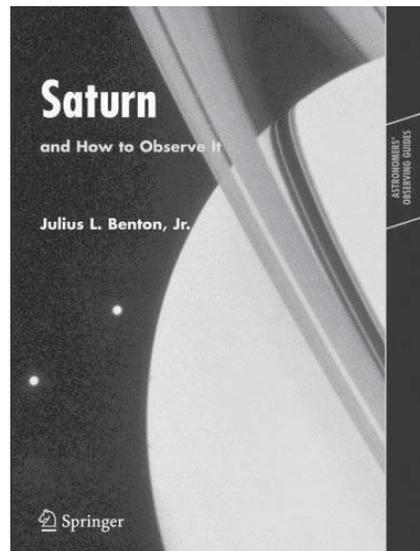
Saturn and how to observe it

by Julius L. Benton, Jr.

Springer-Verlag, 2006. ISBN 1-85233-887-3. Pp vii + 182, £19.50 (pbk)

Practical guides devoted to the observation of the planet Saturn are very rare indeed. Perhaps the best known would be *The Planet Saturn; a History of Observation, Theory and Discovery*, by one-time BAA Saturn Section Director, A. F. O'D. Alexander, first published in 1962, at the dawn of the space-age, when the notion of sending a probe to a remote planet such as Saturn would have seemed too incredible to believe. But much has happened since then. Thus the publication of *Saturn and how to observe it* would seem long overdue, and with the *Cassini* mission to explore the Saturn system well underway, also most timely.

Founded in 1947 largely due to the vision and drive of Walter Haas, the Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO) came into being to encourage observation of solar system objects by amateur astronomers, as up to then, no such formal body existed in the United States. Julius L. Benton Jr. has played a pivotal role in the ALPO for many years, being Coordinator for their Venus and Saturn Sections, and is thus well placed to compose a volume on how to observe Saturn.



Saturn and how to observe it is neatly split into several chapters, each dealing with a specific aspect of Saturn. Thus the opening chapters describe the planet's place in the solar system, its physical constitution and that of the satellites, including diagrams to show the nomenclature of the ball and ring features. The reader is then given generally sound advice on choice of telescopes. This reviewer was pleased to see that the

author has stressed the continued importance of visual planetary observation, though an introductory guide to electronic imaging is provided. Concepts are introduced but not necessarily expanded upon, such as making visual transit estimates, where it would have been useful to show how such estimates can be reduced to derive rotation periods. Similarly, the observed characteristics of the belts and zones are described, but how much more useful it would have been to briefly describe some of the changes that the ALPO has recorded within them in the decades following the organisation's inception.

The reviewer wondered if it would be fair to compare this book with Alexander's seminal work? Most likely not, as the books have different aims. Given the paucity of volumes devoted to this subject, Benton's contribution must be welcomed, but with the reservation that this is the observation of Saturn as practised by the ALPO, and significant areas of the ALPO observing mantra contradict those of the BAA, which can be confusing.

David Graham

David Graham is Director of the BAA Saturn Section. This autumn it will be 30 years since he first looked at Saturn through an astronomical telescope.

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