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**Observatory**

Continued from Page 8

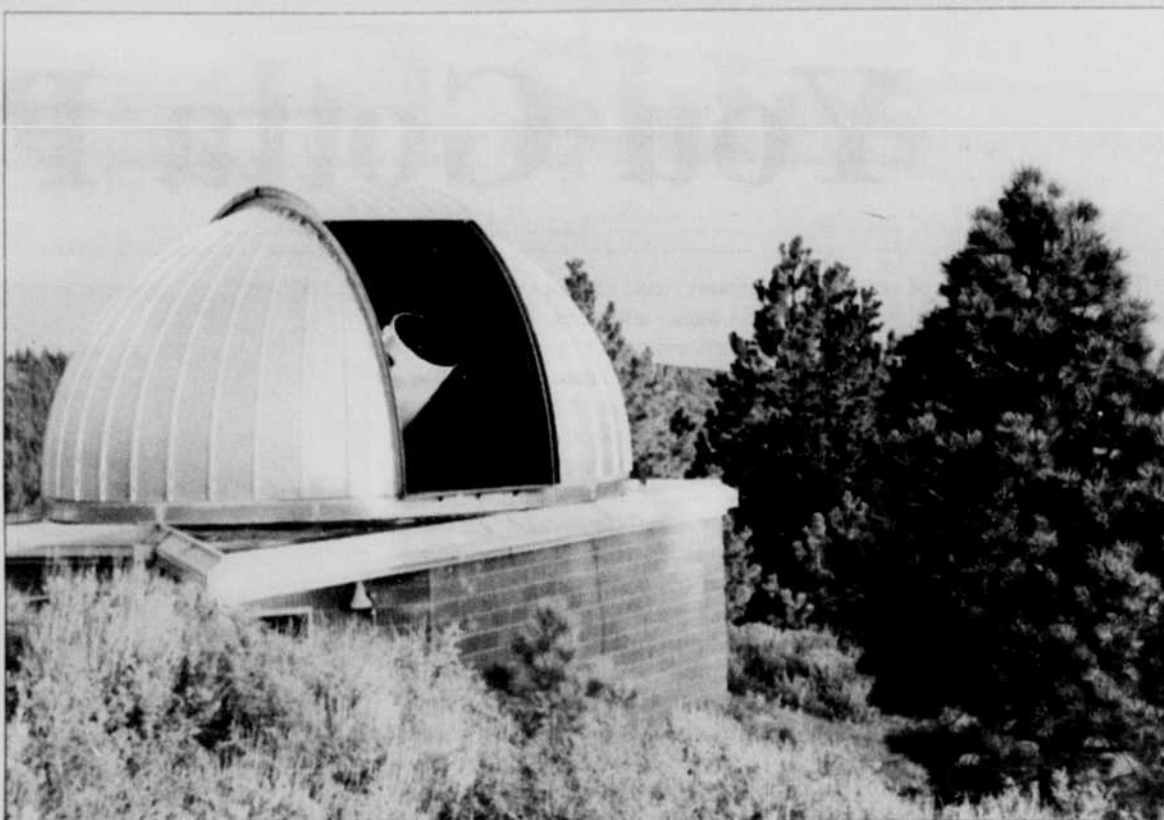


Photo by John Giustina

The 32 inch Cassegrain telescope is staffed year around by University professor James Kemp and his four assistants.

undergraduate students.

Pine Mountain is unique among research observatories because it has assumed a teaching role to both school groups and the general public, in addition to University students. The facility opens its doors to thousands of Central Oregon visitors every year.

Henson hopes one day to teach astronomy at a university and sees public outreach as a vital part of his field. "It's very important to get everybody involved and learning and trying to understand the universe," he says.

Both Henson and Kemp maintain that astronomy is an essential area of study for the modern world. They claim that besides unlocking the secrets of the entire universe, the study of far-away bodies helps scientists better understand our own solar system and planet.

"The heavens are kind of a giant laboratory for physics experiments," Kemp explains. As an example he points to a recent supernova explosion as a "ready-made experiment for particle physics that couldn't possibly be done in the lab."

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Kemp also points out that pure astronomical research has made space travel and satellite technology possible. "Without astronomy you wouldn't have had these technologies; You couldn't imagine going out there," he says.

But others don't always view this research with the same priority as Kemp does, especially those holding the observatory's purse strings. As a result, funding for the observatory has been unstable since the beginning, according to Kemp.

Although the University provides an allowance for physical maintenance of the buildings, the actual research is supported by grants and public donations. Occasionally the state has given one-shot appropriations for new equipment purchases but Kemp sees a need for a guaranteed operating budget to provide for equipment maintenance, continued public visiting hours and job security for observatory employees.

Recently the University failed to grant a two-year, \$70 thousand operating budget and left the observatory's future uncertain. Despite this refusal, Kemp vows to keep pressure on the state to give the observatory the kind of financial support it needs.

Kemp appears more used to dealing with the relatively constant heavens than the uncertain earthly bureaucracy, and is somewhat uncomfortable with his role as lobbyist and fundraiser. "I'm frustrated," he says. "I should be teaching and doing science."

Henson faces terrestrial troubles as well while consider-

ing his future watching the stars. He feels that a career in astronomy takes a little more dedication because there really isn't a job market in the field.

In addition to practical problems, astronomers must also accept that the fruits of their careful research will often be delayed, possibly for years.

"You don't just see something in the telescope," Kemp says while lighting his pipe. "In fact, sometimes you never see it. The actual discovery comes some weeks later when you put the data into the computer."

But the work never bores Kemp. "You get into a certain frame of mind; you think in terms of decades," he explains.

"Being a scientist tends to give me more of a perspective on time and space in general. Human history goes back maybe four or five thousand years. I can calibrate that against the five billion year history of our planet."

Henson also has found that his studies instill in him deeper appreciation of the earth. "When you imagine the distances involved, it makes you look at a different picture because you realize that the earth really is tiny and fragile," he says thoughtfully.

Kemp, Henson and others will undoubtedly continue their work as telescopes move from high peaks into space itself.

"Astronomy is totally open-ended. We will never be through," Kemp says.

For those who gaze at the stars, the sky is truly the limit.

— JOHN HENRIKSON

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