

# THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 4, No. 2

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

April, 2000

**Officers:** President, **Steven (Smitty) Smith** (583-2200) -- or, if you prefer e-mail: [starship-saratoga@dellnet.com](mailto:starship-saratoga@dellnet.com); Vice President/newsletter editor, **Bill Warren** (229-6108; [warren1212@mindspring.com](mailto: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). All of these phone numbers have 770 area code prefixes. Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. FRAC web page address: <http://welcome.to/frac>.

Please notify **Bill Warren** promptly if you have a change of address or e-mail.

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**Club Calendar. Fri.-Sat., Mar. 31-Apr. 1:** Cox Field observings, at dark; **Tues., Apr. 11:** Northside-Barbara Loar Pub. Library observing (Tucker, Ga., 6:30); **Thurs., Apr. 13:** FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook media center, 7:30); **Fri., Apr. 14:** BB observing (behind the school, at dark).

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**President's Message.** I'd like to issue a hearty **WELCOME!** to FRAC's newest member, **Jerry Williams** of Hampton, Ga. Jerry, who doesn't own a 'scope yet, has wisely adopted a "wait-and-see" approach before buying anything. I wish everyone starting out in astronomy would do likewise.

**WARNING:** *Be sure to pre-register before you go to the Peach State Star Gaze on Apr.*

**6-9th, because they aren't accepting walk-up registrations this year.** (That's why we aren't including an equipment Checklist in this newsletter: you'll get one with your confirmation materials.)

Found Lost and Wandering Around Cox Field after Messier Marathon Night, Mar. 5-6: one eyepiece cap for telescope or binocular eyepiece. Dazed and confused after being abandoned. Very friendly, answers to the name "Black Cap." Owner please contact Smitty.

-Saratoga Smitty

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**Here & There.** Smitty's letter to *Sky & Tel*, which we ran in our Jan. issue, appeared in *S&T's* April issue on p. 12. There's also a nice article, "High Observatory Adventure at Astronomy Camp," about the advanced astronomy camp **Katie Moore** attended last summer at the Univ. of Arizona, on pp. 80-83 of the same issue.

\*Speaking of **Smitty**, he and **David Ward** renewed their "Zombie" status at Cox Field on Sat.-Sun., Mar. 5-6, becoming the first FRAC members of the millennium to do so. Smitty bagged 88 Messiers, David 90. David also got 79 binocular Messiers. (For those who don't already know, we offer Zombie certificates to anyone who stays up observing all night from dark till dawn, with at least one witness to attest to the fact.) **Charles Sykes** and **Dan Pillatzki** are our other certified Zombies.

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**Last Month's Meetings/Activities.** Twelve

members showed up for our Feb. 24th Oakland Elem. School observing: **Chuck Hancock, Joanne, Joey & Daniel Cirincione; Neal Wellons; Mike & Danielle Stuart; Joe Auriemma; David Ward; Katie Moore; Smitty; & yrs. truly.**

**Ken Walburn and Raymond Hughes** joined yr. humble reporter for 2 min. of excellent observing and 90 min. of total cloud cover at Cox Field on Fri., Mar. 3rd. The next night was better, with 13 in attendance: **Larry Higgins; Smitty; David Ward; Mike Stuart; Steve & Dawn Knight; John Wallace; Joe Auriemma; Jerry Williams** and a guest; yr. ubiquitous reporter; and Steve's father and sister.

On Mon., Mar. 13th, **Mike Stuart** found nine Herschel 400 objects at Cox Field -- and he could have found many more if he hadn't already observed them previously -- under a first quarter Moon. So much for the mistaken belief that you need perfect viewing conditions to find Herschels.

Our 3rd birthday party/FRAC meeting on Mar. 16th was a rip-roaring success in every way but one (i.e., 19 other members were jealous that it was **Dawn Knight** and not they who won the grand door prize, a *Sky Atlas 2000 (2nd ed.)*. Hubby **Steve** wasn't jealous. Other door prize winners included: **Joe (the Dilemma) Auriemma**, a laminated planisphere; **Celia Astin**, a year's free membership for her and husband **Tim**; **Tom Moore**, a Messier photo chart; and **Veronica Fallin**, a celestial planisphere jigsaw puzzle.

Not incidentally, a huge "Thanks!" goes to **Roxanne Ward** for the wonderful FRAC birthday cake she baked; to **Dawn Knight** for baking cookies and bringing the soft drinks and ice; and to **Louise Warren** for preparing the whatever-kind-of-dip-it-was; and to all of them for doing those thoughtful tasks at no expense to our club.

Elsewhere, **Dan (Call Me Frank) Pillatzki** survived his surgery and saved us the cost of bereavement flowers. **Ken Walburn** also survived in March, although only his wife and closest friends could tell the difference. (No surgery was involved, just rapidly encroaching old age and senility.)

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**Membership Renewals Due in April: Tom Faber; Alex Langoussis; Robby Mask; and Charles Sykes.** Send your \$10 check to Ken Walburn at the address listed on p. 1.

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**Upcoming Meetings and Activities.** Our Cox Field observing weekend will be **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 31st-Apr. 1st.**

On **Tues., Apr. 11th**, we'll conduct an observing at 6:30 at the Northlake-Barbara Loar Public Library in Tucker, Ga. To get there, go N on Hwy. 19/41 and head E on I-285 and stay on it after it turns to the N, until you reach the LaVista Rd. exit. Turn left onto LaVista and go W (toward Northlake Mall). At the light just before the mall, bear left to stay on LaVista. The library is on the right at the corner of LaVista and Harobi Drive, about 3/4 mi. from I-285.

Of course, there's the *Peach State Star Gaze* at Camp McIntosh (10 mi. S of Jackson, Ga.) from **Thurs.-Sun., Apr. 6th-9th.** Hope to see you there!

Our **April** FRAC meeting will be at Beaverbrook at 7:30 on **Thurs., Apr. 13th.** Our speaker will be AAC's **Phil Sacco**, newly appointed Southeast Region Astronomical League (SERAL) representative. Phil's talk will be on "Getting Started in Astronomy and Keeping It Simple." You'll be delighted at Phil's dynamic personality and animated style. (At last year's PSSG, he wore a toga for his talk on mythology of the night sky.)

As **Smitty** put it, "Look out, Lunatic #82 is headed our way!"

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**The Sky in April.** Mars, Jupiter & Saturn will be a close trio in April: if you have a low W horizon, they will be roughly 5° apart -- three finger-widths held at arm's length against the sky. On **Apr. 4th**, Jupiter's moons **Io** and **Europa** will be a scant 9" apart. (Io will be the one that isn't Europa.) On **Apr. 6th**, the crescent Moon will join Mars, Jupiter & Saturn

about 45 min. after sunset.

**Pluto** will be somewhere in April -- but who cares? Your chances of finding Pluto are only slightly higher than of finding **Dawn Knight** at Cox Field in an evening dress, heels and a mink stole.

The asteroid **1 Ceres** will be visible in binocs throughout April as it arcs around the 5th-mag. star *6 Comae Berenices*. The April issue of *Astronomy* has good finding instructions on p. 67.

The **Lyrids meteor shower** ain't what it used to be (we know the feeling!), and it won't be much this year, either, not with a waning gibbous Moon up. *S&T* suggests the morning of **Sat., Apr. 27th**, as your best chance of seeing 10-20 meteors per hour. Look near *Vega* in the E. (No, **Ken Walburn**, *Vega* isn't located in the constellation *Chevy*; it's in *Lyra*.)

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**People You Should Know: Steve & Dawn Knight.** Since joining FRAC in Aug. '99, Steve and Dawn have become two of our most active members. (Well, *Steve* is at least semi-active most of the time, anyway; but those lines on the side of Dawn's face aren't wrinkles or a birthmark, they're *chenille marks* from her most recent nap.)

Sporting a neat little 4-1/2" equatorial Celestron First Scope, Dawn & Steve attend our meetings and club and public observings with a regularity that should embarrass many of the rest of us. Steve's goal is "to get all of the AL pins"; he's saving his pennies toward buying something larger, but for now the 4-1/2" is serving him well. Dawn's somewhat less lofty goal is "to stay awake and warm."

Steve works at Raymond Pontiac; Dawn is a clerk in the detective office of the College Park P.D. They have no children, but are devoted to their nephew **Michael Chappell** and nieces **Brittany & Kristin**.

Steve's favorite celestial objects are **Saturn** and **Andromeda Galaxy**; Dawn prefers the open cluster **M35** in *Auriga*, which she insists is the "**Playboy Bunny Cluster**."

Outgoing, friendly, dependable and extremely likeable, this closely-knit pair enjoy

talking with members and visitors alike. If you haven't already met them, you need to -- and maybe you need to attend more of our club functions.

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### An Open Letter to Members of the "Jack Horkheimer Award 2000" Committee

*(Editor's Note on behalf of Smitty & Ken as well: To say that everyone in FRAC is proud of Katie Moore is a vast understatement. While we hope she wins this year's Horkheimer Award, she's already won where it matters most to us, i.e., in our hearts. What follows is our letter, submitted Mar. 8th, nominating Katie for the award. Next time you come home tired at the end of a long day, consider spending a day or two in Katie's shoes.)*

Sirs:

It is with great pride and pleasure that we nominate 16-year-old **Katie Moore**, a junior at Griffin (GA) Senior High School for this year's AL "Jack Horkheimer Award for Exceptional Service by a Young Astronomer."

The Flint River Astronomy Club applied for (and subsequently received) AL affiliation in March, 1997; 14-year-old Katie and her father Tom joined FRAC 9 months later, in Dec., 1997. Since that time, Katie has grown from an enthusiastic beginning stargazer into a seasoned veteran observer and highly active participant in our club's ongoing program of public outreach and education.

In June, 1999, Katie attended Advanced Astronomy Camp at the University of Arizona, and she has applied for admission to the same camp for this summer. Her project in the 1999 state science fair -- "Barometric Pressure and Its Relation to the Quality of Seeing for Celestial Objects" -- won third place honors in the Earth/Space Science category. Katie has earned her Messier pin and certificate, and is presently working on the Binocular Messier, Binocular Deep-Sky, Universe Sampler and Herschel 400 observing programs. She plans to major in astronomy at either Agnes Scott College in Atlanta or the Univ. of Arizona,

both of which offer excellent undergraduate and graduate astronomy programs of study. With a grade-point average of 3.96 (on a 4.0 scale), there is little doubt as to Katie's ability to excel at that level. She recently visited Agnes Scott and sat in on undergraduate classes in astronomy and physics. ("I answered every question they asked me!," she told us excitedly.)

For the past year, Katie has been our Club Librarian, a function perfectly suited to her avid interest in reading about astronomy and science. Her father Tom recently expressed his amazement at finding her one evening reading -- and understanding -- writings by Albert Einstein. Katie is presently attempting to persuade the Griffin-Spalding Co. Board of Education to add astronomy to the GSH curriculum as a separate course.

Still, it is in the area of public observings that we feel Katie has made her greatest impact thus far, especially with educational groups such as schools and public libraries. Our club is extremely active in the public domain, and Katie is our most frequent and dynamic participant despite her rigorously demanding schedule. Katie's friendly manner; her infectious enthusiasm and obvious love for the night sky and its wonders; and her patience and ability to talk with (as opposed to talking down to) young children; all of these things have rendered her invaluable to our club in fulfilling our commitment to educating the public in matters astronomical.

Katie brings the night sky down to earth for youngsters of all ages, and she inspires young stargazers toward pursuing their own visions of greatness. That fact has been attested to on numerous occasions during the scores of public observings Katie has participated in since joining FRAC. First, there's the perpetually long lines of participants gathered at her telescope long after the lines at other 'scopes have dwindled and their owners are studying their own favorite observing targets; and second, there are the favorable comments we invariably receive at observings regarding Katie's performances. "She's wonderful." "She's remarkable." "She really has a way with children, doesn't she?" (parents) "She's neat; I

want to be just like her." (a third-grade girl)  
"She's cool, for a girl." (a fifth-grade boy)

Lest we somehow inadvertently imply that Katie is one-dimensional, we hasten to add that her interests and activities are by no means limited to astronomy. She has been a varsity cheerleader at GSH for the past 2 yrs., and she is a member of the school's Science Club, Junior Classical League, Beta Club, National Junior Classical League Latin Honor Society, and Y-Club. Beyond those activities, Katie also tutors students in Geometry, Algebra I and Algebra II three days a week, attends cheerleading practice for 2 hrs. after school every day, and takes gymnastics/tumbling classes 2-3 days a week.

Outside school, besides her responsibilities and activities in FRAC Katie is also a member of the Junior Guild of the Griffin-Spalding Historical Society (a community service program) and is actively involved in her church's MYF group.

Academically, Katie was an **All-American Scholar** in 1998-99, her most recently completed school year. That same year, she received the **GSH International Foreign Language Award** and was listed in **Who's Who Among American High School Students**. With half of the 1999-2000 school year left to go, she has already received **Natl. Leadership and Service Award 2000** recognition and will be eligible for further honors at the end of the current school year. She made her schools' yearly All-A honor roll in grades 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 11, and All A-B honor roll in grades 4 and 10.

**Summation.** When we asked Katie what she envisioned herself doing ten years from now she replied, "In ten years, I will still be an amateur astronomer and doing the same things our club is doing now for school groups, etc. I want to be a professional astronomer; I don't know what I'll specialize in at this point, since the more I learn the more I realize I need to know. But I *do* know that I want to be involved in astronomy my whole life."

In an activity -- amateur astronomy -- that has until recently been largely the domain of adult males, Katie Moore is literally a breath of

fresh air, serving as a constant reminder to her fellow FRAC members and the people she shows the sky to as well that neither age nor sex is (or should be) a deterrent to the pursuit of what one thinks is worthwhile in life.

Our nominating Katie for this prestigious award serves a dual purpose: it honors Katie for her hard work in raising the level of public awareness of both the Flint River Astronomy Club and the majesty of the universe around us; and it honors the Horkheimer Award itself because Katie embodies precisely the qualities of commitment and service that the award was created for in the first place. We know that Katie would be exceedingly proud to win the Jack Horkheimer Award for Exceptional Service by a Young Astronomer -- and we are equally sure that the award committee would be proud of its choice in naming her its 2000 recipient.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven Smith, Bill Warren, & Ken Walburn,  
Flint River Astronomy Club

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### Ursa Major, the Great Bear

by Philip Sacco

Up until the past generation, *astronomy* meant looking up at the heavens unaided and contemplating the stories the constellations have born since the days of the ancients. Those who studied the heavens always bore in mind the legends our forefathers told of these majestic figures in the heavens.

Most of us learn to recognize the Pole Star, **Polaris**, early on in our conquest of the heavens, and we even learn the "constellation" of the Big Dipper, not realizing that the Big Dipper is but an asterism within the larger constellation of *Ursa Majoris*. Now, with that in mind, how many of you know the story of Ursa Major? Very few, huh? Well, it's time to put down your atlas, planisphere and eyepieces, leave the 'scope in the house for a change, and get with the original program. Let's appreciate this rising constellation for the legend it has

brought mankind for several thousand years before we in our age of knowledge forget what we as a race have always known...

There are many stories about the bear in Greek mythology. The most common one associates it with **Callisto**, the daughter of **King Lycaon** of Arcadia. Callisto was the favorite hunting partner of **Artemis**, the goddess of the hunt. **Zeus**, father of the gods, lusted for Callisto and succeeded in seducing her by assuming the appearance of Artemis one day. When it became clear to the real Artemis what had happened, she banished her friend from her company.

After Callisto gave birth to her son **Arcas**, **Hera** (the wife of Zeus) became angry at her husband's indiscretions. Cursing Callisto, Hera changed her rival into a bear and condemned her to wander the forest for years to come.

Years later, Arcas himself became an accomplished hunter and stumbled across this bear in the woods. At that point, Zeus stepped in and sent both of them into the heavens where Callisto was turned into *Ursa Major* and her son Arcas became the constellation *Bootes*.

Ursa Major contains a wealth of fine objects for the amateur astronomer. Perhaps the finest double star in the sky is located in the bend in the Dipper's handle. Named **Mizar** and **Alcor**, these two stars were considered a test of one's eyesight among the American Indians. They are clearly visible to the naked eye and a spectacular sight in binoculars.

The spiral galaxy **M81** is considered one of the most beautiful objects in the sky. Glowing at a bright mag. 8, it is one of the easiest galaxies for small telescopes. Only 1/2° away from another Messier galaxy, **M82**, they form one of the most dramatic galactic duos in the sky. Both are rather bright and easily visible in small telescopes. M81 is only about 1/3 the size of the Milky Way, 36,000 light-years across and has a luminosity of 80 billion of our suns.

Now go outside and see if you can find the Great Bear. Look for Mizar and Alcor. Would you have passed the Indian eye test?

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