

# THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 3, No. 1

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

March, 1999

**Officers:** President, Steven Smith (583-2200); Vice President/newsletter editor, Bill Warren (229-6108 -- or, if you prefer e-mail: warren1212@mindspring.com); Secretary-Treasurer, Ken Walburn (P. O. Box 1179, McDonough, GA 30253 / 954-9442; AICor, Neal Wellons, and Web Site Coordinator, Cody Wellons (946-5039); Librarians, Tom and Katie Moore (228-6447); Telephone/Hospitality Committee Chairman: Dan Pillatzki (707-0270). Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. All of these phone numbers have 770 area code prefixes. FRAC web page address: <http://welcome.to/frac>.

Please notify **Bill Warren** promptly if you have a change of address.

\*\*\*

**Club Calendar. Thurs., Mar. 11:** FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook media center, 7:30); **Fri., Mar. 12:** Beaverbrook "First Light"/FRAC joint observing (BB, at dark); **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 19-20:** deep-sky observings (Cox Field, at dark).

\*\*\*

**Vice President's Message.** With **Smitty**, our new president, still visiting his father in Ohio, it behooves me to welcome our newest members, **David & Rachel Ward** and **Rickie, Cindy, Joshua & Austin Ramsey**, to FRAC. David, Rachel, Cindy and Josh attended our Feb. club meeting. Please don't be shy in letting us know how we can make your FRAC membership enjoyable and productive, folks; that's what we're all about. If we're not user-friendly, we aren't really a club at all.

We'll remain strangers to you only if you fail to get involved in what FRAC is doing.

As will be noted shortly, February wasn't very friendly to area stargazers. The best nights for observing turned out to be Sat.-Sun. nights, Feb. 13th-14th, 2 days before the new Moon and a week before our regularly scheduled Cox Field observings. **John Wallace** finished off his remaining Messiers that weekend (although he wants to see the open cluster M25 in *Sagittarius* again, having seen but not recorded it in his previous observations), and I reduced my remaining Herschel 400 targets to 2. Those nights were clear as a bell and dry as -- well, use your poetic powers to finish the rhyme. And where were *you* while the stars were out waiting for you on those nights?

Smitty will take over this column next month; I know you'll give him the same sort of unqualified support that sustained and strengthened me during the past 9 months. Things always change when a new club president takes office, but with Smitty at the helm you can be assured that those changes will be for the better.

-Bill Warren

\*\*\*

To me, every hour of the light and dark is a  
miracle,

Every cubic inch of space a miracle.

-Walt Whitman

\*\*\*

**Hail to the Chief.** Although the lower 2/3 of our executive lineup remains the same, we have a new president to lead us for the next 2 yrs. In case you're relatively new to FRAC and don't know a lot about **Steven ("Saratoga Smitty")** -- or, more simply, "**Smitty**") **Smith** yet, here's what we had to say about him in the Sept. '97 issue of the *Observer*:

"Even if you've never met him, you'll know **Smitty** when you see him: he wears a dark stocking cap when the temperature dips below about 75°, and he sports more facial hair than an English sheepdog. Like his hero (and ours too), the remarkable **John Dobson**, **Smitty** is passionately committed to sharing his love for the night sky with those who have never experienced its wonders at the telescope.

"A marvelously gifted and well-rounded spokesman for amateur astronomy, **Smitty** also manages occasionally to make *me* look brilliant, which isn't always easy to do. Whenever anyone comes to me regarding any kind of problem with their telescope or any technical aspect of observing, I tell them, 'See that guy over there who looks like Rumpelstiltskin? That's **Smitty**. Go talk to him, he'll set you straight.' And he does. **Smitty** goes to the heart of problems and solves them. And that makes **Smitty** an extremely valuable person for you to know.

"**Smitty** and his wife **Deborah** have one child, **Steven**, 11 [in Sept. '97]. **Smitty**, a self-employed motorcycle mechanic, owns a lovely red Coulter 10" Dobsonian; it's one of the nicest 'scopes I've ever tripped over in the dark.

"Although professing to enjoy open clusters most among the various delights in the night sky, **Smitty** admits to having a special affection for *Andromeda's Great Spiral Galaxy*, M31, and its satellite galaxies M32 and M110. 'I never pass up a chance to see *Andromeda*,' he says."

\* \* \*

I would be very ashamed of my

civilization if we did not try to find out if there is life in outer space.

-Carl Sagan

\* \* \*

**Last Month's Meetings/Activities.** We had 14 in attendance at our Feb. FRAC meeting. **Smitty** was unanimously elected president for the next 2 yrs., as were **yr. humble reporter** as vice president and **Ken Walburn** as secretary/treasurer. **Mike Stuart** received his lunar Club pin, and **Ken Wilson** and **Chuck Beckham** were splendid as our guest speakers, telling and showing us what it takes to get started in astrophotography.

The clouds parted long enough on Feb. 16th for **John Wallace, Katie & Tom Moore** and **yr. ubiquitous** (look it up, **Ken Walburn!**) **reporter** to hold an observing for about 60 children and parents at Crescent Elem. School in Griffin. (**Neal Wellons** had planned to attend, but in a burst of genius I considered the unruly nature of the sky that evening and told him not to come.) On Feb. 26th, **Neal, John, Katie, Ken Wilson, Dan Pillatzki** and **yrs. truly** gave a brief telescopic tour of the night sky for a huge crowd of about 160 people at Hampton's Fortson Public Library, after which **Dr. Richard Schmude, Jr.**, took the viewers indoors for a planetary slide presentation and a thrilling hands-on encounter with meteorites. Especially considering the weather outside, all in all it was a very special evening for all concerned.

(About the Fortson observing: in an act of search-and-discover that should rank right up there with Clyde Tombaugh's discovery of Pluto in 1930, 15-yr.-old **Katie Moore** found the **Trapezium** in a sky that was so thickly clouded over that not even Betelgeuse or Rigel could be seen. **Katie** also served notice that she and her dad intend never to let me forget that, at the Crescent and Hampton observings I mis-identified the multiple star **Sigma Orionis** as "Zeta Orionis."

Clouds largely washed out both our Feb. 12th BB/FRAC observing and our Feb. 19th-20th Cox Field observing weekend, the

latter effectively denying **Robert Hall** the opportunity to try out his beautiful new Maksutov 'scope. Having already warned Rob that we were going to hold him and his Mak personally responsible for every molecule of moisture in the air for the next 6 mos., I had to laugh when, first, **Tom & Katie** and then **John Wallace** took turns blaming him for the overcast skies. Don't know if Robert was laughing too -- probably not, since it was the 2nd time his maiden voyage with the Mak at Cox Field has been foiled -- but I hope he knows we're kidding. Robert's fun-loving nature and ready wit make him a great addition to our band of regulars at Cox Field even if his flashlight's green glow zaps night vision like staring at the full Moon. (Sorry 'bout the zinger, Robert, but if you had read the fine print in your application you'd know that the \$10 annual dues applies only to those who don't mind an occasional verbal elbow to the ribs in these pages; annual dues for sensitive souls who embarrass easily is \$25.)

\* \* \*

**Membership Renewals Due in March: Tim & Celia Astin; Chuck Beckham; Steven Byous; Keith & Denise Cox; Mitch, Tammy, Lauren & Jordan Hammond; Larry, Toni & Randi Higgins; Rich Jakiel; Frieda Maddox; Charles, Katie & Kathy Osbolt; Steven Smith; Ken & Doris Walburn; John Wallace; Bill & Louise Warren; and Ken & Karen Wilson.** Send your \$10 checks to Ken Walburn c/o P. O. Box 1179, McDonough, GA 30253.

\* \* \*

**New FRAC Librarians Named.** Due to pressing educational commitments, **Keith Cox** has had to relinquish his position as club librarian. **Katie & Tom Moore** have agreed to house our small but growing FRAC library. Hopefully, we'll have an updated list of our resources for you in a month or two.

**Upcoming Meetings/Activities.** When we discovered that **Dr. Richard Schmude** had a gap in his March schedule, we quickly

scrapped our planned program and enlisted him as speaker for our FRAC meeting on **Thurs., Mar. 11th.** His topic will be *Variable Stars* (i.e., stars that for any of a number of reasons, undergo changes in intensity and brightness for periods ranging anywhere from several years to a few hours -- sort of like **Ken Walburn** on Viagra.). None of our previous speakers has ever addressed this topic before, so it will be virgin territory for most of us. As all but our newest members already know, Richard is a gifted, dynamic speaker with a unique ability to bring complex topics down to earth for people who wouldn't know an eclipsing binary from canned Spam.

Our BB/FRAC joint observing will be held at Beaverbrook on **Fri., Mar. 12th**, and our Cox Field deep-sky observings on **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 19th-20th.**

\* \* \*

**For Sale.** **Robert Hall** has a couple of items for sale: a solar filter for a 90mm (3-1/2") refractor, for \$40; and a Model 531 right ascension motor drive for a Meade 90mm refractor, for \$90. Call him at (912)929-3383 if you're interested.

\* \* \*

**The Sky in January.** In early March, **Mercury** will be about 11° -- a little more than a closed fist-width -- above the horizon 20 min. after sunset; on **Mar. 4th**, it will be 4° to the right of **Jupiter**, low in the west.

On **Mar. 20th**, **Venus**, still rising in the W, will be 3° away from **Saturn**. Look for Venus's gibbous (declining) phase in any telescope. You won't see the phase via naked-eye observing.

**Mars** will rise about 11:00 on **Mar. 1st**, and at around 9:00 by the end of the month.

\* \* \*

For everyone, I think, must see that astronomy compels the soul to look upwards and leads us from this world to another.

-Plato

\* \* \*

**Peach State Star Gaze VI.** Many of you have already received information and an application for the upcoming **Peach State Star Gaze**, a star party sponsored by the Atlanta Astronomy Club; if you haven't gotten their brochure, you can pick up one at our club meeting in March or April.

The PSSG will run from **Thurs.-Sun., Apr. 15th-18th**, at Indian Springs State Park's Camp McIntosh near Jackson, GA, south of Atlanta. Several of our members have already expressed an interest in attending the weekend affair, including **Smitty, Dan Pillatzki, Ken Wilson, Tom & Katie Moore, John Wallace, and Benjamin, Susan & John Redden. Ken Walburn** and I were two of over 200 attendees at last year's PSSG, and we'll be there this year, too. Ken always checks in on Thursday; I stake out a spot on Thursday, observe awhile that night, and then come back the next afternoon and stay the weekend.

The registration fee for this exciting (and widely attended) event is \$20 for adults (age 13-up), \$10 for children ages 5-11, and free for children ages 4-under. A late registration fee of \$5 goes into effect after **Apr. 7th**. There's an additional parking fee of \$2 per car. Overnight camping costs \$8 per person per night, and overnight bunkhouse accommodations (men in one dorm, women in the other) cost \$15 per person per night. If you want to come and observe but not stay overnight, you can do so for \$10 per person per night.

If this sounds like the Peach State Star Gaze is all about money, well, it's not -- but even if it were, it's for a good cause, namely, supporting AAC and its mass of programs, agendas and services. The PSSG is really about having fun, meeting people, camping out, seeing the night sky through every imaginable type and size of telescope, participating in challenging events like the annual search for "Peach Fuzzies," or simply following your own agenda. It's about famous speakers (one of whom, our own **Dr. Richard Schmude, Jr.**, will be talking on

Saturday about "Making A Good Mars Drawing." It's about people like **Ken Walburn** catching up on his sleep by hitting the hay about 8:30 p.m. And it's about people like **Katie M.** working her way through the maze of Messier galaxies in *Virgo, Coma Berenices, Canes Venatici* and *Ursa Major*. Katie stayed up till past 4 a.m. last year chasing them down, while her dad **Tom** kept his eyes propped open with matchsticks.

\* \* \*

(This one's just for you and me, John W.):

When men are calling names and making faces,

And all the world's a-jangle and ajar,

I meditate on interstellar spaces

And smoke a mild seegar.

-Bert Leston Taylor

\* \* \*

### The Lunatix Challenge Series

by **Philip Sacco (Lunatic #82)**

*(Editor's Note: AAC's Phil Sacco has devised a fun and challenging project of lunar observation based on (but not limited to) the AL Lunar Club observing program. Each month, he'll present 10-12 "Lunatic Challenges" that are intended to expand your understanding of our nearest neighbor in space. Phil explains: "The (Lunatic Challenge) is designed to compel participants to enjoy all the various phases of the Moon. Each phase brings something new into view. Even well-known and familiar features are rendered different as the ever-changing shadows bring into view different features not ordinarily seen.*

*"I hope you'll try this new program throughout the year. Offering new challenges each month, it can be completed with the smallest of telescopes and in your backyard.*

since ideal observing conditions aren't required. Hopefully, this program will encourage you to get out under the night sky more often.

*"Any and all observations may be completed with optical assistance other than the category the objects are listed under. While the naked-eye and binocular objects are intended to be shared with others once you know them, some of us don't have the 'eyes' we used to have, and a telescope or binoculars may be used on any object of the naked-eye or binocular listing.."*

*"Your complete (Lunatic) Challenge is intended to take several months (and) several cycles through the phases of the Moon to complete... (You should) indicate the date, time, instrument(s) used and any notes you care to add for each object on the list. If you don't complete a full monthly listing, just roll the objects over to be seen at a later time. The entire list must be completed, however long it may actually take you."*

*You'll need 2 things to get started: a map of the Moon with its features identified, and a book that will describe the features and or define the terms in question. The Sky & Telescope catalog offers several maps and books, the best being the Moon poster on p. 25 for \$14.95 and books on the Moon on pp. 8 and 15. You can get the S&T catalog free by calling toll-free at 1-800-253-0245 or e-mailing them at [www.skypub.com](http://www.skypub.com).*

*Beyond that, before getting started you should study the AL's Lunar Club information from the yellow folder you were given, to tell you exactly how to proceed in your pursuit of a Lunar Club certificate and pin.)*

### **Lunatic Challenge #1**

#### **Naked-Eye Targets.**

1. Rabbit face and ears. (Hint: tranquil bunny.)
2. Mare Crisium: Sea of \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Mare Nubium: Sea of \_\_\_\_\_.

#### **Binocular Targets.**

1. Find 2 prominent ray craters located very close to each other. What are their names?
2. Lacus Somniorum: Lake of \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_. What Sea is it near?
3. Crater Aristarchus.
4. (Challenge) Crater Atlas: what other Greek mythologically named crater is nearby?

#### **Telescopic Targets.**

1. Crater Moltke: How is it visually unique? (Hint: Apollo 11.)
2. Alpine Valley (Vallis Alpes): what prominent crater is nearby?
3. The "Straight Wall": what is its other name?
4. (Challenge) Rima Birt.

*Enjoy!*

##