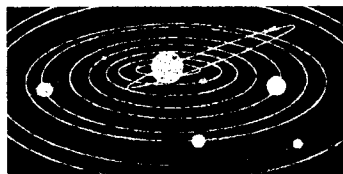


THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 3, No. 6

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

August, 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; 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., Aug. 5: FRAC pool party/cookout/club meeting (1212 Everee Inn Rd., Griffin, 5:30 for the pool party, 6:30 for the cookout, and 7:30 for the meeting); and **Fri.-Sun., Aug. 13-15:** Joint FRAC/AAC **Perseids/Zombie Star Party** (Cox Field).

President's Message. I want to give a hearty FRAC welcome to our newest members, **Steve & Dawn Knight**. Armed with a 4-1/2" equatorial reflector, the Knights are proving to be just the kind of new members we like to attract, namely, enthusiastic observers who enjoy spending time outside under the stars. Although they've been members for less than a month, Dawn & Steve logged more time at Cox Field in July than all but three of our members.

Second, I want to apologize to everyone for missing last month's meeting. Truth is, I've been busier lately than an ant at a picnic, and somewhere along the way I got it in my head that our club meeting was on Fri., July 9th, not Thurs., the 8th. But that's an explanation, not an excuse. Thank you, **Katie and Tom**, for filling in for me. Bill says you did a wonderful job. That's hardly surprising to me, since everything you do for us is always excellent.

At any rate, please accept my apology for letting you down. You deserve better from your president, and I'll do my dead level best to see that you get it from now on.

I hope you'll make every effort to attend our "**Perseids Meteor Shower/Zombie Star Party**" at Cox Field on **Fri.-Sun., Aug. 13th-15th**. We always have a lot of fun at these get-togethers, and you will too if you give it a try.

-Steven (Saratoga Smitty) Smith

Last Month's Meetings/Activities. We had 10 members at our July meeting, which featured an informal presentation by **Katie & Tom Moore** recapping Katie's recent week at astronomy camp in Arizona.

Katie & Tom also showed up at Cox Field the following night and stayed all night so Katie could find her last Messier (late-rising face-on spiral galaxy **M77** in *Cetus*) at about 4:45 a.m. Katie thus becomes, at age 16, the youngest Griffinite, Spalding Countian, and FRAC member ever to earn a Messier pin. It took her a year and a half to track down all 110 Messiers. (Incidentally, Tom found 2 Messiers that evening, bringing his 1-1/2 year total to 2.

At his present rate of progress, Tom should complete his Messier search about the same time as his Lunar Club search, i.e., in June, 2081. Tom feels, however, that it's better to be slow and thorough than to dash through the program the way Katie did -- as if, at his age, Tom were capable of dashing through the sky or anywhere else! Anyway, the Messiers will still be there when 2081 rolls around -- but will Tom will still be around to find them? (We hope so -- but if he is, *we're* certainly not going to clean up after him!)

On Sat., July 10th, **Larry & Toni Higgins** showed up along with newcomers **Steve & Dawn Knight**. Larry tried out his new SA 2000, yr. ubiquitous reporter tried out his new Crayford focuser, and Steve and Toni tried out some Messier hunting, Steve via 'scope and Toni with binoculars.

On Sat., July 17th, **Katie, Tom, Steve, Dawn and Joe (the Dilemma) Auriemma** got in about 2-3 hrs. of decent viewing before ground fog made observing more difficult than a conversation with **Ken Walburn**.

Other recent happenings of note:

*In yet another dazzling display of attention to detail, an anonymous member of our club recently tried unsuccessfully to wipe away the heavy coating of dew on his binocular lenses. It didn't work, but I -- excuse me, *he* -- now has the cleanest lens caps in the club.

***Dan Pillatzki's** 3-yr.-old daughter **Megan** was worried during a 4th-of-July fireworks display. "Daddy," she asked, "Is this gonna make the stars go away?" No, Megan, it won't. Clouds are what make the stars go away and, as everybody knows, clouds form when club members buy new observing equipment or aids.

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Membership Renewals Due in July: Jim Kiker. Send your \$10 check to **Ken Walburn** at the address listed on p. 1.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. Our club meeting on **Thurs., Aug. 5th**, will be preceded by a pool party and cookout at my house at 1212 Everee Inn Road in Griffin. The swimming portion will begin at 5:30, the cookout at 6:30, and the meeting at 7:30. Try to come to the pool party if you can make it: **Louise & I** are supplying the pool, FRAC is supplying the hot dogs, soft drinks, etc. Bring a swimsuit, towel, and an accessory food such as potato salad, pork & beans, dessert, etc., and come early and swim & eat with us. This invitation to swim & eat includes everyone in your immediate family.

We also urge you to attend the 7:30 meeting even if you can't come earlier; in fact, you *need* to attend this meeting if you're an inexperienced observer because we'll be discussing the newest AL observing programs, including one that is designed specifically for *you* if you're a newcomer to stargazing: the **Universe Sampler Club**. This program will teach you what you need to know about telescopes, the sky and observing -- and our meeting will be the best opportunity you'll ever have to get started in this unique, *exciting* program. It'll be the easiest AL certificate and pin you'll ever earn -- but you won't even know about it unless you attend the Aug. meeting, because the information isn't available on the Internet.

To get to my house from, say, Hampton, stay on Hwy. 19/41 S and the 4-lane past the Griffin exit, past the Hwy. 16 (Newnan) exit, and past the Hwy. 362 (Williamson) exit. Turn left at the blinking light at the next exit (Airport Rd.). You'll pass NACOM on the left and the Girl Scout HQ on the right before coming to a 4-way-stop at Everee Inn Road. Turn right at Everee Inn, and our house will be the brick house on the left at the next corner (Roberts St.), beyond the tall hedge. Turn left onto Roberts and park in the driveway or on the left side of the road.

If you're coming from Griffin, go S on Hill St. past the Bruno's shopping center on the left and the fairgrounds, National Guard armory and airport on the right. Turn right at the Airport Rd. stoplight, and stay on Airport Rd. until you reach the 4-way-stop at Everee Inn

Rd. Turn left there, and our house is one block down, on the left corner. (Note to **Ken Walburn**: the pool will be the large, rectangular, *wet* area.)

Besides that, there's our FRAC/AAC "**Perseids Meteor Shower/Zombie Star Party**" at Cox Field on **Fri.-Sun., Aug. 13th-15th**. We've included another checklist of supplies and equipment you might want to consider bringing along, in case you misplaced your copy of last month's *Observer*.

The star party will take the place of our regular Cox Field observing weekend. Admission for all comers will be \$5 per person per night, regardless of whether you stay overnight.

To quote from last year's star party newsletter: "Here's how star parties usually go. Attendees stay up until the wee hours of the morning pursuing whatever observing projects or AL programs they're involved in, and then hit the sack in tents, sleeping bags, etc. Mornings are devoted to sleeping late or going out for breakfast (there's a Hardee's about 8 miles away in Zebulon, I'll tell you how to get there if you're interested; and the convenience store on Hwy. 362, 1-1/2 mi. E of Turner Rd., has a variety of breakfast biscuit selections). Afternoons are for socializing and getting ready for the night's observing. Sometimes groups will caravan en masse to an unsuspecting restaurant for lunch or an early supper.

"As **Larry H.** has noted, you'll get your money's worth out of any star party. Even if you're not a social animal or don't know enough about astronomy or stargazing to qualify as an expert -- and that includes most of us -- you'll learn a lot just by walking around, looking at (and through) telescopes and positioning yourself on the fringes of conversations. If a particular conversation is over your head, just nod wisely every now and then and people will think you understand what they're talking about. I do it all the time when talking with **Rich Jakiel**.

"Try to come early and get a good site and set up while it's still light. We'll have Port-O-Lets available, but not water or electricity. Everyone will be given a trash bag;

be sure to take it with you when you leave on Sunday morning. **Mr. Cox** has graciously allowed us to use his field; we want to leave the area exactly like we found it. Be sure to thank him if he comes down; he'll be riding in a golf cart.

"We've promised Mr. Cox that there will be absolutely **no alcohol** on the premises, and **no drugs** stronger than No-Doz."

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The Sky in August. Last time we looked, it -- the sky -- was still there (although barely), and knowledgeable forecasters are predicting that it'll still be there in August. Check with us in September to see if they were right.

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Things We Conveniently Forgot to Tell You Before You Joined This Cockamamie Club

article by **Bill Warren**

1. **All of those wonderful colors I see in photographs of the night sky aren't there in a telescopic view.** Well, *Yes*, they are there -- but your eyes don't pick up or retain colors at night as well as opening the shutter of a camera for 30 min. or so does the trick. Blame your eyes for the lack of color, and us for not telling you.

If you want to see color in the night sky, look at (a) the planets; (b) stars (to see their true colors, put them slightly out of focus and the colors will leap out at you like Hannibal Lecter on LSD); (c) planetary nebulae (most of them appear grayish green or pale blue); or (d) bright diffuse nebulae such as **M42** (the Great Nebula in *Orion*) or **M20** (Lagoon Nebula in *Sagittarius*). You won't see the lovely pinks or blues of long-exposure astrophotos -- but you'll see them as grayish-green clouds.

2. **Practically all of the Messier galaxies are faint and fuzzy.** Hey, so is **Ken Walburn**, but that didn't stop him from landing a wife, **Doris**, who is anything but out of focus. If you want to see impressive

Messier galaxies, take more than 30 seconds before going on to something else next time you observe **M81/82** in *Ursa Major*, **M31** in *Andromeda*, or **M104** (the Sombrero Galaxy) in *Virgo*.

3. The Moon gets in the way of observing during part of every month. This is true only if you're observing something other than the Moon. (Actually, it's true anyway, since the full moon is so bright and flat that it gets in its own way by hiding features that are easily observed at other times during the month.)

4. The weather often messes up observings. True again. From April-September, there are more than enough wonders in the night sky to occupy your observing time from here to eternity -- but with the four Horrible H's to contend with (Heat, Haze, Humidity and Hinsects) -- not to mention clouds, rain, light pollution and **Larry Higgins** (the 5th "Horrible H"?), the months of late spring, summer and early fall can be somewhat less than ideal for observing, especially when Larry has taken the family out for supper at Taco Bell before making his presence known at Cox Field.

5. You have to learn how to use your telescope before you can find things with it. Right. You also should learn how to use a planisphere to get you to the constellation you're looking for, and you need star charts that are large and simple, but detailed enough to show you precisely where to start looking. And you need to develop a scanning technique that will enable you to find things that aren't exactly where your finderscope or Telrad indicates they ought to be. It's a *big* sky up there, especially when you're looking for things that are fainter than the stars around them.

All of the above requires practice -- and *regular* practice, not just a 1-2 hr. visit to Cox Field or your backyard every 2-3 months. As we've observed often in these pages, you'll get no more out of astronomy, this club, or stargazing than you're willing to put into it.

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The Lunatic Challenge Series: #6

by Philip Sacco (Lunatic #82)

(Editor's Note: This is the 6th 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. *Rabbit in the Moon.* (Hint: All major seas and oceans are part of it.)
2. *Mare Frigoris:* Sea of _____?
3. Why do most of the eastern seas have names reflecting nice weather and the western seas have names that relate to stormy weather?
4. (Challenge) *Mare Insularum:* Sea of _____?

Pickering's Naked-Eye Challenge. Can you see *Mare Vaporum*? This is a rated 7 challenge.

Binocular Targets. 1. *Sinus Amoris:* Bay of _____? 2. *Mare Spumans:* the _____ Sea? 3. *Palus Somnii:* Marsh of _____? 4. *Catharina:* Approximately how large in diameter is this feature in miles? What is this feature commonly referred to as? 5. (Challenge) *Mare Australe:* the _____ Sea?

Telescopic Targets. 1. *Lacus Doloris:* Lake of _____? 2. *Rupes Altai:* the Altai Scarp. 3. *Fra Mauro:* What is the historical significance of this area? 4. (Challenge) *Rima Hypatia:* What small, named crater does this rille pass by?

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