

SDAA

San Diego Astronomy Association



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A Non-Profit Educational Association
P.O. Box 23215, San Diego, CA 92193-3215

News and Notes

March 2002

Messier Marathon 2002

SDAA Business Meeting

Will be held at:

SKF Condition Monitoring
4141 Ruffin Road
San Diego CA 92123-1841

The Messier Marathon is on March 16th at Tierra Del Sol!

Don't forget to bring:

- Warm clothes
- Food for late-night hunger
- A red flash light
- Star charts
- A comfortable chair
- A pen or pencil for your observing log

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The life of Charles Messier by Lloyd Duhon

Charles Messier was a renowned comet-hunting astronomer, observing 44 comets over his lifetime; fourteen of these comets were original, independent discoveries. He spent many years searching the skies for these comets, and as a side note to his research, cataloged a number of nebulae and star clusters that should be avoided in the hunt for comets. His now famous Messier objects point out some of the most beautiful views of the night sky—most certainly not objects to avoid!

Charles' first brush with astronomy was at age 14, when he was able to observe the great six-tailed comet in 1744. This sparked a lifelong interest that provided us with arguably one of the best astronomers of the time. He began his search for comets in 1757, with his first object, the now famous crab nebula, or M1, being discovered in 1758.

His career proceeded in full swing with discoveries being made and objects added to his list with great regularity. He contributed observations to many other astronomical disciplines, including reporting "specks" crossing the sun, which we now know are sun-spots. His observations also motivated other astronomers of the time to begin sky surveys, including the famous William Herschel, who then produced his first catalog of 1,000 nebulous objects.

In his hunt for comets, Charles utilized a great number of instruments. His favorite instruments were a number of



Achromatic Refractors of approximately 3.5 feet focal length and 90mm diameter, magnifying only 120x, and a 32 feet focal length 7.5" Gregorian reflector, which because of the limited mirrors was equivalent to only a 3.5" reflector. These modest instruments are below standard of even modestly equipped amateur astronomers today, so hunting the objects on his list are easily within the grasp of most astronomers, regardless of equipment.

Charles Messier was a great astronomer and an accidental parent of an entire observing program for astronomers, The Messier Marathon. This marathon was independently invented by several American astronomers in the 1970s and entails that under extremely good sky conditions, and at low northern latitudes, an astronomer can view all 110 objects in his catalog in a single night.



San Diego Astronomy Association

Passing the Torch by Bret Akers

When I was in fourth grade, my teacher thought that I needed something to do and sent me home with an Astroscan® Telescope for the weekend. That's all it took to get me started. When Monday rolled in, I didn't want to take it back. I was having far too much fun! Even though I only found two objects that weekend, the Orion Nebula and the Pleiades, that little, red bowling ball started me down the all-consuming path of Astronomy. I still remember sending requests to JPL, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, for reprints of some of the Voyager 1 and 2 photos and receiving a bounty of images to hang on my wall. These days I read the magazines, look at all the new equipment reviews on the internet, lurk and participate on a dozen email lists, and occasionally chime in on the SDAA Yahoo group that was set up by Scott Baker.

I first visited Tierra del Sol about two years ago. Since then I've been coming out the site as much as possible. I was amazed by both the quality of the site and the quality of the people. It's easy to find members willing to share their skills, knowledge, and experience with both long-time observers and rank amateurs. Add to that the site's facilities and the 22-inch Ritchey-Chrétien in the club observatory and it's easy to see why the site is so popular—at least when it's not

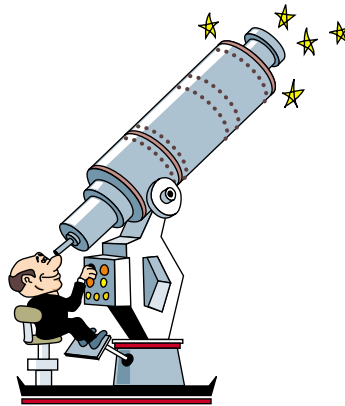


Look for Bret at Tierra Del Sol

frigid, cloudy, and/or extremely windy!

So why did I volunteer for this job? I wanted to see the newsletter continue to prosper and I saw it as an opportunity to pursue my second favorite hobby after observing—talking about astronomy! Isn't that half of the fun? It is for me.

I would also like to thank Doug Johnson and Kathy Laborde for the wonderful job they did producing the newsletter before passing the torch to Lloyd and me. Without their hard work and dedication, you wouldn't be reading this.



A New Newsletter by Lloyd Duhon

Hello Everyone, I am Lloyd Duhon, Co-Editor of the SDAA Newsletter. Many of you know me from my other adventures with SDAA over the last several years. I am the host for the Messier Marathon, a semi-regular Stars in the Park contributor, and an astronomy enthusiast. Others of you may know me as the founder of the Open Space Initiative, a not for profit organization that aims to put useful, inexpensive scientific tools in the hands of amateur astronomers, and help collect and normalize the data for research.

I would like to thank Doug and Kathy for their excellent work these last few years. Without them, the newsletter would not have been published, and that would have indeed been a sad state for the group. They did wonderful work, and they have provided Bret and me with insight into the



Look for Lloyd at Tierra Del Sol

quirks and nuances of the newsletter. We took their wisdom, and have applied a few fresh ideas of our own to bring you the best possible newsletter.

In my duties as co-editor, I hope that I will be able to provide fresh, up-to-date content every month, with new, more technical articles, and other nice features that will only serve to improve on an already excellent newsletter. Bret and I have discussed a great number of improvements, large and small that will make the newsletter more useful, and enjoyable. Look forward to these changes over the next several months.

Don't forget to let us know how we are doing. We appreciate your feedback, and would love to know what you think of the new format. If you have questions, comments, or would like to submit material for us to consider for the newsletter, email us at newsletter@sdaa.org. Thank you for reading, and I hope you enjoy the new newsletter!

Send us your comments!

We want to know what you think about the current state of the SDAA newsletter. Really! We want to provide you with the information that you want to read. Send your articles, suggestions, gripes, images, techniques, personal stories, and general comments to Newsletter@sdaa.org.

The Messier Marathon by Lloyd Duhon

During the night of March 23/24, 1970, astronomer Gerry Rattley from Dugas, Arizona, under extremely good sky conditions, tracked down all of the objects listed in the Messier Catalog. This exciting accomplishment led to the creation of the Messier Marathon! Astronomers of all levels now attempt the same feat during the new moon of March.

The marathon can be a challenging endeavor, pushing the observing skills of even skilled observers. It is best performed using star hopping, i.e., finding nearby bright objects in constellations and moving your telescope or binoculars from the bright naked-eye object to the nearby nebula or cluster.

Because thorough study of each object is not possible during the marathon, some critics believe the marathon is not appropriate. Astronomers wishing to improve their object locating skills, however, will find this marathon very helpful. It also bears pointing out that many professional and amateur astronomers don't manage to observe the whole list of Messier objects in their lifetime, much less in a single night, so it is certainly worth the effort to see as many as possible, if only briefly.

The marathon is frequently enriched by other celestial events visible during the same evening. Often a planetary marathon or a visible comet adds to the evening and makes each year unique. This March, we will have the peak of the Gamma Normids meteor shower. A planetary marathon is also possible, with difficult targets being Neptune and Venus. In addition, several comets will be visible below magnitude 14. Please consult the table below for location and magnitude of the comets.

Comet	RA (2000.0)	DEC	Mag
C/2000 SV74 (LINEAR)	23 48.32	+60 34.5	12.9
C/2002 C1 (Ikeya-Zhang)	01 26.88	+16 58.8	3.3
19P/Borelly	12 06.7	+53 09	14.1
7P/Pons-Winnecke	17 44.97	+02 27.9	12.5
C/2000 WM1 (LINEAR)	19 20.49	-09 50.0	7.4
29P/Schwassmann-Wachmann 1	20 42.90	-20 04.0	15.7
C/2001 OG108 (LONEOS)	21 38.74	+52 20.8	10.1



Above: Photo of M31 courtesy of Jim Janusz

This year promises to bring a great many astronomers to dark sky sites around the world, all hoping to catch a glimpse of most or all of these beautiful objects in a single night. Whether you are a beginner on your first outing, or a seasoned veteran polishing off the list, you will enjoy the awesome challenge of locating these beautiful, celestial wonders—the building blocks of our universe.

The Binocular Messier Marathon by Lloyd Duhon

Many beginner amateur astronomers purchase inexpensive, small aperture telescopes, to get an idea of their interest in the hobby. Still others follow the sage advice of seasoned veterans and start out with nothing more than a simple pair of binoculars. Binoculars can bring a great number of objects into our reach that our eyes aren't capable of viewing alone. The wide field of view afforded to binoculars also makes it easier to point at the larger objects in the sky.

Beginners often believe that they can only go so far with their binoculars and that any serious observing program would necessitate the use of a telescope. This, while true for many aspects of the hobby, most certainly doesn't hold up when it

comes to completing a Messier marathon.

Charles Messier cataloged a number of objects to avoid while hunting comets. This now famous list of Messier Objects represents some of the most beautiful objects in the night sky. These objects, viewable within a single night (in early spring) make for a challenging observing program well within the reach of even modest binoculars. Most of the objects in Messier's list will represent only a modest challenge, while a few others pose a more significant challenge. Only a small number of the objects in Messier's list of 110 are out of reach of binoculars.

Completing a binocular observing program for certificate requires that you search out and locate 50 of the 110 objects. Seventy-six of the objects are within reach of 7x35 binoculars, purchased from Wal-Mart for \$19.00. This opens up the Messier marathon to even the smallest budget.

This year at Tierra Del Sol, for the SDAA Messier Marathon on March 16th, we will provide sheets for telescope observing and binocular observing. When you arrive at the site, please see me, the host, for your check lists. Happy hunting!



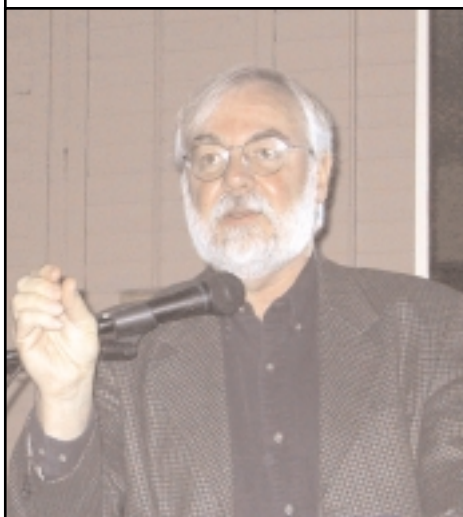
San Diego Astronomy Association

Banquet Report by Bret Akers

The annual banquet was held on February 9th at the Red Lion Hanalei in Mission Valley. Here's the big news...Jim Doody didn't win the Meade 14UWA eyepiece!

Terence Dickinson gave a wonderful slide show that garnered oohs and ahhs from the audience and educated us on the directions that amateur astronomy will take in the 21st century. Many also learned that he is a member of SDAA, possibly our most remote member since he lives in eastern Canada.

We raffled off several wonderful donations including: an 8-inch dobsonian telescope donated by Discovery; a 14mm UWA eyepiece donated by Meade; The Sky donated by Software Bisque; Night Sky Planispheres donated by the David Chandler Company; a 6mm TeleVue Radian eyepiece and meteorite pendant donated by Oceanside Photo and Telescope; a deep sky filter donated by Lumicon; an eyepiece case, deep sky map, and planisphere donated by Orion Telescopes; a filter and two \$25 gift certificates donated by Scope City; Starlight Nights donated by Sky Publishing, a subscription to Astronomy Magazine donated by the publisher; Mike Dietz and the RH Fleet Center for the RH Fleet tickets; Jim Traweek for the posters and frames; and many other donations from club members. Thanks everyone!



Finally, we would like to thank Diana Kelly for making the banquet arrangements and Brian Staples for running the auction.

The Landers Observing Site by Craig Ewing

During the weekend of January 12th and 13th, Jim Traweek, George Sarabia, and I visited the Riverside Astronomical Society (RAS) observing site in Landers, California. Personally, I went for the opportunity to observe from a different location. Was the grass truly greener on the other side of the fence? I wanted to find out.

Background: The 5-acre site was donated to the RAS in August of 2000. Needless to say, it is under development. It is fenced in with two open entrances and is divided into two sections: the Observing Field in the center of the property and the Camping Area surrounding it. Their plans include having observatories, individual pads, a family recreation area, a restroom, and an amphitheatre.

Observing: The sky conditions were comparable to the conditions at Tierra del Sol (TDS). To the west, light pollution emanated from the Los Angeles metropolitan area. It was about 5 times brighter than the glow from the San Diego metropolitan area as seen from TDS. Also, the city of Landers, located about 5 miles west of the property, created its own glow. Observing to the east provided the best viewing opportunities. However, westerly flight paths of airplanes cross the sky in all directions making photography, and sometimes visual observing, difficult.

Sightseeing: During the day on the 13th, we visited Joshua Tree National Park. Personally, I'm more partial to mountains than deserts. But after experiencing Joshua Tree—wow! Without question, it's worth seeing in person. Among other things, you can watch people climbing rocks that are scattered throughout the park. For the more adventurous people, you can even

climb some yourself.

Summary: The RAS site is nice; it's worth visiting. If you are interested in going there, you can get directions from their web site at <http://www.rivastro.org/>. I hope that you have equally enjoyable experiences when visiting other astronomy club's sites. If so, please share them.

Acknowledgments by Michael Dietz

The club would like to thank Roy Ang, Dean Belcher, Rich Bentley, Carolyn Corless, Peter DeBaan, Mike Dietz, Stu Hall, Shawn Kelly, Jim Lawler, Jose Magsaysay, Nick Marilao, Joe McGerald, Gary Moose, Bob Nanz, Jennifer Pesqueira, Mary Jo Rushing, Cindy and Terry Stewart, Bob Wetzels, and Bill Whalen for helping with the school star parties, Camp With The Stars, and Stars In The Park programs. Your efforts are greatly appreciated by the students, parents and teachers.

Camp With The Stars by Michael Dietz

This month we have two Camp With The Stars programs out in the desert. On March 9th we will be at Vallecito Stage Station Campground. If you have a telescope that you can share with the campers you are welcome to join us and camp for free. If you like, you can come up on Friday and enjoy the campground for an extra day/night. Don't forget to bring a towel and swimsuit so you can take a dip in the pool at Agua Caliente Hot Springs for free.

To reach Vallecito Stage Station take I-8 East to Ocotillo, and then take Hwy S-2 North for about 30 miles to the campground which is about 4 1/2 miles north of Agua Caliente Hot Springs. Those of you that are coming from the North County area can take Hwy 78 through Julian to Scissors crossing. Turn right and head South on Hwy S-2 to the campground.

On March 16th, we will be at Borrego

Left: Terence Dickinson speaks at the SDAA Banquet



San Diego Astronomy Association

Palm Canyon Campground. We will set up at the Visitors Center at noon on Saturday for solar viewing, and then at 7 p.m. for the evening viewing. If you are interested in attending call me at (619)562-2726 so I can be sure we can accommodate everyone.

To reach Borrego Palm Canyon campground take I-8 East to Hwy 67 North. Continue on Hwy 67 North through Ramona to Hwy 78. Take Hwy 78 East to Santa Ysabel and turn left on Hwy 79. Head North on Hwy 79 for about 20 miles to Hwy S-2. Turn right on Hwy S-2 and head East for about 4 1/2 miles to S-22. Veer left on Hwy S-22 (Montezuma Valley Road) and head East for 18 miles to Borrego Springs. At the outskirts of Borrego Springs, Montezuma Valley Road becomes Hoberg Road at the intersection with Palm Canyon Drive. Turn left at Palm Canyon Drive, and go west about one mile (if you turn right you will go into the town of Borrego Springs). The first road on the right leads to the campground.

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John Restivo
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Melinda Baker
Jim Traweek

SkyWatch for March, 2002

John Mood



1st, I want to welcome the new editors of "SDAA News & Notes." They are Bret Akers & Lloyd Duhon. We're all looking forward, I am sure, to what they'll make of our newsletter. Help 'em out by sending in articles, esp re yr experiences observing the heavens. I'm sure they'll appreciate it.

[Times PST] [* = Easy] [** = Moderate] [*** = Difficult]

Wed., 27 Feb. ---- FULL MOON, 1:17 a.m.

Sat., 9 Mar. ---- STAR PARTY @ Tierra del Sol.

Wed., 13 Mar. ---- NEW MOON, 6:02 p.m.

Sat., 16 Mar. ---- STAR PARTY @ Tierra del Sol.

Tues., 19 Mar. ---- 8th mag asteroid VESTA only 6' due east of SATURN tonight, looking like an extra satellite of the planet; RHEA & DIONE are near by.

Wed., 20 Mar. ---- VERNAL EQUINOX (Spring begins!!), 11:16 a.m.

Thurs., 28 Mar. ---- FULL MOON, 10:25 a.m.

Mon., 1 Apr. ---- No fooling!!

EVENING PLANETS:

The naked eye planets are starting to line up for their breath-taking show from mid-April to mid-May. JUPITER [*] is in Gemini, SATURN [*] still near the Hyades in Taurus (& see above, 19 March), & MARS [*] is crossing Aries. They are joined by VENUS [*½] which is clearly visible moving into Pisces by mid-month. Only Mercury is missing, but wait 'til mid-April.....

MORNING PLANETS:

None.

BEGINNING OBSERVERS (binocs & small scopes):

The wildcat LYNX is another neglected constellation, running ferociously between Ursa Major & Gemini. Give yourself a stretch & try for the most distant globular cluster in our galaxy, NGC-2419, mag 10.4 [**]. It will look like a very fuzzy star, & is so distant most astronomers now consider it an extra-galactic object, perhaps 300,000 light years away. To celebrate getting it, or to console yourself for not doing so, go to the easy & beautiful double star 19 LYNCIS [*].

EXPERIENCED OBSERVERS (large scopes):

There are many lovely galaxies for you in LYNX. Start w/ 9.7 mag edge-on NGC-2683 [**], then try for 2 difficult pairs of galaxies:-- NGC-2798, 12.3 mag [**] w/ much dimmer edge-on NGC 2799 [***], & 11.5 mag elliptical NGC 2932 w/ 13.6 mag lens-shaped NGC-2831. Then cap it off by going for 14th mag planetary nebula NGC-2474 & its 17th mag central star. That shd keep you busy!

TIERRA DEL SOL

LAT = 32° 36' 46" N (± 0.1"), LONG = 116° 19' 55" W (± 0.1"), ELEV = 3710' (± 5'), at the bathroom, as determined from USGS 7.5 min 1/24000 map.

Send comments & questions to me by phone (619/225-9639), USPS (4538 Long Branch Av., San Diego, CA 92107) or my newe-mail address

(1happyalien@cox.net).

¡HAPPY VIEWING!



San Diego Astronomy Association

March Program Meeting by John Restivo

Three months! WOW! Hard to believe how time has a way of getting past us. I hope everyone had an enjoyable holiday season and safely made it thru 2002 unscathed. Now as the weather is starting to befriend us, I look forward to another exciting year with the SDAA. As vice-president, my duties include coordinating the Program Meetings. I wish to point out that the Ruben H. Fleet Science Center (in Balboa Park), plans to cut back their hours of operation due to poor attendance. Our allotted hours to present the Program Meeting is also moving back. Therefore, The March Program Meeting will be starting at 7:00 PM.

I am happy to announce that noted astronomer John Dobson will be our guest speaker. Founder of the San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomers and designer of the telescope by the same name, Mr. Dobson is a most colorful and thought provoking speaker. His topics include research, observations and the theory of Cosmology. Time provided, he will take questions on telescope and mirror making.

Mr. Dobson has been featured on the PBS video Series (funded by the Keck Foundation), THE ASTRONOMERS ("Where Is The Rest of The Universe?") and

has authored essays, Dying Stars Viewed from Death Valley (1973), Einstein's Physics of Illusion (1980) and Creation of Ex Nihilo...or from Wheeler's Pregeometry (1989), just to name a few. Mr. Dobson gives voice to the spirit of discovery that compels humans to ask: "Where is the rest of the Universe?" Everyone is born curious. Everyone wants to see and understand this universe. They're just waiting for someone to explain it to them."

So mark your calendars—March 15th. For the new members, go to the front and tell them that you are attending the SDAA Program Meeting. The ushers will direct you to the lecture hall. It's FREE and is open to both members and guests. However, remember seating fills quickly for Mr. Dobson. The lecture hall holds approximately 110 people, so come early. The doors will open at 6:00 pm. This will give you time to get seated and peruse the club's library. I look forward to seeing you there.

Treasurer's Report By Jennifer Pesqueira

Two new members have been added to our club's roster: Eric Bartch (and family) and John Oliver. On behalf of the SDAA, welcome and may you enjoy clear, dark skies!

February Meeting Minutes by Melinda Baker

The meeting was called to order at 7:07pm by President Jim Traawek.

Treasurer's Report read by Jennifer Pesquiera and approved.

Star Party Report: There will be 44 parties in March, 54 in April and a projected 175 for the year. Vallecitos and Borrego Palm Canyon Camp with the Stars is next month.

Educator Report: A science and english fair will be held at the Balboa Park Activity Center on March 20th, the SDAA will be judging.

Vice President's Report: There are currently problems using the R.H. Fleet Space Theatre, and efforts are underway to locate a new site.

Old Business: The recent banquet netted \$634.00 and everything went well. A thank you goes out to all volunteers for the event, and especially to Jim Potter for his service as SDAA Treasurer. His successor is Jennifer Pesquiera.

New Business: Astronomy Day will be April 20th, and Balboa Park is the proposed site, though not finalized.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:15pm.

Clip and Save

2002 Board of Directors and Chairpersons

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SDAA Calendar of Events

March 2002

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
					1	2 Star Party at Blue Sky Ecological Reserve
3	4	5	6 Stars in the Park	7 Star Party at Lexington Elementary	8	9 Star Party at Tierra Del Sol Star Party at Vallecito Stage Station
10	11	12 SDAA Board Meeting Star Party at Sunset Hills Elementary	13 Star Party at Mt. Vernon School	14 Star Party at Johnson School	15 SDAA Program Meeting	16 Messier Marathon at Tierra Del Sol Star Party at Borrego Palm Canyon
17	18	19 Star Party at Adobe Bluffs Elementary	20 Star Party at San Dieguito	21 Star Party at King Chavez School	22	23
24/31	25	26 Star Party at Del Rey School	27	28	29	30

Stars at the Site 2002 by Jim Traweek

I've made corrections for daylight savings time, which always confuses me, and added a couple of dates. To anyone who would like to host, e-mail me with a preferred date and I'll work you in somewhere.

Date	Moon Rise/Set	Date	Moon Rise/Set	Date	Moon Rise/Set
03/09	R-4:32am	06/08	R-4:42am	10/05	S-01:47am
03/16	S-8:28pm . .Messier Marathon	06/29	R-11:48pm	10/12	S-11:39pm
04/06	R-4:10am	07/06	R-3:16am	11/02	R-4:38am
04/13	S-8:19pm . .Host Training	08/03	R-1:51am	11/09	S-9:27pm
05/04	R-2:45am	08/10	S-9:27pm . .Annual BBQ	11/30	R-3:26am
05/11	S-7:09pm	08/31	R-12:28pm	12/07	S-8:13pm
06/01	R-1:17am	09/07	S-7:57pm	12/28	R-2:21am

For Sale:

German equatorial mount with wooden tripod. It is in good shape and I used it with my 5-inch S/C Celestron telescope. \$100. Call Charles Ham at (619) 461-9769.

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

Send dues and renewals to P.O. Box 23215, San Diego, CA 92193. Include any renewal cards from Sky & Telescope, Astronomy, or Odyssey magazine in which you wish to continue your subscription. The expiration date shown on your newsletter mailing label is the only notice that your membership in SDAA will expire. Dues are \$35 for Contributing Memberships; \$25 for Senior (Basic) Membership; \$3 for each Family membership. In addition to the club dues the annual rates for magazines available at the club discount are: Sky & Telescope \$29.95, Astronomy \$29, and Odyssey \$25.46. Make checks payable to S.D. Astronomy Assn. **PLEASE DO NOT send renewals directly to Sky Publishing.** They return them to us for processing.

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