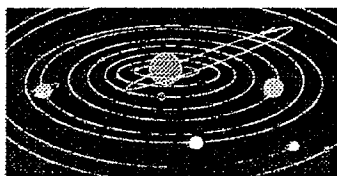


THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 6, No. 4

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

June, 2002

Officers: President, **Steve Knight:** (770)227-9871, 114 Central Lake Circle, Griffin, GA 30223 <sdknight@bellsouth.net>; Vice President/newsletter editor, **Bill Warren:** <warren.1212@mindspring.com>, (770)229-6108; Secretary/Treasurer, **Dawn Knight** (see above); AICor, **Neal Wellons** (770)946-5039; Webmaster: **David Ward** (770)989-5201, <dward51@bellsouth.net>; Librarian, **Tom Moore:** (770)228-6447. Event Photographer: **Doug Maxwell** (770)719-7959. Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: <<http://welcome.to/frac>>, discussion group at <FRAC@yahoo.com>.

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

* * *

Club Calendar. Fri., May 31: "Relay For Life" cancer walkathon observing (Spalding High School, 7:00); **Thurs., June 13:** FRAC meeting (Bill Warren's house, 7:30 [6:00 if you wanta swim beforehand]); and **Fri.-Sat., June 7-8 and Fri.-Sat., June 14-15:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

* * *

Vice President's Message. Hey, it's me again -- and no, **Steve** isn't pulling a Larry Higgins on us. At least, he wasn't as of the last time I talked with him. We just had to get the newsletter out early in order to include a late-scheduled public observing that you need to know about on **Fri., May 31st**. It's for the American Cancer Society's "Relay For Life" walkathon, an all-night affair in which team members walk in relays to fulfill donor pledges. They visit us to see the sky when they aren't walking.

You don't have to stay all night, of course, but we hope you'll join us for whatever part of the evening you can be there. We've done two previous ACS walkathon observings, and they're always great fun. I can think of few endeavors more worthy than helping those who raise money to fight that dreaded disease.

If you've never participated in a public observing before, you're in for a treat. The size of your 'scope doesn't matter, nor does a lack of previous experience in showing the sky to people who have never seen it up close and personal before. In their eyes, as a member of an astronomy club you're already an expert because you know infinitely more about the subject than they do. All you really need to know is (a) what to show them, (b) where to find it, and (c) a couple of facts about what you're showing them. We'll give you all the help you need in each of those areas before you get started.

And if you're asked a question for which you don't know the answer -- hey, there's nothing wrong with saying "I don't know" or "See that guy over there? He can answer your question." No one will expect you to have all the answers to every possible question they might ask, though, any more than you would expect the same from anyone else. Hey, we're amateur astronomers, not experts.

As I've said many times, an "ex" is a has-been and a "spurt" is a drip that fizzled.

-**Bill Warren**

* * *

Last Month's Meeting/Activities. Our May Cox Field observings were a washout. There were several excellent weeknights for observation at the Field, but the weekends were generally crummy.

We had 18 FRACsters and family members at our "Dinner on the Grounds": **Jerry & Carol Williams, Cory & Grady Dukes, Dawn & Steve Knight, Veronica & Larry Fallin, Smitty, David & Brendan O'Keeffe, Greg, Kathy & Greer Potter** and Kathy's mom and brother, and yr. editor and his wife **Louise**. Good food, good meat, and good golly, did we eat! **Cory Dukes** won the door prize.

Our late-scheduled Fayette Middle School observing on May 14th was a lot of fun. **Mike & Danielle Stuart, Felix Luciano, Dawn & Steve Knight** and yr. editor took advantage of one of those clear weeknights to show the planets and the universe to 40-50 interested, well-behaved and knowledgeable students and their parents. The only question left unresolved at evening's end was, *Who had more fun, us or the kids?*

* * *

Membership Renewals Due in June: Joe Auriemma; and Donald Harden. Please send your check for \$12 payable to either Steve Knight or the Flint River Astronomy Club c/o Steve's address listed in the upper left hand portion of p. 1.

* * *

This 'n That. You may have noticed that we've changed web site coordinators. After a long period of excellent service to FRAC, **Cody Wellons** has relinquished the task of maintaining our web site to **David Ward**. Thanks, guys, you're great!

*Speaking of **David W.**, here's a question that hardly bears asking: *Have you ever wished there was a way to know what the weather is (or will be) doing out at Cox Field?* Well, David has taken some of the guesswork out of planning your trips to Cox Field around the weather forecast.

First, he's added to our web page a "clear sky clock" that evaluates observing conditions at Cox Field; and second, he's added a link below the clock that gives the hour-by-hour weather forecast for Williamson. (It can be scrolled forward in 8-hr. blocks.) Just click on

the <weather.com> logo.

*If you're interested in keeping up with what's going on in FRAC between newsletters, you might want to join the <FRAC@yahoo.com> crew. This month, for example, the AAC's **Peach State Star Gaze 2002** brochure's arrival generated -- no pun intended -- a firestorm of discussion among FRACsters regarding the announcement that, at this year's PSSG (to be held at WhiteWater Express in the Ga.-Tenn. mountains on Oct. 3rd-6th), "There are NO power outlets nearby and NO generators are allowed."

The ensuing discussion was lively, and eventually led to **Phil Sacco** suggesting that "There is nothing to prevent FRAC from hosting a star party at, say, Indian Springs. It wouldn't have to be very large at all to be a success, and the price is right to get the park. What do you guys think?"

Well, here's what some of the FRACgroups folks had to say about Phil's idea.

Smitty replied, "FRAC doesn't have the funds for something like this, but it's still something to keep in mind." He suggested that, in order to avoid competing with the AAC, which has moved the PSSG to the fall season, any such FRAC star party should be scheduled for the spring.

David Ward suggested exploring the possibility of teaming up with the Middle Ga. Astronomical Society for a weekend star party. "Not a competing project," David wrote, "but something different altogether: small, cozy & friendly over, say, a Friday through Sunday. (2 nights with site camping?) Basically, a small star party geared 99% toward observing fun. A nominal fee would benefit the coffers of both clubs since we are moving toward joint ventures lately. Spring 2003, anyone?"

Larry Fallin said he'd like to see it held on the weekend of the Messier Marathon.

So that's what our July program will be about: (a) reporting on the WW site, and (b) discussing the pros and cons of hosting a little star party of our own (or possibly with the MGAS folks), whether at Indian Springs or elsewhere and whether next spring or some

other time that won't conflict with the PSSG.

You can add your 2 cents' worth to the discussion, whether by attending our July meeting or by joining our FRAC chat group. As our revered president, the legendary **Blaze Knight**, has often said, "Huh? What? Oh, you want a comment from me? Well, don't point your telescope where the Sun comes up and then go to bed."

No, what he really said was, *Your opinions are important to us. We can't make FRAC what you want it to be unless you tell us.*

*Only five of FRAC's 18 charter members who attended our first meeting in Feb., 1997, are still with the club: **Keith Cox, Smitty, Ken Walburn, John Wallace** and yr. editor.

* * *

Upcoming Meetings/Activities. On **Fri., May 31st**, we'll be out at **Spalding High School** to hold an observing for the American Cancer Society's "Relay For Life" walkathon participants. They'll be walking all night to raise money to fight cancer, and we hope you'll come out to share your love of the night sky with these fine, caring people.

To get to the school from, say, N of Griffin, come S on Hwy. 19/41 and stay on it until you reach the Hwy. 16 (Griffin/Newnan) exit. Get off the 4-lane there, turn left on Hwy. 16 and stay on that road all the way through Griffin. (Street signs will refer to it as Taylor Street.) After maybe 3 mi. you'll pass the library on the right, then go through a stoplight intersection and past the Dairy Queen on the right. Stay on the main road past the point where a side road peels off to the right, and 1/2 mi. from the Dairy Queen you'll cross a RR track; 3/10 of a mile farther on you'll come to a green sign and arrow indicating the direction of Spalding H. S. (i.e., to the right) at the next corner. Turn right at that street -- Wilson Road -- continue past the stop sign at American Excelsior Co., and the school will appear almost immediately on the left. We'll be setting up near the track, which is near Wilson Rd. at the far end of the school property from where you're coming.

Please note carefully: *Beaverbrook will be closed during June and July, so our next two meetings will be held at Bill Warren's house at 1212 Everee Inn Road in Griffin.*

To get to the Warren mansion from N of Griffin, come S on Hwy. 19/41 like you're going to Cox Field, but instead of getting off at Hwy. 392 (the Williamson exit), stay on the 4-lane and turn left at the next stoplight (Airport Road). You'll then pass NACOM on the left and the Girl Scout headquarters on the right before you reach a 4-way stop at Everee Inn Rd. Turn right onto Everee Inn Rd., and the red brick house on the left at the 1st corner is the Warrens'. Turn left onto Roberts St., and park in the driveway or on the left side of the road.

Since we have a pool, plan to come early -- say, 6:00ish -- with a towel and swimsuit and splash around. Bring your family if you like. We won't have refreshments at our June meeting, but we *do* have an area for you to change clothes. (We also have indoor plumbing, so need we remind you that there's no silent p in the *pool*?)

Our meeting, at 7:30 on **Thurs., June 13th**, will feature a group astronomy trivia contest. We'll divide the participants into groups of equal astronomy backgrounds, give out the contest question sheets and let 'er rip, may the best group win. (No cheat sheets, please.) Certificates will be awarded to everyone.

If, as we expect it will be, this trivia contest turns out to be fun, we'll do another one in the future. Matter of fact, as worrisome as arranging meetings sometimes is, we'll probably do it again later on even if this one turns out to have the appeal of gall bladder surgery.

Our June Cox Field observings will be held on **Fri.-Sat., June 7th-8th**, and **Fri.-Sat., June 14th-15th**. Maybe the skies will be kinder to us this time around.

* * *

The Sky in June. The Sun will already have set when the **partial annular solar eclipse** occurs on June 11th, so we won't get even a partial view of it. Maybe **Katie** can enjoy it in Arizona and tell us about it.

While **Venus** will be brightly accessible all month, **Jupiter** will sink ever closer to the W horizon as June wears on.

Neptune (mag. 7.9) will rise in *Capricornus* after midnight, and **Uranus** (mag. 5.8, in *Aquarius*) will rise about an hour later. Both of them are small but easy targets for binoculars: Neptune is blue, Uranus green, but that and their disk-shapes are about all you'll get from them even in telescopes. But ain't it fun to be able to say that you've seen 'em, or to show them to someone who has never seen them before?

* * *

ASK MR. STARGAZER

(Editor's Note: After far too long an absence, the Observer is proud to announce the return to its pages of the world's most knowledgeable astronomer, Mr. Stargazer, who will dazzle you with his simple yet brilliant answers to highly complex questions about the universe and cosmology. He's ready now for your questions.)

Q (from Joe Auriemma): Is a light-year a measure of distance or time?

Mr. Stargazer: Yes, it is, Joe. Can you come up with a more difficult question? Mr. Stargazer is already starting to nod off. (He stayed up all last night studying a little-known constellation, the *Wild Turkey*.)

Q (also from Joe Auriemma): Okay, what about this one: Why do the people who make star atlases put east on the left side of the page and west on the right side?

Mr. Stargazer: They're only thinking of what's best for us, Joe. Cartographers such as **Wil Tirion** have traditionally reversed the East-West directions on star maps to make it easier for us to read them while lying on our backs.

Q (from Felix Luciano): Why do people sometimes use averted vision when they're observing?

Mr. Stargazer: That's easy, Felix: Some objects get nervous if you stare at them.

Q (from Mike Stuart): Mr. Stargazer, I think I may have discovered a killer asteroid last night. What should I do?

Mr. Stargazer: Try Preparation H.

Q (from Greg Potter): I'm new to astronomy, so tell me: Why can't we see the far side of the moon?

Mr. Stargazer: Our necks aren't long enough. Hey, doesn't anyone in FRAC have a question that will challenge Mr. Stargazer's massive intellect?

Q (from Phil Sacco): Okay, you pompous, overinflated windbag, here's one for you: What's the difference between the **Kuiper Belt** and the **Oort Cloud**?

Mr. Stargazer: Nice try, Phil. You can think, think, think as hard as you can, but you can't stump me, I'm the Stargazing Man!

The Kuiper Belt holds up Mr. Kuiper's pants. The Oort Cloud is Mr. Oort's hazy recollection of events after an evening of stargazing with the famous Russian astronomer, **Smirnoff Vodka**.

Q (from Smitty): What's the difference between an astrologer and an astronomer?

Mr. Stargazer: None, if you teach astronomy at the University of Georgia.

(Actually, Smitty, the difference is about \$35 a visit, or \$25 if you bring your own tea leaves.)

Q (from Neal Wellons): If, as cosmologists tell us, the "Big Bang" occurred everywhere simultaneously, where is the center of the universe?

Mr. Stargazer: I'm glad you asked me that, Neal. Many people mistakenly believe that the "Big Bang" occurred somewhere in the vicinity of **Ken Walburn's** outhouse.

But back to your question. Willingness to take on complex, difficult and demanding questions that other astronomers shy away from explains why Mr. Stargazer is universally recognized as the greatest cosmologist the world has ever known.

So it is in the present case. Here's my answer. (Write it down, because you **won't** get

this kind of straight answer from such "experts" as **Stephen Hawking**:

According to Mr. Stargazer's mathematical computations, *the center of the universe lies exactly halfway between the edges.*

Mr. Stargazer (pointing): You, there in the second row. Yes you, the lady in curlers, a chenille bathrobe and fuzzy slippers. Do you have a question for Mr. Stargazer?

Q (from **Dawn Knight**): What's the largest thing in the universe?

Mr. Stargazer: Mr. Stargazer's ego. But wouldn't you like to know what is the *second* largest thing in the universe, madam?

Q (also from **Dawn Knight**): Sure. What's the second largest thing in the universe?

Mr. Stargazer: Your husband's fire extinguisher.

Q (from **David Ward**): Okay, so what is

the *smallest* thing in the universe?

Mr. Stargazer: Now, *there's* the question Mr. Stargazer has been waiting for!

For many years, the smallest thing in the universe was thought to be **Larry Fallin's** I.Q. However, that honor now goes to the **Damatta-U** (pronounced Duh MATT uh YOO).

Q (also from **David Ward**): What's a Damatta-U?

Mr. Stargazer: Nothing's a Damatta-Me, David, what's a Damatta-U?

* * *

Editor's Note: Are you having trouble organizing your monthly searches for objects in the night sky? If so, Larry Fallin offers a monthly guide to which Messiers, Caldwells, Herschel 400s and Double Stars are up. His June installment appear below.

##

Constellations of the Month - June

	Messiers	Caldwells	Double Stars	Herschel 400
Bootes	none	C45 NGC 5248	Delta Bootis Epsilon Bootis Iota Bootis Kappa Bootis Mu Bootis Pi Bootis Xi Bootis	NGC 5248 NGC 5466 NGC 5557 NGC 5676 NGC 5689
Corona Borealis	none	none	Sigma Corona Borealis Zeta Corona Borealis	none
Draco	M102	C3 NGC 4236 C6 NGC 6543	16/17 Draconis 40/41 Draconis Mu Draconis Nu Draconis Psi Draconis	NGC 3147 NGC 5866 NGC 5907 NGC 5982 NGC 6543
Libra	none	none	Alpha Librae	NGC 5897
Ursa Minor	none	none	Alpha Ursa Minoris	NGC 6217