

Up and Running

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Welcome to another SCAN-IT Newsletter! I am ashamed to think that three full years have passed since the last one (which was brought out to coincide with the 2006 IAU *General Assembly* in Prague), but if any individual has felt the burning need to announce things at more frequent intervals, s/he could always take over the Editorship from me!

While there certainly *are* items of great import and interest to be circulated to the PDPP group, this kind of medium may not be the most efficient. Latex was originally proposed as a lowest common denominator, since that is what most Journals require to publish papers, and our community is broadly spread both in geography and in technology. I believe it could now serve the PDPP better if the Newsletter became more like a Wiki: an interactive Web-site where one can place one's own articles in whatever format, and where discussions can be pursued in real time. It would obviate the need for fiddly conversions from *.doc to Latex, or *.jpeg files to *.eps ones. Access to a Wiki would of course be login/password restricted. With a Wiki we could also maintain a reference list of papers that make use of photographic observations.

Despite SCAN-IT's silence, a lot HAS been happening, as this Newsletter reflects. New projects are up and running (I could equally well have said "alive and kicking", but it is somehow the wrong epithet!). Since 2006, North Americans have designated PARI (the Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute in North Carolina) as the 'ultimate' plate repository for N American plates; a Workshop to discuss issues related to that decision was held at PARI in 2007, and a census of plates in N American observatories was carried out in 2008. The Workshop established at PARI the *Astronomical Photographic Data Archive* (APDA), which has been accumulating plates as and when observatories wish to relinquish them. The APDA is also the proud new owner of the two *GAMMA* PDS machines from STScI, one of which is again in working order and needs but money to upgrade it so that scanning of the APDA holdings can commence. This is Progress!

On the spectroscopic front, the *Spectroscopic Virtual Observatory* (SVO) at the DAO in Canada has taken a major stride towards realization, with the commencement of a Scanning Service. Presently working under the auspices of the Canadian charity (*World Spectra Heritage*), which is a grant-handling interface, the SVO can entertain requests to digitize either plates from its own archive or ones sent from elsewhere. A negotiable fee is presently asked of customers, but as the Service grows in popularity it is hoped that the costs of the service will be absorbed by the Observatory itself. The service creates 1-D spectra, calibrated in intensity and wavelength, normalized, and delivered as FITS files with the reference arcs. The spectra will also be placed in the public domain via the CADC, though respecting a proprietary period for the Investigator if required. This, too, is Progress!

Not everything is going well. Some projects have had their funding cut back just when they needed to be completed, or put into operational mode. That is an exceedingly frustrating situation, to which the only constructive response is "Persevere". Even the Harvard scanner (DASCH), whose development and initial performance were highly acclaimed, is being challenged to fund the programme for which it was built. In any funding request we need to emphasize that these scanning programmes are not draining, on-going costs for ever; the plates to be digitized need only be digitized once (provided of course that the digitization is as comprehensive and error-free as can be managed!).