

December 2020

Dear members of SAS sections,

Dear friends of SAS,

An unusual year is coming to an end. After 71 years, for the first time no regular meeting of the SAS took place. What was due to administrative reasons in 1949, was due to the limitations caused by the corona pandemic in 2020. The Assembly of the Delegates took place only via e-mail and the Presidential Conference in the form of a video conference. The board has never met physically this year either but has been highly active anyway. The day-to-day business was carried out at six meetings held via video. An important topic this year concerned the future of our magazine ORION. Like many times in its long history, the magazine's finances require the implementation of new ideas. In October we were surprised by the spontaneous shutdown of the popular portals of *astroinfo*. This has consequences for the operation of the websites of several sections. The specialist groups were once again able to make a pleasing expansion and there are also new impulses in the field of youth work. In the background was the work of the webmaster, who keeps our website in operation despite adversity.

1. On the history and future of ORION: Some facts and figures

The first edition of ORION in October 1943 states:

"Without having the ambition to carry out scientific tasks, the journal "ORION", published by it (*the Swiss Astronomical Society*), is primarily intended to serve the reader, to supplement his astronomical knowledge, to answer his questions and to be a mediator of experiences and observations". This is an objective which can still apply in general terms today.

From 1943 to 1963, the ORION was published with 4 issues per year. The SAS membership fee of initially Fr. 5.- per year included the subscription for the ORION. By the end of the 1960s, the number of ORION issues had gradually increased to 6 per year. At the same time, the subscription fee also increased. When the membership fee including ORION reached Fr. 25.- in 1970, the desire arose, especially in French-speaking part of Switzerland, not to have to subscribe to the ORION.

Subsequently, at the SAS Annual Meeting of 5/6 June 1971 in Burgdorf, "après une discussion nourrie" was established in Article 7 of the SAS statutes: "Members of the sections that receive the ORION are also members of the SAS". This decision had the far-reaching consequence that only the addresses of the newly defined SAS members, i.e., the subscribers of the ORION, were then kept in the then General Secretariat of the SAS.

By the revision of the statutes on 1 January 1980, this "partial exclusion" of SAS members was corrected. Article 36 then states anew: "The subscription (*to ORION*) is optional" and "active members of the sections not subscribed to ORION receive the SAS newsletter (middle section of the ORION) through their section". This made a SAS membership possible again for all section members (even

without ORION), but the addresses of the active members without ORION subscription were then only incompletely and later no longer recorded centrally. This should prove to be a disadvantage even 40 years later when advertising the ORION!

For the first time in 1972 and after a sharp drop in the 1990s again, the number of ORION subscribers reached a peak of almost 2500. After the turn of the century, the number of ORION subscribers began to decline sharply. For this reason, various variants for the ORION were studied in 2006 and finally decided in 2007 to hire and pay for an editor for the first time in the history of ORION. In addition, two "assigned" editors without remuneration were appointed. All other services such as address management, debt collection, dunning, etc. remained voluntary activities.

This business model resulted in a loss in the ORION settlement of around CHF 38,000 in the years 2007 to 2010, which was covered by 2/3 of the SAS cash register and 1/3 from the ORION fund. After the number of subscribers had fallen below 1500, a pleasing increase was again evident from 2009, due to Thomas Baer's new magazine design. From 2011 onwards, larger surpluses could also be recorded annually in the ORION statement and transferred fully to the ORION fund. Since 2007, the amount of the ORION fund has increased by around CHF 16,000. In these years, however, money from ORION has never flowed into the SAS cash register.

Around the middle of the decade, the number of subscribers began to stagnate again and at the SAS Annual Meeting of 21 May 2016 in Zurich it was decided to found ORIONmedien GmbH and to transfer ORION to this company. The previous ORION fund amounting CHF 75,000 was made available to ORIONmedien GmbH as a loan, i.e., remaining in the possession of SAS. (Shareholders of ORIONmedien GmbH are: bsmediagroup 60%, SAS 30%, Thomas Baer 10%).

With the balance sheets of ORIONmedien GmbH, full cost invoices for ORION are now available for the first time. So far, deficits have occurred every year, most of which have been compensated by bsmediagroup and to a lesser extent by SAS. However, ORIONmedien GmbH cannot write losses permanently and only with at least a balanced budget can ORION survive the next few years. This year, therefore, great efforts were made to make the ORION more attractive as a print edition as well as a website from 2021 onwards in order to attract additional subscribers. The target audience includes in particular other members of SAS sections and specialist groups. Today, only about half of the members of the SAS sections have subscribed to ORION.

Among the most important innovations are the division of the editorial staff between two persons (Helen Oertli and Thomas Baer) with the associated extension of the editorial orientation of ORION, as well as the establishment of an editorial advisory board for critical observation and "strategic" planning of ORION content. With these innovations, ORIONmedien GmbH hopes to gain additional subscribers and thus secure the future of ORION. However, this goal can only be achieved with the great support of the SAS sections.

As a valuable addition to the forward-looking decisions, SAS has also initiated the digitization of all ORION issues published since 1943 by the library of ETH Zurich. We presented this project for the first time in 2019. This process is ongoing and should be completed in the course of 2021. Digitization itself has now largely taken place, but the subsequent manual collection of all metadata is likely to take a little more time. After that, all contributions published in an ORION issue, with a blocking period of 2 years for the latest editions, will be freely available. In addition to a full-text search, each article will also receive a unique DOI (https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_Object_Identifier) for identification. The platform for this will be <https://www.e-periodica.ch> of ETH.

2. End of the astronomy portals "astronomie.info" and "calsky.com"

The very popular sites astro!info and CalSky were shut down on 9 October 2020. The owner of these Swiss portals is the association *astroinfo*, founded in 1998. Arnold Barmettler, together with a few colleagues, managed and operated these pages very successfully until the end. As a collective member of *astroinfo*, the SAS was also surprised by the sudden shutdown of the pages.

The SAS would like to thank Arnold Barmettler and all those involved in *astroinfo* for the huge work they have done over more than two decades and regrets the disappearance of these popular internet addresses of the astro scene. In order to clarify the needs and possibilities of successor solutions, the SAS has started to list available alternatives today

(<https://forum.sag-sas.ch/viewtopic.php?f=25&p=666&sid=36494854d58cc57e8f707a85646b8b11#p666>).

We would be happy to receive further links. The new website of ORIONmedien GmbH, which will become active at the end of January 2021, shall contain a current astrocalendar.

3. Domain "astronomie.ch" is continued by SAS

Various sections have hosted their websites so far at *astroinfo* (subdomain of *astronomie.ch*), which were also affected by the shutdown. The relevant sections were informed of the need for action and proposed solutions. SAS was able to take over the domain *astronomie.ch* from *astroinfo* at the end of November and has also rented a new server. The previous subdomains are therefore still available to the sections free of charge. Individual subdomains are newly hosted on the SAS web server (11). Some of them are only redirects to web pages hosted elsewhere. With the takeover of the hosting, however, responsibility for the content and operation of the pages remains with the respective owners. The future application of the main domain www.astronomie.ch is still being searched for. The prominent address could be used in the future with corresponding subdomains for SAS "Fachgruppen", projects and various services.

4. SAS "Fachgruppen"

At the 10 SAS "Fachgruppen" today, there are always new interesting works and results. Further information can be found on the SAS website at <https://sag-sas.ch/ueber-die-sag/fachgruppen/>. The groups look forward to the cooperation of other colleagues. In addition, founding members for new "Fachgruppen"

- Computer astronomy and
- History of astronomy

will be searched for. Interested parties should contact the coordinator of the groups, Jonas Schenker (jonas.schenker@sag-sas.ch).

5. SAS Youth

Due to the corona-related limitations, not all planned actions could be carried out in the current year. However, a lot of work has been invested in the new portal for training documents (<https://sag-sas.ch/sag-jugend/>).

Toni Schriber (anton.schriber@sag-sas.ch) is happy to accept suggestions and contributions to youth work.

6. Deaths of well-known SAS members

On September 8, 2020, Josef (Joe) Schibli died unexpectedly at the age of 75. Joe was a member of the Baden section, the SAS astrophotography "Fachgruppe" and enthusiastic director of the Cheisacher Observatory. We knew Joe as a very competent, initiative and very friendly colleague. We will miss the interesting conversations with him.

Andreas Tarnutzer died on 20 October 2020 at the age of almost 90 years. He was an avid astro-amateur from a young age. Already in 1944, at the age of 23, he wrote a letter to the SAS secretary general and was interested in the work of the then young SAS. From 1960, Andreas Tarnutzer was a member of the Lucerne Astronomical Society for 6 decades and was also an honorary member there for many years. He served in the SAS from 1978 to 1991 as a very active central secretary. In 1987 he became an honorary member of the SAS. With Andreas Tarnutzer, SAS has lost a very distinguished personality.

7. New SAS section

The Observatory Oberherthen/Frauenfeld has joined the SAS as a new section. Originally, this observatory was a member of the Astronomical Association Frauenfeld, which disbanded in 2010.

8. Assembly of Delegates 2021

The next annual assembly of delegates will take place on 27 March 2021. If possible, we will perform the event in the presence of the participants in suitable rooms. Possible further pandemic restrictions will result in a video conference held on the same date.

The further development of the corona pandemic and the associated limitations are not yet foreseeable. The club life remains in many areas closed and the observatories cannot be open, or only under very difficult conditions. We can only hope to return to normalized operations. Until then, I wish everyone a lot of patience and, above all, good health.

Hopefully the weather helps, so that we can observe and enjoy the special Jupiter/Saturn constellation in the actual evening sky (<https://sag-sas.ch/intranet-sektionen/sag-fachbeitraege/>).

With warm greetings and best wishes for the change into the new year.

Christian Wernli

SAG-SAS President