

Astronomical Youth Projects Supported by the European Union

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Abstract

The *Beskid Astronomical Club "Polaris"* and some of its activities are presented. The successful application for a European Community grant is described, and educational projects conducted with the grant are related. These involved astronomy camps to introduce Polish youth to the night sky and provide training in observation, especially of meteors.

1 Introduction

My name is Piotr Nawalkowski and I am the president of the *Beskid Astronomical Club "Polaris"* from Sopotnia Wielka in Poland (IMO CODE 34077). Today, at the *International Meteor Conference*, *Polaris* is also represented by Marta Jasak, Michał Goraus, Łukasz Biegun and Alfred Skorupka. We all conduct sky observations in Poland.

Sopotnia Wielka is a village not far from Korbielów where the Polish-Slovakian border is. Sopotnia lies in the mountains called Beskids where the air is clean. Therefore, there are splendid conditions to observe meteors. Moreover, due to politeness of the local people light is turned off in the whole village during our observations. That is why they can be more detailed. Unfortunately, we still have problems with wild animals and a great deal of snow which keeps up in Sopotnia Wielka from October to April.

Up to now, "*Polaris*" has existed for nine years, not to mention a six-year fruitful collaboration with the *Comets and Meteors Workshop* that conducts its works for the *International Meteor Organization*. Although our club is not big and far from large urban centers, it is mainly directed toward youth. We think that young people are the real future of astronomy.

2 Our projects granted by European Union

In February this year, we tabled a motion to the European Commission to help us realize our unusual astronomical project. It was our aim to organize a mass training including sky observation, chiefly for people from country areas. We wished to arouse their interest in astronomy. They often come from villages where hardly any interests can be developed. Sopotnia Wielka offers them ideal conditions for observation. The fact that they not only can gain some knowledge from astronomy but also use it in practice is of vital importance. Our request for subsidy was granted. Therefore we could organized four camps under the name *EUROASTRO 2002*. Taking into consideration the new moons, the entire project was

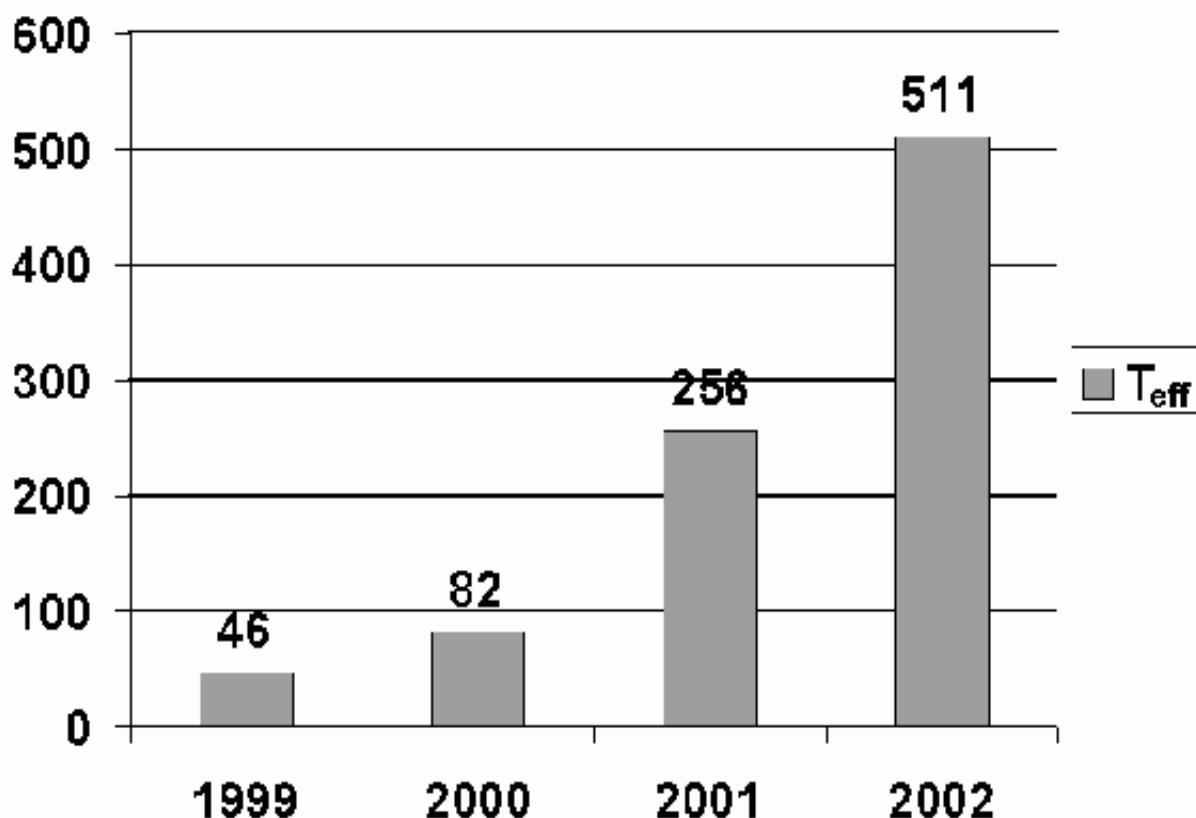


Figure 1: Total effective time of visual meteor observations achieved by The Beskid Astronomical Club "Polaris" during several years. Data from 2002 covers the time up to the IMC.

deliberately planned for July, August, October and November. We did not want to miss the chance of observing as many of the most interesting meteor showers as possible. The main goal of the training remained meteor observations. However, integration on a large scale and cooperation among young people from economically and socially different regions of Poland were also of crucial significance. Unfortunately, we lacked money for equipment since the whole project was organized in the form of free camps. This time we approached the *Polish-American Fund of Liberty* for support. We received indispensable money through the *Polish Fund for Children and Youth*. Due to their help we were able to buy thirty camp beds, educational materials, a Xerox machine for reports and other necessary equipment. From the beginning of July we began mass meteor observations, including training. It is worth emphasizing that "Polaris" managed to arrange *EUROASTRO 2002* on a voluntary basis.

At the moment we are midway through our project. Some results are already visible. First of all, we ourselves are surprised by such a great interest in astronomy. So far, over a hundred people have participated in these camps during the holidays. Half of them, having finished *EUROASTRO 2002*, are able to conduct sky observations by themselves. Charts showing the number of observational hours indicate this fact quite well (Figure 1). There you can see the total effective time of visual meteor observations achieved by *The Beskid Astronomical*

Club "Polaris" over several years. As you see, it continues to grow systematically. This year, due to *EUROASTRO 2002*, we collected almost five hundred hours of effective time of visual observations. Thus *"Polaris"* became the second most significant center of observations in Poland, close behind the *Comets and Meteors Workshop*. As I mentioned earlier, we are only halfway through our project, and therefore there are still two more camps before us. For these, nights are longer than the previous ones. We are highly satisfied not only with numerous observations but also with the number of people taking part in these camps. We managed to turn their attention to a beautiful and unpolluted sky that became the object of their fascination. At last, astronomy itself became the universal language regardless of the age, origins or wealth.

3 Future plans

In the next year, we would like to conduct similar projects cooperating with amateur astronomers from such neighboring countries as Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Belarus, Ukraine or Russia. Taking into account the short distance between Sopotnia and the Polish-Slovakian border in Korbielów, we would especially like to invite Slovaks. Thus we could prove that astronomy really is the universal language among nations even if only at the amateur level. This meeting is a perfect example.

The *Beskid Astronomical Club "Polaris"* is known in Poland for successfully conducted astronomical training. It is also known as the organization constantly creating and testing unusual equipment for sky observations.

You can be up to date with activities of the *Beskid Astronomical Club "Polaris"* by our webpage: <http://www.astronomia.ozone.pl/polaris>