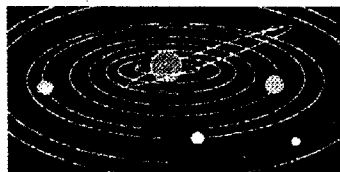


THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 4, No. 1

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

March, 2000

Officers: President, **Steven (Smitty) Smith** (583-2200) -- or, if you prefer e-mail: starship-saratoga@dellnet.com; Vice President/newsletter editor, **Bill Warren** (229-6108; 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 or e-mail.

Club Calendar. Fri.-Sat., Mar 3-4: Cox Field observings, at dark; **Thurs., Mar. 16:** FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook media center, 7:30); **Fri., Mar. 17:** BB observing (behind the school, at dark); **Tues., Mar. 21:** Hampton Elementary School observing (at dark); **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 31-Apr. 1:** Cox Field observings, at dark.

President's Message. First, let me welcome back **Lee Russell**; 'way back in 1997, Lee was our first Hospitality Chairman. We haven't gotten older since then, Lee, we've gotten better.

I've taken the liberty of enrolling all of our members in the *Sky & Tel* Messier Marathon contest. To qualify for a chance to win a free

copy of Steven James O'Meara's *The Messier Objects*, all you have to do is send your name in to *S&T* -- and I've already done that -- and find one or more Messier objects in a single evening before the reporting deadline of **Apr. 15th**. You can do your Messier hunting at Cox Field on either of our upcoming observing weekends, **Mar. 3-4** or **Mar. 31-Apr. 1**, or at the **Peach State Star Gaze** on **Apr. 6-9**. Let me know what you've observed by **Mon., Apr. 10th**, and I'll notify *S&T* of your participation in the drawing.

Speaking of PSSG, it's that time of year again for you to prepare for one of the southeast's major star parties. While this event is not a FRAC activity, I strongly urge you to attend if you can. Last year, FRAC had a strong showing of members attending the event, so you won't have to worry about showing up and not knowing anyone. This year, they're bringing in **Antonin Rukl**, author of *Atlas of the Moon*, all the way from eastern Europe. If you have his book, you can have it autographed while he's there; I'll be bringing my copy along. Count on it. This is about as close to a once-in-a-lifetime chance to meet an internationally famous astronomical author as you can get. It's the first -- and *only* time that Rukl has ever addressed an amateur astronomy group.

There are usually other people giving talks on different subjects, workshops on things like star-hopping, mirror washing and drawing at the eyepiece, and non-astronomical events such as the Sat. morning Pancake Breakfast (*with, we might add, pancakes lovingly crafted by FRAC's own Steven "Flapjack Smitty" Smith. -Ed.*) And the best part is a field full of different kinds of telescopes. There are more 'scopes around than you can shake **Bill**

Warren's cigar at.

If you're interested in attending, I urge you to fill out the registration form at the back of this newsletter and send it in **today** with your check. This event is attended by about the maximum number of people that the site will hold, and you *don't* want to miss the *PSSG* because you sent in your registration too late. Anyway, it costs an additional \$5 if you wait till you get to Camp McIntosh to register and there's still an opening when you get there..

Hope to see you there!

-Saratoga Smitty

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Odds & Ends. You'll want to check out **Rich Jakiel's** latest offering in *S&T's* ongoing Deep-Sky Notebook series. Entitled "Behind the Veil: Exploring the IC 342 Galaxy Group," his article and accompanying drawings and photos appear on pp. 126-7 of the March issue.

We don't see nearly as much of Rich -- or fellow AAC/FRAC members **Dr. Richard Schmude, Joanne Cirincione, Art Russell** or **Alex Langoussis** -- as we'd like, but we're proud and happy to have them in our club.

*From the fertile (as in *fertilizer*) mind of **Tom Moore** comes this latest gem: "Instead of using red flashlights in the dark at Cox Field, why don't we all use regular flashlights and wear red goggles?"

If you were to ask Tom, "How many Cox Field observers does it take to screw in a lightbulb?," he'd probably tell you that it depends on the color of the bulb. (The correct answer is, *It would take Tom Moore -- and someone else to tell him how to screw it in.*)

*From our "**Lo, How the Mighty Have Frozen**" Dept." comes the following icy adventure narrated by **Steven "Frozen Toes Smitty" Smith**: "When the recent lunar eclipse started, I didn't realize how cold it had become. I donned my sweatshirt and hat before heading outside to glimpse the start, but that first trip lasted only a couple of minutes because I had thoughtlessly walked out the

door wearing only *flip-flops on my feet!* It was a real attention getter -- and I'm not just talking about the Moon, either!"

*Incidentally, **Smitty** informs us that **Orion's online catalog is having a safety recall on some models of Orion's AC (110-volt) Dew Zappers.** You can get more information about it at Orion's website.

*After all the negative comments we made recently about Orion Telescopes, Inc., in the interest of fairness to Orion we should note two things: (1) when **Dan Pillatzki's** order of a Shorty Barlow and beginners' filters set got lost in the mail and bounced across the U. S. a few times, Orion sent Dan a *free* advanced set of color filters for his trouble. It was a classy thing for them to do; and (2) the old 10" and 12-1/2" Orion DSE Dobsonians aren't gone forever as we assumed; instead, they're merely being sold now under a new name by a new company, i.e., **Discovery Telescopes** -- the company that made Orion's telescopes in the first place -- and with a few improvements, to boot.

*Speaking of **Dan P.**, ol' Danny boy is scheduled to undergo knee surgery on **Mar. 7th**; you can send him a get-well card at home c/o Dan Pillatzki, 13 Emory St., Hampton, GA 30228. He'll appreciate it, if he survives the surgery. (**Personal aside to Dan:** We make no *bones* about being *gravely* concerned for you; surgery is always a risky *undertaking* -- but if you don't make it can we raffle off your telescope and give away your equipment and books as door prizes at future meetings?)

It's the *caring* touch that makes our club so special. Right, Frank? I mean, Dan?

***Personal Aside #2 (to Katie M):** So it's "details, details, details," is it? Remember what **Albert Einstein** said about it: "God is in the details."

*It's nice to have **Lee Russell** back in FRAC after too long an absence. Lee is a really nice guy despite the fact that he looks exactly like horror writer **Stephen King.**

The phrase "Back in FRAC" fits Lee nicely; why, only the other day we overheard someone in the club muttering, "*Lee Russell? That dirty backinfrac!...*" Or something like that.

See what you've been missing, Lee?

***Ken Wilson** wants us to know that his new website, www.clearnights.com, contains some of his astrophotos "and other helpful information about how to get started in astrophotography. I would like to put up pictures and articles from other FRAC members as well." We've been to his site; it's *very* nicely done, and well worth your investigating, whether you're interested in taking up astrophotography or merely in taking a leisurely, lovely trip through Ken's universe.

Give it a look-see.

(It was Ken and **Chuck Beckham** who made the four beautiful framed astrophotos you've seen on the walls of the BB media center.)

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Observing the universe involves a built-in paradox: we look forward in space to see backward in time.

-Bill Warren

* * *

Last Month's Meetings/Activities. Nineteen members showed up for **Neal Wellons's** splendid presentation on the telescopes of Mauna Kea. Prior to Neal's talk, **Ken Walburn** thought an interferometer was the little box you put on the dashboard of your car to detect the presence of radar.

Only eight hardy souls braved February's wintry chill to venture out to our Cox Field observings: **Ken Walburn, Raymond Hughes, Tom & Katie Moore, Ken Wilson, Joe Auriemma** and yr. humble reporter (both nights). On the other hand, a large group of students and parents turned out for our BB observing. Showing them the sky were: **Mike & Danielle Stuart, Katie Moore, Dan Pillatzki** and yrs. truly. **Lee Russell** also came by for awhile. A first quarter moon and

hazy sky didn't produce good viewing except for the **Moon**, planets, **Orion Nebula** and a few Messier open clusters, but our visitors were excited at what we were able to show them.

And we thought **Lee R.** only came out during the full moon...

* * *

Membership Renewals Due in March: Tim & Celia Astin; Chuck Beckham; Steven Byous; Keith & Denise Cox; Rich Jakiel; Steven Smith; Ken & Doris Walburn; and John Wallace. Send your \$10 check to Ken Walburn at the address listed on p. 1.

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Upcoming Meetings and Activities.

Variations in the new moon are playing havoc with our Cox Field observings. This month, we'll be chasing Messiers at Cox Field *twice* this month -- first, on **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 3rd-4th**, and again on **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 31st-Apr. 1st**. (This *isn't* an April Fool's trick; it's for real.)

Other problems have forced us to move our club meeting at Beaverbrook to **Thurs., Mar. 16th**. (The meeting time, 7:30, will remain the same.) Although we won't have a formal program, just cake and soft drinks to celebrate FRAC's 3rd anniversary, you won't want to miss the chance to win our door prizes, which include: a small laminated planisphere; a year's free membership in FRAC; a 1,000-piece celestial planisphere jigsaw puzzle; a Messier Objects poster; and an unbound field version of *Sky Atlas 2000.0* (2nd ed.).

On **Tues., Mar. 21st**, we'll try again to conduct an observing for students at Hampton Elementary School. (Our last attempt was clouded out.) To get to Hampton Park where the observing will be held, go N on Hwy. 19/41 from Griffin, and when you reach the light-polluting electronic billboard at the raceway in Hampton, turn rt. at the road directly across from the billboard. Follow that road for 1.2 mi. and turn left at the 4-way stop sign at Central Avenue. The park will be down the block on the right, across from the school.

With AAC's **Peach State Star Gaze** star

party coming up on the weekend of **Thurs., Apr. 6th-Sun., Apr. 9th**, we're enclosing a registration form in this issue of the *Observer* to give you plenty of time to register and get ready. (Next month we'll provide a checklist to remind you what to take along -- but we *won't* include another registration form.)

In addition to offering a "Peach Fuzzies" observing competition -- which isn't really a competition but a fun activity in which you can earn an observing certificate for finding all of the deep-sky targets on the list -- PSSG also gives door prizes (**Tom Moore** won a nice eyepiece last year) and has outstanding guest speakers (this year including **Antonin Rukl**, author of the highly renowned *Atlas of the Moon*). The PSSG gives you the chance to meet all kinds of observers from beginners to world-class, and you'll see 'scopes of the sort that the rest of us only dream about owning. You can camp out onsite for a nominal fee, or bed down in one of their bunkhouses (complete with running water, flush toilets, electricity and heat).

The PSSG is held at Camp McIntosh, a group camp adjacent to and operated by Indian Springs State Park near Jackson, Ga. The camp has its own gated entrance, and your equipment will be perfectly safe while you camp. (I wouldn't want to leave my wallet, keys or an expensive eyepiece lying on my cot in the bunkhouse while I was outside observing, though.) The registration fee is \$25 (\$10 for children under 12, and children under 5 free). Camping costs \$10/night and bunkhouse space (bunkbed with locker) costs \$15/night. A \$2 parking fee is extra. Bring your own camping gear and/or bed sheets, covers, pillows and towels, and bath items. (Leave the rubber ducky home, **Dan**, they have showers, not tubs.)

In a more serious vein, AAC president and PSSG organizer **Ken Poshedly** advises us that there will no longer be \$10 day passes issued for those who want to observe but not camp out; you'll have to pay the full \$25 registration fee whether you stay overnight or not. (Frankly, considering last year's huge crowd and the problems they had in trying to keep up with who paid how much to stay for how long,

we can't really blame them. This is AAC's big annual money-maker, and their expenses are enormous; for instance, it's costing them upwards of \$2,000 to bring Mr. Rukl and his wife over here from Prague, in the Czech Republic, so AAC needs all the \$25s they can get.

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The Sky in March. Jupiter, Saturn & Mars are continuing to move closer together; at the beginning of the month they'll be 28° apart, Saturn 10° E of Jupiter and Mars 18° to the W of Jupiter. By month's end, the trio will be a scant 9° apart -- Saturn 6° away from Jupiter, Mars only 3°. On **March 7th-10th**, the crescent Moon will join them.

Moving steadily westward, Jupiter, Saturn & Mars will be progressively lower in the sky as March wears on. We'll lose them completely -- but thankfully not forever -- in April.

Venus will be lower in the E than in previous months. Shortly before sunrise on **Mar. 15th**, **Mercury** will lie a mere 2° W of **Venus**.

The March issue of *Sky & Tel* (pp. 108-110) shows where to find the bright asteroids **2 Pallas** (mag. 7.4), **7 Iris** (mag. 8.1), **1 Ceres** (mag. 6.9) and **4 Vesta** (mag. 5.4, a naked-eye target). March would be a very good time for you to start working toward your Asteroid Club certificate and pin.

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Atlanta Astronomy Club

Peach State Star Gaze April 6-9, 2000 **REGISTRATION**

Send completed form with check or money order payable to the Atlanta Astronomy Club - no cash - to:

Peach State Star Gaze
c/o Ken Poshedly
1741 Bruckner Court
Snellville, Georgia 30078-2784

For more information:
Phone 770-979-9842
E-mail - ken.poshedly@mindspring.com

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY!! Late fee after March 31, 2000.

Arrival Date _____ Departure Date _____

Name _____

Street address _____

City _____ State _____ ZIP code _____

Additional names on this registration (for nametags) _____

Home phone _____ Work phone _____

E-mail _____ Fax phone _____

A directory will be published of all registrations received by March 31. It will include your name, address, phone and e-mail unless you state otherwise: No phone number No e-mail
 Do not list me in the directory

Registration \$ _____
_____ x \$25 per adult; age 13 and up
_____ x \$10 per child; ages 5 thru 12
_____ free age 4 and under

Late registration fee (REQUIRED after March 31) \$5 _____

Teeshirt (optional; indicate how many of which size; adult sizes listed; order by March 23 to guarantee delivery)
XXL _____ XL _____ L _____
M _____ S _____ Other (call for details) x \$12 each _____

Parking fee (REQUIRED) _____ x \$2 per car _____

Lodging (indicate how many)
Camping _____ x \$10 per person per night _____
Bunkhouse _____ x \$15 per person per night _____
Semiprivate room _____ x \$20 per person per bed per night _____

TOTAL \$ _____