TELESCOPES IN EDUCATION

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Over the course of several evenings in June 1995, student observers from Apple Valley Science and Technology Center in California, and Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology in Virginia, participated in a joint effort to establish refined positions for the planet Pluto. Pluto’s close passage to SAO 140853, a star whose coordinates are precisely known, will enable scientists to more accurately calculate Pluto’s orbit. The accuracy of the distant planet’s orbit is paramount in plans for spacecraft missions to Pluto and Charon.

Telescopes In Education provides opportunities for students to do research with a 24" telescope equipped with a ST6 CCD camera. In 1993-94, Apple Valley and Thomas Jefferson HSST served as Beta Test Sites for this innovative program. Using The Sky Software by Bisque, students can remotely control the telescope, image the object, download the image, and enhance the image – all of this from their workstation in the classroom.

Support for the TIE Project comes from funding grants out of NASA’s Office of Space Science and Information Infrastructure Technology and Applications Office. TIE is a special adjunct of the Mt. Wilson Institute directed by Dr. Robert Jastrow. A wide variety of astronomical instruments are housed on the mountain as well as the historic 100" Hooker Telescope. Under the management of Dr. Gil Clark, the program has grown since 1993 to include many more school group users as well as amateur astronomers and international observers.

Our students were most excited to be a part of this historic event. The Apple Valley students made their observations from 10 p.m. to 11 p.m. PDT and the Jefferson students had the 2 a.m. to 3 a.m. EDT observing watch. At some points in the sessions our students were conversing with each other over the phone lines merging in the Observatory on Mt. Wilson.

The students’ digital images will supplement those made by Dr. William Owen of the Jet Propulsion Lab. Certainly observations by other professional and amateur astromonmers in this coordinated effort will enhance NASA’s effort in planning its FAST Flyby to Pluto. Students interacting with each other, even collaborating in joint projects using a real research instrument offers a unique and memorable experience for students!

For further information on the Telescopes In Education Project contact: Gil Clark, TIE, Box 24, Mt. Wilson, CA, USA 91023, Tel.: (818) 793-3100, FAX: (818) 793-4570.