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A review of: "The Wandering Astronomer"  
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*Book Review*

THE WANDERING ASTRONOMER

by Patrick Moore

*Bristol & Philadelphia: Institute of Physics Publ., 1999, 208 pp.*

*(Received July 25, 2000)*

Many of us like astronomy, but Patrick Moor has studied it for more than 70 years! He is an author and broadcaster; he served in the RAF during the war and has been involved in astronomy since he was a boy. As a lunar specialist, he continues to make observations from his home in Selsey on most clear nights. He has written more than 100 books, and for the past 43 years he has presented BBC TV's 'Sky At Night' programme without missing a single episode. In 1967, he was awarded the OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire) for his services to astronomy and in 1988 he received the CBE (Commander of the Order of the British Empire).

This particular book, *The Wandering Astronomer*, contains 41 chapters, each of which is separate essay. For example: *The Case of the Vanishing Planets*, *The Lonely Brown Dwarf*, *A Year on Icarus*; *Flying Saucers in Selsey*, *The Cosmic Zebra*, *The Atmosphere of the Moon*, *The Strange Case of SS Lacertae*, *Names in the Sky*, *Travel to the Stars?* *Ghost Moons*, *Apocalypse Postponed*, *Ripples of Creation*, *Life Can Appear – but Will it?* *To Catch a Comet!* *The Blackness of Mathilde*, *The Lighter Side of Space*, etc. Drawing on his vast knowledge and direct experience of most of the key events in astronomy and space exploration this century, Patrick Moore takes a sideways look at the historical reports and contemporary thought behind a wide range of astronomical topics.

Personal accounts of outstanding characters of 20th-century astronomy, intriguing facts about puzzling astronomical phenomena, and amusing stories about the quirkiest side of astronomy and space, exploration abound in this collection of essays. From 'The Case of the Vanishing Planets', to 'Flying Saucers in Selsey', Patrick Moore's wit and wisdom simultaneously entertain and inform.

Here is the author's preface to the book:

'Most books have a set plan. This one has not; it has no plan at all, and like its two predecessors, 'Armchair Astronomy' and 'Fireside Astronomy', it is simply

a collection of totally unconnected essays. Some are more technical than others but what I have tried to do is to present material which you will probably not find in conventional textbooks. Certainly it is not a book to be read straight through in the usual way; but if you dip into it at random, I hope you will find something that will appeal to you. I have done my best!

I am sure that a reader will find something attractive in the book. For me personally, one of the most interesting chapters was 'The Man Who Discovered a Planet' dedicated to Clyde Tombaugh, the discoverer of Pluto, who died on 17 January 1997. What do we know about him except this fact? Patrick Moore and Clyde Tombaugh were old friends; and Patrick knows many stories about Clyde. 'Tombaugh was born on 4 February 1906 at Streator, Illinois, where his family ran a farm. He was the eldest of six children; his family could not afford to send him to college, and he cycled to school, seven miles (11 km) and back each day. By the age of eleven, he had already become a competent farm worker, but it was already clear that his interests were wide-ranging. History and geography fascinated him, and in 1918 a first view through his uncle's telescope turned his attention to astronomy.

In 1922, the Tombaughs moved to another farm, this time in Kansas, and it was here that Clyde made his first telescope; it had an 8-inch mirror, a wooden tube and a rudimentary mounting – but it worked, and worked well. Others followed and led on to systematic observations, mainly of the planet Mars. Diffidently, he sent some of his drawings of Mars to V.M. Slipher, Director of the Lowell Observatory at Flagstaff in Arizona, and Slipher was impressed. He saw that this young man had exceptional talent, and the drawings arrived at exactly the right moment because Slipher was looking for an assistant to carry out a search for a new planet... In 1929 Clyde Tombaugh arrived at the Observatory to begin work with a new fine 13-inch refracting photographic telescope. In 1930, the ninth planet Pluto was tracked down.' And these were only the first steps of Clyde's biography. I think, this story will be interesting for our children.

The history of the author himself is also instructive: 'My own interest in astronomy dates from the age of six, when I picked up a book which happened to be lying around, and began to read it. I was fascinated, and took what I still believe to be the correct steps. I made sure that I could understand the basic facts, and then I equipped myself with an outline star map and started to navigate my way around the sky... The more I saw and read, the more my interest grew. I wanted to make a real hobby out of astronomy. That, I thought, meant obtaining a telescope. I saved up my pocket money, Christmas presents, birthday presents and everything else until I had accumulated the princely sum of 7.10 pounds. That was enough to buy a proper telescope – a refractor with an object-glass three inches (76 mm) in diameter. I still have that telescope, and I still use it. With it I learn my way around the Moon, saw the belts and satellites of Jupiter, the rings of Saturn and almost countless star-fields and clusters. I was 'hooked'. This was long ago, in 1933.'

Now Patrick Moore is one of the best experts in astronomy. He knows so many interesting facts and stories, that anyone would enjoy reading his books. In 'The Wandering Astronomer' you will find stories about Hoba West Meteorite near

Grootfontein in Namibia (South West Africa), the largest meteorite ever found; about asteroid Ida and Matthilde, which was investigated by spacecrafts; about UFO observations by Patrick Moore and his investigation of that case. In conclusion, this is a book for everyone who has enjoyed reading Patrick Moore's previous books and articles or enjoyed watching him on television during more than four decades in the public eye.

*V. G. SURDIN*