

CAC Kids winter walk and Astrokids

19th January 2013

It was a cold and snowy Saturday afternoon that greeted our CAC Kids - perfect for our annual winter walk. Meeting in the car park at the Blaise Castle Estate, we headed straight across the park to the woods in search of anything Iron Age. George and Jaimee, with a few clues, soon spotted a snow covered bank and ditch, and shortly afterwards, some secret steps, probably not Iron Age, leading through the trees to the summit - the site of Blaise Castle.



On the way up to Blaise Castle

Blaise Castle is a folly, but was used as a residence and venue for guests to watch the progression of merchant ships in and out of Bristol along the River Avon. It was built in 1766 by Bristol merchant Thomas Farr on the site of St. Blaise Chapel. St. Blaise seems to have been an Armenian bishop and physician who specialised in extracting fish bones stuck in the people's throats. Farr also landscaped the surrounding area and created ramparts for effect, so maybe our Iron Age bank wasn't quite as old as we thought. However, archaeology has revealed Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman use of the hill, so it has been an important spot for at least 5000 years.



CAC Kids in front of the castle

Blaise Castle was badly damaged by a fire in 1954 and much of the ornate internal décor was lost, but it was restored in 1982, as it appears today.



Snowballs

The first activity for our CAC Kids obviously involved snow, and a snowball fight quickly ensued. We also took the opportunity to create a new CAC Kid recruit.



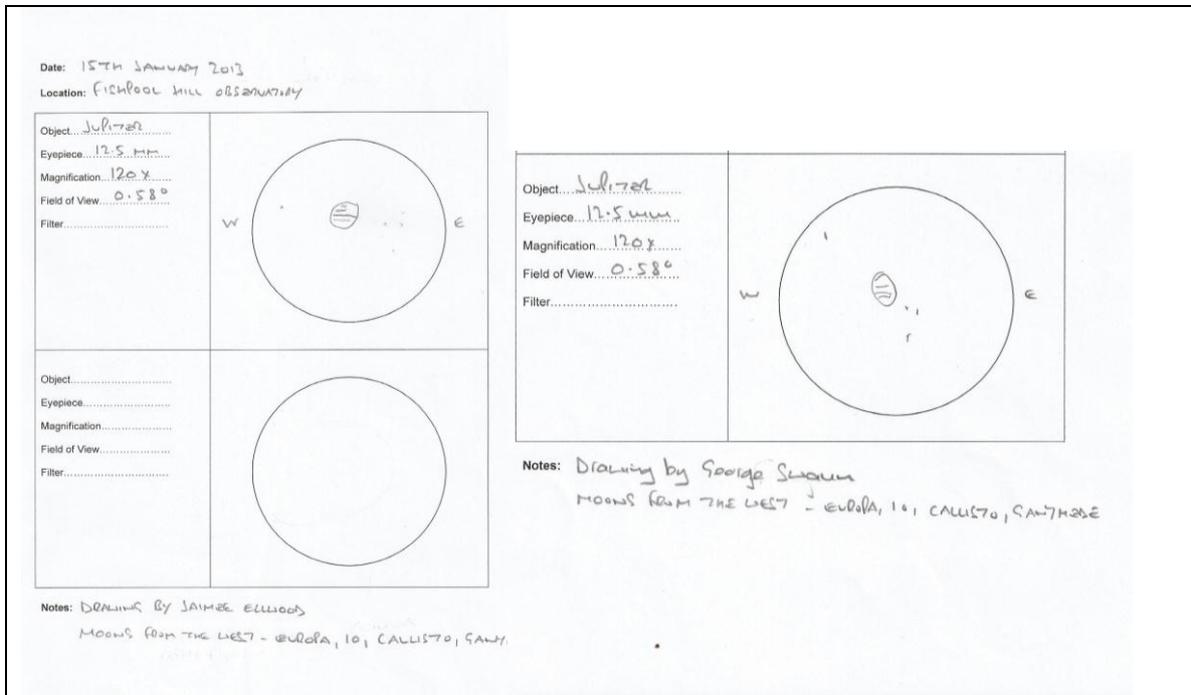
Our new recruit

George then led the team to the Robber's cave, man-made, apparently as a point of interest for the carriage journey up to the castle.

Next up was hot chocolate and marshmallows from a great viewpoint looking over the gorge and Hazel Brook and across towards Stokeleigh Camp. Thus warmed up, a little, we headed along the footpath to Butcher's Cave, a "grotto" also constructed in the eighteenth century and finally continued the circuit back to the park.

Blaise Castle is a fascinating spot; a sort of bespoke landscape created in the mid 1700's to reflecting perhaps contemporary interest in things antiquarian. There is plenty more history to explore here, maybe in the summer.

We cheated a little with Astrokids, aware that the weekend would bring snow and lots of cloud, we sneaked our Astrokids evening in on the beautifully clear Tuesday evening beforehand. Jupiter was our target, and had some great views. George and Jaimee produced great drawings showing three visible cloud belts and the fantastically accurate positioning of the four Galilean moons.



Out on its own was Europa, fascinating by virtue of the proposal that its thin atmosphere and 50 km deep ocean make it one of the most likely spots in the solar system that we might find alien life. We didn't see any, maybe we need a bigger telescope!

We also had a good look at the Great Orion Nebula and the "trapezium", birthplace of new stars and a theme that we shall continue on our next Astrokids evening.

All in all, another great outing for our Astrokids and a good start to the CAC Kids year.