

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 3, No. 5

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

July, 1999

Officers: President, **Steven (Smitty) 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; AlCor, **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.

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Club Calendar. **Tues., July 6:** Fortson Public Library observing (Hampton, at dark); **Thurs., July 8:** FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook media center, 7:30); **Tues., July 13:** McDonough public library presentation (**Smitty**, at 10:00 a.m.); **Fri.-Sat., July 16-17:** FRAC deep-sky observings (Cox Field, at dark).

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President's Message. On FRAC's behalf, let me extend our heartfelt sympathies to the family of **Dan Pillatzki**, whose grandmother passed away in June. And I'd like to welcome our newest club members: the **Kelleys (John, Lisa, Morgan, Ian & Erin)**. We met them at Mayfling; John and Lisa have wisely resisted the temptation to buy Morgan a telescope until they know more about what she needs.

Elsewhere, there is this: **WE'RE HAVING**

A FRAC/AAC "PERSEIDS METEOR SHOWER/ZOMBIE STAR PARTY" AT COX FIELD ON THE WEEKEND OF AUGUST 13TH-15TH!!!

Last year's highly successful October Zombiefest drew more than 40 attendees to Cox Field; this year's event may be even bigger since it coincides with the best of the annual meteor showers, the Perseids, and viewing won't be hindered by the Moon. Plan to come early and stay late -- or better yet, come prepared to camp out with us!

While Bill and I will have more to say about this event elsewhere in this issue and in the August newsletter as well, I'll point out here that *You may never have a better opportunity to learn how to observe and record meteors and start logging hours toward AL Meteor Club certificates than by watching experts like Dr. Richard Schmude and others do it.*

Meteor watching is, after all, the most laid-back form of skywatching you'll ever do. It's also the cheapest form, since you were born with all the equipment you'll ever need to track meteors. Unless you wear eyeglasses, that is.

Keep your phasers set on "Stun," **Mr. Higgins!**

-Steven (Saratoga Smitty) Smith

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Last Month's Meetings/Activities.

Congratulations to **Neal Wellons** for an interesting, enjoyable and highly informative presentation at our June meeting. Thirteen members and two guests were taken through the basics of cosmology in the smooth, easy manner of the late **Carl Sagan**. Thanks, Neal, for a job well done; **Cindy** -- and Dr. Sagan as

well -- would have been very proud of you.

Also at the meeting, **Mike Stuart** received his Messier pin (and won the door prize as well), and **Smitty** presented **Katie Moore** with two colorful FRAC tee shirts to take with her to astronomy camp in Arizona.

The Fri. nite segment of our June Cox Field observing weekend was a washout.

Attendance- and weather-wise, our Sat. nite observing session was almost a carbon copy of May, with **Smitty, Joe Auriemma, Ken Walburn & yr. humble reporter** getting in about 3 hrs. of observing that was highlighted at midnight by our seeing a UFO -- and before you ask, *No*, we hadn't been tipping a jug of elderberry wine!

Another important outcome of our time together at Cox Field Sat. night was our finding a way to explain Einstein's "relativity theory" in terms that can be easily understood by laymen. While discussing **Neal's** cosmology talk, we decided that Einstein's statement, "Time is relative to the observer," refers to the fact that time slows down when relatives come to visit.

See what you missed by staying at home and watching the Braves get shellacked by Cal Ripken and the O's when you could have been out exploring the night sky and solving the deepest mysteries of the universe? (Not to mention *witnessing an alien abduction*, which might have occurred if it had been a UFO instead of a faulty utility transformer somewhere S of Cox Field.)

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Membership Renewals Due in July:
Tommy Narron; Daniel, Kathy, Amanda & Megan Pillatzki; Susan, Benjamin & John Redden; and Doyne & Jodi Tallman. Send your \$10 check to **Ken Walburn** at the address listed on p. 1.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. As usual, July will be a busy month for FRAC. On **Tues., July 6th**, we'll hold a public observing at Fortson Public Library in Hampton. To get there, take U.S. Hwy. 19/41 N from Griffin

and turn right onto Ga. Hwy. 20 at the red light and Wendy's near Atlanta Speedway. After about 3/4 mi. Hwy. 20 makes a sharp curve to the left where a paved road, the Old Atlanta Road, joins it. Turn right onto that road, and the library and observing site are on the right, about 75 yds. from Hwy. 20. Last year's Hampton observing was attended by about 150 children and adults, so we'll need as many members in attendance as we can get.

You don't need a telescope, or even binoculars, to help out at our public observings, folks. All you need is to be there to talk with people. And you don't need to know much more about the sky or telescopes than you presently know in order to talk about our club or astronomy, or to handle whatever questions might arise. If you have answers, give them; if not, just point the questioner toward whomever you think might be able to supply the answers. No one has all the answers, of course -- except **Ken Walburn**, who spent four years at Harvard (in a jar of formaldehyde) -- but some of us always bring along resources to supplement whatever gaps exist in our understanding of the night sky and how it works.

If you bring a telescope or binoculars but don't know your way around the night sky very well, don't worry; we'll show you what to find, how to find it, and tell you what you need to know about it so you can tell viewers what they need to know about it. You'll be amazed at how much fun it is to show and talk about the sky with people who have never seen it this way before!

On **Thurs., July 8th**, our FRAC meeting in the Beaverbrook Media Center at 7:30 will feature **Smitty** talking about the growing national (and worldwide) problem of light pollution, and what the International Dark Sky Assn. is doing to combat the problem.

Our Friday BB/FRAC observings have been cancelled for the summer -- but you can bet that, if the skies are clear on **Fri., July 9th** (and **Sat., July 10th**, as well), some of us will be out at Cox Field. We'll be happy to have you join us in our never-ending search for UFOs. Maybe you'll even get to see **Ken W.** abduct an alien.

On **Tues., July 13th**, **Smitty** will be giving a daytime presentation at the public library in McDonough at 10:00 a.m.; he'd love to have you come along for moral support if you can make it. Call him at the telephone no. listed on p. 1 for directions to the library.

Our **Fri.-Sat., July 16th-17th**, Cox Field deep-sky observings will be on the other side of the new moon (which occurs on Mon., July 12th); if the sky cooperates, deep-sky observing conditions should be fine on both weekends. All we'll need to make things complete is *you*.

Next month's FRAC meeting will be held on **Thurs., Aug. 6th**, at **yr. humble newsletter editor's** house at 1212 Everee Inn Rd., and will be a combination pool party and program. Directions to our humble abode will be given in next month's newsletter, but for now it's enough to tell you that we live on the SW side of Griffin, 2 blocks from the airport and less than 1/2 mi. from the 19/41 Bypass. Our program topic will be "Recording Your Observations" -- what you should look for in what you see, and what observing information you need to include in your observations.

Also in August, FRAC is hosting a joint FRAC/Atlanta Astronomy Club "**Perseids Zombie Party**" observing weekend at Cox Field on **Fri.-Sun., July 13th-15th** -- virtually the same dates as our regularly scheduled club observing weekend. The 13th will be 2 days after the new moon, so our views of the deep sky *and* the Perseids meteors -- rated among the best of the annual meteor showers with rates of up to 50 meteors per hour during the late evening/early morning hrs. not uncommon -- will be excellent. This month's *Observer* contains a checklist of what you need to bring along with you if you plan to camp out with us. (Of course, you're also free to come and go each night if you wish, but in case you decide to stay Port-O-Lets will be available.) A fee of \$5 per person per night will be assessed -- whether you camp out or not -- but we hope you'll come anyway, since you don't get all that many opportunities to rub shoulders with the bigwigs of AAC, or to see the universe through their monster 'scopes. Anyway, we don't often ask you to support our club through donations,

fund-raisers, etc., so you shouldn't mind terribly if we do so just this once.

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The Sky in June. **Venus**, still a bright "evening star," will become a morning star in Sept. For now, though, the goddess is growing larger (40" arc on **July 20th**), brighter (mag. -4.5 on the **15th**), and more crescent. On **July 15th**, you can enjoy the twin crescents of the **Moon** and Venus, 2° apart.

This month's *Astronomy* magazine (p. 68) tells how to find Venus in the daytime in July: "Walk outside and hide the sun behind a streetlight or the top of a flag pole, taking note of where you place your feet." Then come back to the same spot (a) exactly 3 hrs. later on **July 1st**, (b) 2 hrs. and 50 min. later on **July 8th**, or (c) 2 hrs. and 33 min. later on **July 15th** -- and Venus will be in the same place where the Sun was hidden -- a tiny white dot, somewhat hard to see amid a sea of blue sky surrounding it, but still there nevertheless, if you look closely enough.

Neat, huh?

Mars, fading about 1/2 mag. in brightness during July, is also shrinking in size even as Venus grows larger. While the study of Martian surface features has been productive in recent months, such will not be the case after July. Mars will set after midnight as it moves farther away from **Spica** (*Alpha Virginis*). *Astronomy* (p. 69) tells how you can find Mars naked-eye during the afternoon of **July 20th**.

Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus & Neptune all still qualify as early morning targets. **Mercury** can be seen low in the W 45 min. after sunset in early July. The July issue of *Astronomy* (p. 71) tells how to find "easy **Pluto**" (mag. 13.7) under dark skies with an 8" 'scope during the 1st week of July.

A partial lunar eclipse will occur at 6:22 a.m. on **July 28th**. Look for it if you happen to be in Hawaii at the time. You're better advised to wait for the total eclipse that will be visible to all of North America next January.

At mag. 10, Comet **Tempel 2** will be about as bright an object in July in the constellation *Ophiuchus* as a few of the fainter Messier

objects; if you want to give it a try -- or if you'd like to track down the asteroid **22 Kalliope** -- consult the July issue of *Sky & Tel* (p. 71 for Tempel 2, p. 69 for Kalliope).

On p. 122 of its July issue, *S&T* has a nice article by Charles A. Wood on my favorite lunar feature, the dark and lovely crater **Plato**, located N of *Mare Imbrium* in the Moon's NE quadrant.

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The Lunatic Challenge Series: #5

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

(Editor's Note: This is the 5th in a series of 12 monthly "Challenges" devised by AAC's Phil Sacco to make your Lunar Club award quest more interesting. Remember: If you miss a given feature one month, you can always look for it next month; and you can look for naked eye or binocular targets with a telescope or binoculars if you prefer to do so.)

Naked-Eye Targets. 1. *Oceanus Procellarum*: Sea of _____? 2. *Mare Cognitum*: the _____ Sea. 3. (Challenge): *Sinus Medii* (Central Bay): What does its name mean? 4. What is significant about crater *Hedervary*?

Pickering's Naked-Eye Challenge. Can you see with your naked eye: 1. *Mare Humorum* (the Sea of _____; this is a rated 3 challenge); and 2. *Sinus Medii* (shouldn't be TOO tough for you, hehehe... What does its name mean? This is a rated 9 challenge...)

Binocular Targets. 1. Crater *Cleomedes*: What Sea is just below it? 2. Crater *Endymion*. 3. *Mare Undarum*: What Sea is just above it? 4. Crater *Macrobius*. 5. (Challenge): Crater *Cyrillus* (Hint: *Theo's* buddy.)

Telescopic Targets. 1. Crater *Burg*. 2. Crater *Triesnecker*. 3. *Promontorium LaPlace*. (Hint: Another good place to see a

rainbow!) 4. (Challenge): *Triesnecker Rilles*.

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From Our "Hot Flashes On a New Summer Day" Dept. -- excuse me, that should have been **"News Flashes On a Hot Summer Day" Dept.** -- comes the following nonsense:

*What FRAC officer mistook the constellation *Ophiuchus* for *Sagittarius* -- not an easy thing to do, since they resemble each other about as much as **Joe Auremma** resembles **Dennis Rodman** -- at Cox Field back in April? **Yr. nearsighted reporter** will never tell -- for obvious reasons -- and he hopes that **Katie M.** won't tell, either.

*This from **David Ward**: "I was outside tonight with my 6" Newt, trying to find M13. It was near the zenith, so alignment of the equatorial mount was a neck strainer with a straight-through finder. My youngest daughter, **Melissa** (age 7), asked what I was looking for. I told her I was trying to find **M13**, a cluster of stars in Hercules. I found it and showed it to her, and she trotted off to bed.

"A few minutes later my wife **Roxanne** came outside and said she had asked Melissa what I was doing. Melissa said I was 'outside looking for Klutzie stars.'

"I guess we'll have to start a new catalog of 'Klutzie stars' now...so I nominate M13 as **K1** in the Klutzie Catalog."

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*Since we haven't heard from **Tom Moore** yet in this issue, consider the following conversation allegedly overheard between Tom and a club member regarding Tom's Lunar Club misadventures:

Member: Have you tried following the lunar cycle?

Tom: No, I haven't. Is it something like a dirt bike?

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STAR PARTY EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES CHECKLIST

This checklist is to remind you of what you might want to bring with you to the Star Party — and once there, it will remind you of what you brought and want to take home. Just check off items as you pack them. You don't have to bring everything on the list, of course; bring what you *need* (e.g., a sleeping bag or cot), what you *want* (e.g., a transistor radio), and what you *have* (e.g., binoculars, a telescope). **Don't** bring a Coleman lantern or oil lamps; the chemicals they emit can damage optical coatings.

<u>Cox</u>	<u>Going</u>	
<u>Field</u>	<u>Home</u>	<u>Camping Gear</u>
_____	_____	Tent/camper/RV/etc.
_____	_____	Sleeping bag/cot/air mattress/blanket/etc.
_____	_____	Food/snacks/etc.
_____	_____	Cooking gear, equipment (e.g., plates, cups/eating utensils)
_____	_____	Cooler or thermos (with ice)
_____	_____	Toiletries (e.g., Visine, No-Doz)
_____	_____	Table, chair(s), esp. a lawn chair for observing meteors
_____	_____	Sunglasses
_____	_____	Insect repellent, suntan lotion/sun block
_____	_____	Flashlight (white beam)
		<u>Clothing</u>
_____	_____	Cool daytime clothing (e.g., shorts)
_____	_____	Warm late-night clothing (e.g., long pants, sweater)
_____	_____	Raincoat
_____	_____	Extra pair of shoes, socks
		<u>Observing Equipment</u>
_____	_____	Telescope
_____	_____	Binoculars
_____	_____	Star charts, observing plan
_____	_____	Eyepieces
_____	_____	Filters (solar and/or nebular)
_____	_____	Telrad/finderscope
_____	_____	Extra batteries (for telescope/Telrad/flashlights)
_____	_____	Flashlight (red beam)
_____	_____	Dew shields
_____	_____	Collimating tool
_____	_____	Other tools (e.g., screwdriver, Allen wrench)
_____	_____	Coated lens cleaner
_____	_____	Camera, tripod, film
_____	_____	Notebook, pencils