

## Discovering The Moon

Like a lot of kids, my folks gave me a 60mm telescope for Christmas one year. The scope was a typical department-store brand - not very good - but to a 12-year old kid it opened up the universe. Through it I got to see the moons of Jupiter, the phases of Venus and the rings of Saturn. But above all these eye-openers, there was the moon. There in the eyepiece stood craggy mountains - spires casting long shadows across crater lowlands, dark maria and (painfully) bright highlands, a surface pockmarked with craters of all sizes, some with bright ejecta rays and some funny squiggle type features. I soon learned that the greatest amount of detail was seen along the terminator, that line splitting light from dark, where shadows played across features showing them in stark contrast. And to cap it all, each night different features could be seen in detail. They say that as you get older, your memory plays tricks on you - you remember good things more than the bad. I remember lots of clear, frosty winter nights when I could point my 'scope at the moon and scan its disk for some feature I had not seen in relief before. These days, the skies seem to be cloudy much more frequently and the frosty winter nights are few and far between. I guess that's global warming for you! Time moved on and I moved in and out of committee positions in astronomy societies, editing some magazines along the way. Astronomy became more about the bureaucracy of running clubs than about looking through a telescope. Then, in the late '90s, wanting to get back to my astronomical "roots", I bought a 'real' telescope, an "reflector which I readily turned towards the moon. Stunning views once again assailed my eyes (prompting memories of halcyon nights as a 12 year old looking through my old 60mm scope). I'm a software writer (or should that be "engineer"?) by profession, so I wrote a bit of software which would help me in planning my moon observations. It told me when the moon would rise and set, what phase it was and other stuff. When people who'd seen it said they wanted a copy, I polished it up and released it as Shareware under the title [LunarPhase](#). It's now evolved into a more comprehensive application called [LunarPhase Pro](#). I'm pleased that's it's been receiving very good reviews - I feel like I've done something to make other people more aware of my old friend in the sky. With the encroachment of light pollution across the globe, the pristine skies of my youth have been gradually fading behind the yellow-orange glow of ever more street lamps. Where stars once twinkled on a velvet background, only a few hardy garnets of light now poke through the misty haze and background neon glow. But the Moon is always there, outshining any murk and pollution we cough up into the sky. It's a shame we don't treat the sky with the same respect we give our national parks. After all, the sky belongs to all of us. How many of us really appreciate people throwing garbage into our back yards. Why should we allow others to pollute our natural resource? I still find a night under the stars with a partially lit Moon high in the sky a relaxing and humbling pursuit. The Moon is the only object in the solar system where we can actually see real surface detail. Growing up during the Apollo era, I have to say that those missions played a great part in spurring on my interest in the moon. It's nice to see that the Moon is once again taking center-stage with man returning there in the next 10-15 years. Who knows, one day, in my dotage, I may actually get a chance to visit it in person!

## About the Author

Gary Nugent has been involved with astronomy as a hobby, either running astronomy clubs, publishing magazines or writing astronomy software for over 20 years. He runs one of the best-known astronomy and space news websites - the [Night Sky Observer](#) which has been online since 1997.

He is also the creator of the [LunarPhase Pro](#) and [Jupsat Pro](#) astronomy software packages.

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