

Subject: Quick overview of the meeting in San Diego
From: Peter Abrahams

The meeting in San Diego was a great success. There have been previous meetings of binocular enthusiasts, which prepared the way for the many papers & displays of the 2003 meeting. This meeting did not reduce the significance of earlier meetings & publications, but we hope it 'expands the horizon of the possible' for those interested in this subject.

For the purposes of this 'binocular list', I won't repeat the names & schedule that were emailed in previous lists. They will be in a final record that will be posted to the web.

The following notes do not include everything of interest, and I hope that attendees can contribute to the record by filling in the gaps in my text. I still have notes to go through, but I did not witness everything or try to record everything. (In other words, if I forgot your contribution, let me know.) :

Tuesday morning, Fan Tao set up a display of about 25 wide angle Japanese 7 x 35 binoculars. This display was especially appropriate because David Bushnell recognized some of the products of his business, as did Toshi Kamakura, and optical designer Naomi Watanabe found an example of the first binocular he designed, a Swift model.

Steve Stayton set up a display of Bushnell Rangemasters. Steve Rohan brought 3 luggage-cart loads of large & heavy instruments, and a selection of 25 x 100 and 12 x 60 binoculars, the subject of his talk. Mike Rifkin brought various publications related to binocular use, such as hunting and birding magazines. Gene Lucas brought some papers related to the Sard 6 x 42.

Terry Vacani brought a copy of a new book, 'Binoculars & their Use', by R.C.Gregory, which will be reviewed in the next list.

Jack Kelly began the presentations with an offer of ' www.binocs.org ' as a binocular collectors' web site. The possibilities of such a site were discussed as the weekend progressed. Most felt that it should have an overall organization and not be just a collection of files, and the characteristics of this organization are something to be decided. This site would augment the existing sites (Peter Abrahams', Simon Gunning's, Mike Rifkin's) and not replace any of them.

The founding of Deutsche Optik in 1990 was described by Mike Rifkin, including the first sales of East German binoculars, and various adventures en route to the business of today. A recent project is the development of a new binocular, and a prototype of a Porro II model was shown.

Steve Rohan gave a talk on 'Early Japanese copies of Zeiss instruments', showing how various early Japanese binoculars and 'rabbit ear' stereo telescopes have a very close resemblance to German models. Many examples were shown and passed around.

Gene Lucas presented 'Notes on the Sard 6 x 42 Super Wide Angle Binoculars', with personal experiences and an overview of their use. A few minutes were spent on the subject of restoration of magnesium parts.

Steve Rohan presented a second talk based on a display of Zeiss 25 x 100s of the WWII era. The evolution & of variations of these were described.

A video was presented, showing Terry Vacani's explanation of the disassembly of a Zeiss 25 x 100 and a similar Zeiss model, the rangefinder mounted 12 x 60. The intricate Cardano circle for interpupillary adjustment was described. Most notably, disassembly involves removing a heavy cover plate with the large roof prisms mounted in place; with only millimeters of clearance between the housing and the highly vulnerable roof edge of the prism -- it was clear that inexperience in the workman, or frozen assembly, could cause the roof edge to be nicked or broken on the metal housing. Furthermore, to lift the cover plate, several screws are removed, but if adjacent screws are removed, the prism drops off the plate and falls into the housing.

During breaks and over lunch, discussions were too numerous to follow, but Toshi Kamakura and David Bushnell were sharing experiences of Japan, and Toshi described some of the products of his business and the designs of Kamakura engineer Naomi Watanabe.

Tuesday afternoon was spent at Deutsche Optik, where an open house included tours, displays, previews of Wednesday's sale, and many instruments on display to talk about. That evening we were guests of D.O. at a dinner on the water at the San Diego Yacht Club. Hans Seeger gave a brief speech, expressing thanks to the meeting organizers (full text below). We still had plenty to talk about, but discussions were interrupted by a short talk by Peter Abrahams on some of the issues related to creating a more formal organization for those interested in the history of binoculars. There were no volunteers for president or editor, but it was decided that we should not let this opportunity pass, and a board of volunteers was convened after dinner. At that time, a name for the organization was voted on, and the name (or at least provisional name) is: The Binocular History Society. (Binocular Preservation Society was second place.) Also discussed was the next meeting site. It was decided that we are an international organization and the next meeting should be in Germany. Lothar Esch volunteered to coordinate this meeting, to be held circa September 2004. Since this is 19 months away, another meeting in the U.S. was thought appropriate, and it was decided to meet in Tucson, Arizona in January or February of 2004. Other regional meetings are strongly encouraged.

Further discussion concerned the web site & organization of the design for the site. The board consists of: Lothar Esch, Hans Seeger, Steve Stayton, Peter Abrahams, Jack Kelly, Fan Tao, Steve Rohan, James Lidgett, and Fred Schwartzman.

A major snowstorm delayed our east coast members, but on Wednesday the Zeiss contingent was completed after Nick Grossman finally managed to catch a plane. Our only missing registrant was Connie Spence of Ferson Optics. The efforts made by those from the east coast to arrive in San Diego were heroic.

On Wednesday, we met in a larger room, which began filling rapidly with displays and sales items. Steve Rohan brought the heavy metal back downstairs, in three luggage cart-loads, so we could further inspect these optics. Fan Tao, Steve Stayton, Gene Lucas, and David Bushnell also displayed. Sales tables were manned by David Jones, Peter Abrahams, Mike Rifkin, David Bushnell, and others.

Presentations on Wednesday were accompanied by a 'computer projector', which allowed large quantities of detailed color images to accompany the talks. Larry Gubas gave us an overview of the history of Zeiss, and the progression of Zeiss binoculars, accompanied by many new (to us) images from advertising and company publications. Steve Stayton spoke on the Bushnell Rangemaster series. Jack Kelly presented scores of images to illustrate the development of 'Mechanical designs over the first 20-30 years of mass production'. Robert Forslund showed us more varieties of Swedish military binoculars than anyone thought could exist. Peter Abrahams presented an informal overview of Japanese post war binocular production, with images of workers in early Japanese factories. thingy Buchroeder presented an optical engineer's perspective on the design of the Russian 30 x 180 now being sold in the U.S. Peter offered a postscript to this talk, noting that while much of the advanced technology of optical engineering is incomprehensible to mere mortals; the professional lens designer can be of great service to the historian of optical instruments:

for example, the fabulous performance of the German 8x60s is not from black magic, it is from technology, and it can certainly be replicated, if the glass types, curvatures, and workmanship of the historic models can be comprehended.

After a lunch break and socializing, Peter Abrahams gave a talk on 'The First 300 Years of Binocular Telescopes', illustrated with examples of binoculars from 1600 to 1900.

Some of the above speakers did not have a written text, or are unable to provide a paper for publication. However, all of the papers that can be published, will be placed on the internet or elsewhere.