

## Wandering & Wondering



**John Maybury**

### CLOSE ENCOUNTER

Have you noticed an intense red star rising in the east in recent evenings? That's no star, that's Mars. The red planet is having a close encounter with Earth. At closest approach on Dec. 18, the two worlds lay only 55 million miles apart. Mars won't be this close again until the year 2016. To the naked eye, Mars now outshines every star in the night sky (it is slightly brighter than Sirius) and it looks great through a backyard telescope. Technically, Mars was at its best and brightest only on Dec. 18, but the red planet will remain unusually close and beautiful for weeks to come. (Visit [spaceweather.com](http://spaceweather.com) for photos, observing tips, and sky maps.)

### NEW WINE

Napa Valley vintners, which primarily produce Pinot Blanc, Pinot Noir, and Pinot Grigio wines, have developed a new hybrid grape that acts as an anti-diuretic. It is expected to reduce the number of trips that older people have to make to the bathroom during the night. The new wine will be marketed as Pinot More.

### BUSYBODY

"There is a busybody on your staff who devotes a lot of time to chasing split infinitives: I call for the immediate dismissal of this pedant. It is of no consequence whether he decides to go quickly or to quickly go or quickly to go. The important thing is that he should go at once." (George Bernard Shaw, letter to the editor, London Times)

### TRANSIT POLL

Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) is hosting a Web survey on transportation, environment and development in the Bay Area. The online survey asks questions about greenhouse gas emissions, global warming, housing, traffic, planning, and transportation funding priorities in the region. To participate now through Jan. 9, log on to [www.mtc.ca.gov/T2035](http://www.mtc.ca.gov/T2035). The online survey is also available in Spanish and Chinese.

### GREEN, SIMPLE

Simple Green, the original all-purpose, nontoxic, biodegradable cleanser, has morphed into more than 20 different varieties, each specifically formulated to cut grease and grime. After Simple Green founder Bruce Fabrizio's car broke down, says daughter Jessica Frandson, now Director of Internet Marketing, "He went to JC Penney and said he'd clean the floor

of their auto shop if they'd fix his car." At first, the auto shop guys laughed. But Simple Green did the job, and JC Penney soon became the company's first big customer. Pioneers of green cleaning, Simple Green created its first green cleaner in 1975, and since then, all of Simple Green's cleaning products have been free of nasty chemicals such as ammonia. The company plans to introduce a line in 2008 that contains only natural ingredients. Simple Green is qualified under EPA and OSHA guidelines as nontoxic and biodegradable; rescue workers have even used it to clean animals after oil spills. Simple Green has donated 1 million gallons of its products to disaster and humanitarian relief projects. Except for a few ready-to-use products, the formulas are concentrated, so you can use less of them than other cleaners. It also means there's less packaging waste and energy use for shipping. Its EGBAR Foundation funds community cleanups and environmental education programs, which more than 1.5 million kids have participated in. Uses easily recyclable, PVC-free packaging. Although Simple Green's packaging isn't made of 100% recycled materials, Frandson says the company is moving toward using more recycled content.

### YOGA ON THE POINT

Yoga on the Point opens with Dan Pifer on Wednesday, January 2. Each class costs \$10, and will help you get back to that center! Don't miss Dana's 8th Annual New Year's Day Yoga Class at 12 noon, 1227 Danmann Avenue (in the old Pedro Point firehouse).

Schedule starting January 2, 2008

Monday: 6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m., All Levels

Tuesday: 6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m., Intermediate

Wednesday: 6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m., All Levels

(Wednesdays include restorative process, back care and meditation.)

Thursday: 6:30 p.m. - 8 p.m., All Levels

### GGNRA PARTY

GGNRA Endangered Species "Big Year" Kickoff Party, Jan. 6, 1 p.m., San Francisco Zoo.

### GOOD WOOD

Bamboo is possibly the modern world's most perfect plant. Buy everything from plates and bowls to hardwood flooring and furniture made from bamboo, and feel good about supporting a plant that supports your health and the environment. Bamboo stands are known to release 35 percent more oxygen into the air than its tree stand equivalents. Its fast growth rate (some species grow as much as a foot a day) makes it an excellent choice in replanting deforested areas. Products made from bamboo are incredibly durable, so you get great, long-lasting value with every purchase. Great bamboo resource, from tabletop products to retail outlets to a brief history on bamboo: [bamboohome.com](http://bamboohome.com). Beautiful and affordable bamboo flooring: [bamboohardwoods.com](http://bamboohardwoods.com).

### FAUX JERKY

Curing fake jerky (textured soy protein, tofu, dried

cactus, etc.) takes much less dehydration time (energy) than curing meat. If Americans could reduce their meat consumption by just 10%, they would free up enough grain to feed 60 million people each year. Like a patch for smokers, this stuff makes the transition to vegetarianism easier for carnivores. ([idealbite.com](http://idealbite.com))

### NATURE & SOCIETY

The Aspen Institute Nature and Society Seminar is designed to combine both intellectual content and nature immersion. With moderated discussions of classical and contemporary texts, paired with expertly guided hikes, this program fosters a reflective examination of our relationship to nature, the meaning of wilderness in history and philosophy, and values at the intersection of the environment and society. Over five days, participants will consider nature as a source of identity, purification and change; as a place to reflect on our lives in society; and as a place to explore values that transcend social convention. Moderators Paul Andersen and Elliot Gerson will lead discussions of relevant readings from Hobbes, Rousseau, Emerson, Thoreau, Darwin, Muir, Leopold, E.O. Wilson, Rachel Carson and others. Discussions will probe issues relating to the fragile balance between our needs for society and wilderness, and the degree to which nature can be understood outside of social context. The Aspen-based seminar will include daily wilderness excursions culminating with two nights in the Margy's Hut at 11,300 feet in the Hunter-Frying Pan Wilderness. Participants should be reasonably fit for altitudes over 8,000 feet where mountain trail hiking will require moderate exertion. Dates: Aug. 9-13 in Aspen, Colo. No auditors. Info: Paul Andersen, 970-927-4018.

### NAMEPHREAK

Namephreaks is what the late, great columnist Herb Caen called his collection of funny names. Well, here's one for Herb: Peter Sandmann, lawyer for the Spindrift Home Owners Association in Stinson Beach, which is being sued for throwing a bodysurfer off its so-called private beach.

### SITeseer

•Good for your home, your dog, and the earth: [biobagusa.com](http://biobagusa.com)

•Champion classic-car auctioneer: [assiter.com](http://assiter.com)

•Solar panels for 99 cents: [nanosolar.com](http://nanosolar.com)

### SWAMI SEZ

"Keep your ear to the ground; you'll hear lots of dirt." (Jake Sigg)

### MAYBURRITOVILLE

•Local news: [PacificaRiptide.com](http://PacificaRiptide.com)

•My columns: [WanderingAndWondering.com](http://WanderingAndWondering.com), [PacificaTribune.com](http://PacificaTribune.com)

•Email stories & photos: [mayburrito@goofbuster.com](mailto:mayburrito@goofbuster.com)