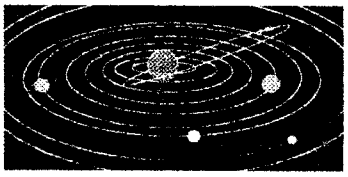
THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 4, No. 6 **FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB** **August, 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); Librarian,**Katie Moore** (228-6447); Observing Chairman & Public Observings Coordinator: **Larry Higgins** (884-3982), e-mail <larrylhiggins@yahoo.com> . 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. Thurs., Aug. 10 : FRAC meeting (**Bill Warren's** house, 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, 6:30); **Fri., Aug. 18th: Katie Moore** speaking at Atlanta Astronomy Club meeting (Emory University's White Hall, 8:00); **Fri.-Sat., Aug. 25-26:** Cox Field observings, at dark.

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President's Message. Back in March, *Sky & Telescope* held a "Messier Marathon Contest" with winners to receive the book, *The Messier Objects*, by **Steven James O'Meara.** *Sky & Tel* editor **Leif Robinson's** editorial in the August issue discussed how very few *S&T* readers took part in the contest. Only 692 people pre-registered for the contest -- that's 0.5%, or 1/2 of one percent -- of the magazine's total circulation of 138,400.

It gets worse, though: out of those who registered, Robinson stated, only **204** "actually went out and did something" and reported back to *Sky & Tel.* Think of it: only 204 people out of a total readership of nearly 140,000 actually participated in *S&T's* contest. Think they'll sponsor another "Messier Marathon Contest" next year?

FRAC's March Cox Field deep-sky observing was termed "Messier Marathon Night" -- but doing the marathon was not required; you could observe whatever you liked. Five of us took up the challenge and hunted Messiers. Those other four FRAC members -- who with me comprised ***2-1/2%*** of *S&T's* participants nationwide -- are to be commended for taking up the challenge and pursuing it so diligently.

At writing, *Sky & Tel* has not yet announced the names of the contest winners, but those of us in FRAC who entered and participated have a pretty good chance of winning one of those books, thanks in part to the 138,196 *S&T* readers across the U. S. who chose not to participate.

-Steven (Saratoga Smitty" Smith

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*(Look at it this way, Smitty: the five of you comprise **0.00004%** of the magazine's total readership.*

It gets better, though: consider that the AL has 245 member clubs nationwide -- and doubtless many of them are much larger than FRAC. If each of those clubs had had only the same number of participants as FRAC -- five --

*there would have been at least **1,225** contestants within the AL alone competing for the O'Meara book! Congratulations to those who participated in the Marathon -- and congratulations to Smitty for generating such interest in the event. -Ed.)*

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. Attendance was stellar at our Fri.-Sat., June 30th-July 1st Cox Field observings, with a total of **23** members participating, including: **Chuck Beckham** and **Toni Higgins** (Fri. night); **John Wallace, Katie Moore & Mom, David Ward** and **Jerry Williams** (Sat. night); and **Tim & Celia Astin, Steve & Dawn Knight, Smitty, Larry Higgins, Ken Wilson** and **yr. reporter** (both nights). Smitty & David stayed out till 5 a.m. on Sat. night.

At any rate, it was good having Celia and Chuck back with us at Cox Field after *much* too long an absence.

Rich Jakiel, AAC's Observing Vice President and a world-class deep-sky observer and astroartist as well, was routinely (for him) spectacular as guest speaker at our July 13th club meeting. Nineteen members were in attendance.

Also at the meeting, **Dawn Knight** received a "Katie's Club" certificate for finding **M4** at 238x on an *awful* night for showing the sky to visitors at Hampton Library on June 9th; **Larry Higgins** received his Lunar Club and Binocular Messier club pins and certificates -- and a "Zombie Club" (all-night) certificate as well; **David Ward** received his Messier Club and Binocular Messier Club certificates and pins; **Steve Knight** presented **Katie Moore** with a polarized lunar filter and two sets of regular filters, purchased through individual contributions from club members; and, on behalf of the club, **yr. reporter** presented Katie with an engraved commemorative plaque for her telescope which read, "THIS TELESCOPE BELONGS TO **KATIE MOORE,** WINNER OF THE 2000 JACK HORKHEIMER AWARD FOR SERVICE BY A YOUNG ASTRONOMER. PRESENTED BY THE FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB, JULY 13, 2000."

Attendance figures and activities at our *other* July Cox Field observing weekend on the 28th-29th were unavailable at writing due to an early publication date, and will appear in next month's *Observer.*

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Astronomers at Parkes Observatory in Australia were excited that man's search for extraterrestrial intelligence in the universe had finally paid off when their radio telescope began picking up a distinctive signal at 2.3 to 2.4 gigahertz every evening about 6:00. p.m. Unfortunately, the signal was found to be emanating from a microwave oven downstairs.

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Club News. Our deepest sympathies are extended to **Deborah Smith** (Mrs. Smitty), **Wanda Hughes** (Raymond's wife) and **Toni Higgins** (Larry's wife), all of whom lost a mother or father in June.

***Please Note:** We're going to try out a new parking arrangement at Cox Field beginning in August. When you park, please leave 15-20 feet between the front of your vehicle and the fields beyond; that way, people who leave early can drive away in front of the parked vehicles and won't have to back out of their parking spaces and disturb observers with their back-up lights.

*In the wee hours of the morning at Cox Field on Sun., July 2nd, **David Ward** officially became the first FRACster to locate and observe **Comet 1999 s4,** better known simply as **LINEAR.** David estimated the comet's brightness at about mag. 8.5.

*A few months ago, it was Hawaii's 13,800-ft. Mauna Kea and the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO). Last month, it was Socorro, N. M. and the Very Large Array of radio telescopes. This month it's the world's largest radio dish, the one in the jungles near Arecibo, P. R., that beckoned to FRAC's

happy wanderer, globetrotter **Neal Wellons.** What's next, Neal? A trip to the International Space Station?

*Since you asked -- and if you didn't ask, it was probably an oversight because we know you're bursting with anticipation -- **yr. editor** is up to 178 Herschel IIs and 78 Arp Peculiar Galaxies. (That's 44.5% of the H2's and 78% of the Arps required for pins.) The remaining Arps will be harder to find than a swimsuit to fit **Ken Walburn** or **me.**

*Let's see: who haven't we zapped yet? Well, there's **Steven Byous,** who, last time we saw him, hadn't yet grasped the fact that **Fabio** and other hunks leave their shirts unbuttoned at the *top*, not the bottom. (That'll probably mean a tax audit for **yrs. truly** next April, since Steven works for the IRS in Washington, D.C.)

Or how about FRAC's equivalent of **Sigmund Freud: Dawn Knight**, who sees the open cluster **M35** in *Gemini* as the "Playboy Bunny"? Well, Dawn has struck again: Ask her what the open cluster **M6, the Butterfly Cluster** in *Scorpius*, reminds her of. But don't ask unless you really want to know.

*Finally, from our **"Where Have You Gone, Joe Dimaggio?" Dept.,** there is this: Try as we might, we couldn't find **Mike Stuart** among the open cluster of observers at Cox Field last month. Hey, Mike: having gone through turkey season without seriously injuring himself or any of our fine feathered friends, **John Wallace** was out at Cox Field chasing down Binocular Messiers and Double Stars. We've missed you, Mike.

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I love all sights of earth and skies
From flowers that grow to stars that shine;
The comet and the penny show
All curious things above, below
. . . . . .
But most I love the tube that spies
The orbs celestial in their march;
That shows the comet as it whisks
Its tail across the planet's disk,
Or wheels so close against the sun
We tremble at the thought of risks
Our little spinning ball may run.
-Oliver Wendell Holmes
The Flaneur (1882)

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Membership Renewals Due in August: Chuck Hancock. Send your $10 check to Ken Walburn at the address listed on p. 1.

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Upcoming Meetings and Activities. On **Thurs., Aug. 10th,** we're having a combination swimming party/club meeting at **yr. editor's** house at 1212 Everee Inn Road in Griffin. Bring a swimsuit if you plan to get in the water (and we hope you will); otherwise, **Dawn K.** might mistake you for **M35.** We'll play in the pool from, say, 6:00-7:15, and the meeting will begin at 7:30. Bring along your eyepieces, too, because **Smitty** and **Larry** will be showing and telling us how to clean ~~eyepieces, lenses and mirrors~~.

To get to our house from N of Griffin, stay on Hwy. 41 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 stoplight at Airport Road. You'll pass the Girl Scout HQ on the right before reaching a 4-way stop at Everee Inn Road. Turn right on 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 large driveway on the left, or on the street.

To get there from downtown Griffin, go S on Hill St., past the shopping center on the left and the fairgrounds, national guard armory and airport on the right. Turn right at the Airport Road 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.

Incidentally, we aren't eating at the August meeting because we're planning a "meal-on-the-grounds" with the **Coxses** in September.

On **Fri., Aug. 18th, Katie Moore** will be the featured speaker at the Atlanta Astronomy Club's monthly meeting. To show your support for Katie, meet us at Beaverbrook at 6:30 on the **18th** and we'll carpool to Emory University's White Hall, where the meeting will begin at 8:00.

Our club observings will be held on **Fri.-Sat., August 25th-26th,** 3-4 days before the new moon.

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The Sky in August. On **Fri., Aug. 2nd, Jupiter's** moons **Io** and **Europa** will be a scant 4" apart at 2:57 a.m.; if you miss it, they'll make a repeat performance at 2:16 a.m. on **Fri., Aug. 12th.** And on **Wed., Aug. 16th, Europa** and **Ganymede** will be only 13" apart at 1:27 a.m.; they'll be 18" apart at 2:06 a.m. on **Wed., Aug. 23rd.**

Jupiter and **Saturn** will rise about midnight in August. Saturn will be an especially nice sight, with its rings tilted a healthy 24° to us. **Venus** will be very low in the W sky shortly after sunset. *Sky & Tel* offers charts for finding **Uranus** (mag. 5.7) and **Neptune** (mag. 7.8) in *Capricorn* at its website, <www.skypub.com/sights/moonplanets/urnepplu.html>.

The annual **Perseids meteor shower** (July 17-Aug. 24) maxxes out about an hour before dawn on **Aug. 12th.** A bright waxing gibbous Moon likely will hinder observing till then, however.

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The comet! He is on his way
And singing as he flies;
The whizzing planets shrink before
The spectre of the skies.
. . . . . .
And what would happen to the land
And how would look the sea,
If in the bearded devil's path
Our Earth should chance to be?
Full hot and high the sea would boil,
Full red the forests gleam.

-Oliver Wendell Holmes
The Comet (1830)

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A Beginner's Telescope With Your Name On It

article by Steven "Saratoga Smitty" Smith

(reprinted from the July, 1997, *Observer)*

I'm often asked, "I want to get a telescope; which one is the best?" My reply is always the same: *The one you're going to use often after you buy it.* My listeners' blank stares deepen as I go on to explain that *Telescopes are like hammers...* There are many different kinds of hammers; each is designed for use in certain kinds of tasks. The telescope that's right for you depends on what you plan to do with it.

A variety of telescopes are available -- reflectors, refractors, Schmidt-Cassegrains, and off-axis reflectors, to name a few. Each type collects and focuses light in its own special way. Each has its own strong points and limitations for different kinds of astronomical viewing.

Mountings. Telescope mountings are many and varied, but basically boil down to two types, *equatorial* and *altazimuth.* With equatorial mounts, a slow-motion control knob or motorized drive is used to track objects across the sky. Equatorial mounts can be a headache for beginning observers because they must be polar aligned and set up properly before objects can be observed. They are also difficult for a beginner to operate in the dark due to the confusing array of friction knobs, handles, counterweight arms and height adjusters present.

Altazimuth mounts simplify the task of locating objects, but they do not track: you must move the telescope tube vertically and horizontally to keep the object in your field of view. This can be rather confusing at first, since most astronomical telescopes (including those on equatorial mounts) invert and/or reverse the image. You can't use motorized

drive with an altazimuth mounting.

Other Problems. Mountings aside, most beginners' problems with their telescopes can be traced back to flimsy or unstable tripods, or to cheaply made friction locks (the devices that enable you to move and point the telescope on its mountings but keep it from drooping or swinging away from its target). A quality mount and tripod costs more than a cheaply made "beginner's telescope" (including mount and tripod) sells for!

Another troublesome feature -- and usually an identifying characteristic of unreliable, "el cheapo" telescopes -- concerns focusers and eyepieces. Most el cheapos use .965" eyepieces, which are available only with simple lens designs. Some models come with a ,965" focuser and an adapter for standard 1.25" eyepieces, but don't be fooled: most .965" focusers are cheaply made. You're better off with a telescope that takes 1-1/4" eyepieces.

Dobsonians: Altazimuths With an Attitude. In what direction should beginners go in looking for a high-quality telescope at a reasonable price? Well, more than 30 years ago **John Dobson**, a Californian, had a similar problem. A monk, he had no money or personal possessions but wanted to see what the universe was all about. So he built his own telescope, a Newtonian reflector, out of used scraps and parts. What made Dobson's telescope truly special, though, was its mounting: a brilliantly simple kind of altazimuth mounting that is stable, highly maneuverable, and doesn't add the equivalent of open-heart surgery costs to the price of the telescope. A Dobsonian reflector can be built with basic hand tools, or you can purchase one from any of several reputable manufacturers at a very reasonable price. Aperture (mirror) sizes from 3" and up are available.

For most people (including women and older children), a 4-1/2" or 6" Dobsonian is light enough to be carried and set up with ease, and will gather enough light to fully acquaint you with a wide range of wonderful objects in the night sky. Prices range from $200-$250 for a 4-1/2" Dobsonian to about $350 for a 6" Dob, depending on the manufacturer. Major manufacturers of Dobsonians under 18" include Celestron, Discovery, Meade and Orion. If you're interested, you can e-mail or write to them for free information about their telescopes -- and you should talk to some Dob owners as well. Most of them will probably tell you that they plan to keep their Dobs even if they buy another 'scope for other purposes (e.g., astrophotography).

Be advised, though, that in 1996 a major magazine tested three commercially available 6" Dobsonian telescopes. One of the manufacturers -- ask me and I'll tell you who it was -- had a heavy metal counterweight mounted directly behind the primary mirror; the metal retained heat and did not permit the temperature of the glass mirror to equalize with the outside air. As a result, optical performance was rated as poor and getting a sharp image at high magnifications was virtually impossible. (The other manufacturers' 6" Dobs had no such problems.)

John Dobson never patented his design, nor has he sought money from the companies that have copied it. He contends that telescopes should not be named after people, so he refers to his creation as a "Sidewalk Telescope."

Personally, I feel that Dobsonian owners *should* use names -- their own -- for their telescopes. In my own case, I like to think of my telescope as a 10" *Smithsonian!* It gets me where I'm going whenever I feel like taking a leisurely, 30 million light-year stroll through the night sky.

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Errata. 1. **Larry Higgins** was inadvertently omitted from our list of June 2nd Cox Field observers. Sorry 'bout that, Larry; don't know how we could have overlooked you. (If **Katie Moore** is our resident Supernova-In-Waiting, Larry is our resident H-II region of ionized hydrogen, especially after a hefty meal at Maria's.) 2. **Neal Wellons's** e-mail address is: <nwellons@hotmail.com>.

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