

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Flint River Astronomy Club
Vol. 6, No. 12 January, 2003

Officers: President/Treasurer, **Steve Knight**, sdknight@bellsouth.net; Vice President, **Larry Fallin**: lbfj@mindspring.com; Secretary, **Dawn Knight** (see above); Board of Directors: **David Ward**: dward@flintriverastronomy.org; **Steven (Smitty) Smith**; **Doug Maxwell**: dougmax1@bellsouth.net; and **Felix Luciano**: Montbo2@yahoo.com. Newsletter editor/ observing chairman, **Bill Warren**: warren1212@mindspring.com; Webmaster, **David Ward** (see above); Alcor/Librarian, **Tom Moore**: tmoore@dfiequipment.com; Event Photographer, **Doug Maxwell** (see above). Public Observing Liaison, **Felix Luciano** (see above). Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: www.flintriverastronomy.org, discussion group at FRAC@yahoogroups.com. Please notify **Bill Warren** if you have a change of address, telephone no. or e-mail provider.

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Club Calendar. Fri.-Sat., Dec. 27-28: Cox Field observings, at dark; **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 3-4:** Cox Field observings, at dark; **Thurs., Jan. 9:** FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook, 7:00); **Fri., Jan. 10:** Beaverbrook observing (behind the trailers, at dark); **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 31-Feb. 1:** Cox Field observings, at dark.

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President's Message. First, I want you to help me welcome FRAC's newest member, **Roman Mierbeth** (pronounced MEER beth), of Griffin. Roman, we hope you'll consider us, not just your friends, but your astronomy extended family. We want you to enjoy

your time spent with us, and we're prepared to help you in any way we can along the way.

We had a large turnout at our Christmas party, including several folks who we rarely see – spouses and children, including **Anna Luciano, Mary, Teagan & Ana Newcombe, Robin Carlson, Laura Maxwell, Carol Williams** and newborn son **Thomas** – a born astronomer if I ever saw one – **Roxanne Ward, Veronica Fallin** and **Louise Warren**. And for those of you who couldn't make it, **Bill Warren** is now the club's official chart supplier. (Details later in this issue.)

Next month will be FRAC's first officer elections under the newly revised bylaws that stipulate one-year terms of office. We're looking for officer candidates for president, vice president, secretary, treasurer and board members. I'm proud of what we've accomplished during the past year – revising the bylaws, incorporating the club, sending the newsletter by e-mail, expanding our web site resources – but as I've mentioned many times, it takes "U" to make a "club". Please give some thought to serving as a club officer, or at least serving on the nominating committee that will prepare a slate of officer candidates to present at the Feb. meeting. You can contact **me** or **Bill Warren** if you're willing to serve in either capacity.

Don't forget about the weekend trip to Chiefland in April for their Spring picnic. I promise you won't regret your decision to join us. Just ask Bill about Chiefland; the silly grin he gets at the very mention of it says it all.

Finally, on behalf of all of us in FRAC let me extend our sincere condolences to the family of **Grady Dukes**, whose father passed away recently. Your loss is heaven's gain, Grady.

-Steve Knight

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. We had a total of 30 members and guests at our four observings during the Thanksgiving holidays and Dec. 6th-7th weekend: **Dawn & Steve Knight, Doug Maxwell** and **yr. editor** (four nights each); **Smitty** (three nights); **Larry Fallin** (two nights); and **David & Brendon**

O’Keeffe, Jerry Carlson, Roman Mierbeth, John Wallace, Joe Auriemma, Erik Erikson (a visitor), **Felix Luciano** and **Dan Newcombe** (one night each). On Sat., Dec. 7th, Smitty’s thermometer registered a chilly 17-1/2 degrees.

On Sun., Dec. 1st, **David O’Keeffe** reports, “**Brendon** and I left Cox Field at 3:30 a.m. It was a wonderful treat to see good skies after so many cloudy observings. The wind subsided some but the temperature dropped and our feet went numb. We looked at **M81** and **M82** with the 32mm. It was cool! We tried all our filters on **Saturn** and **Jupiter**. Blue was the best for Jupiter. Then we saw **Io** pass in front of Jupiter. It was GREAT!”

We had **23** at our Christmas dinner party at Buffalo’s in Griffin: **Carol, Jerry & Thomas Williams; Roxanne & David Ward; Veronica & Larry Fallin; Anna & Felix Luciano; Louise & Bill Warren; Laura & Doug Maxwell; Smitty; Dawn & Steve Knight; Robin & Jerry Carlson; Mary, Dan, Teagan & Ana Newcombe; and Erik Erikson.** When door prizes were drawn, **Louise W.** won the grand prize, a \$100 software, *Sky Map Pro 8*, donated by **David Ward**. It was by far the most valuable door prize ever awarded at a FRAC meeting, and will be put to very good use by **yr. editor** (who, in the spirit of the season, plans to sell customized sky maps at outrageously high prices, once he learns how to turn on the computer). We’d like to thank **Tom Moore** and **Rod Dougherty** for not showing up, and thus giving the rest of us a chance to win a door prize for a change.

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Membership Renewals Due in January: Keith & Denise Cox. Please send your check for \$12 payable to either Steve Knight or FRAC c/o Steve’s address listed in the upper left hand portion of p. 1.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. With the new moon hovering around the first weekend of every month, our observing schedule is changing dramatically. Our upcoming Cox Field observings will be on **Fri.-Sat., Dec. 27th-28th, Fri.-Sat., Jan. 3rd-4th** (the new moon

is on Jan. 2nd), and at the end of the month on **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 31st-Feb. 1st.**

Our club meeting will be at Beaverbrook at 7:30 on **Thurs., Jan. 9th**, and will feature a videotape on the great telescopes of the world, courtesy of **Felix Luciano**.

On the following evening, **Fri., Jan. 10th**, we’ll hold a Beaverbrook observing for parents and children; we’ll set up our ‘scopes in the dark area beyond the trailers that are behind the school. (Just drive in from Birdie Road as you normally do, but instead of parking in front follow the road to the right.)

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This ‘n That. **Doug Maxwell** recently finished the motorized equatorial drive platform he’s been working on for about 2 months. He uses two little stopper motors to track objects across the sky with his 14-1/2” Dob. It’s a really neat gizmo, quiet as a mouse and smooth as a baby’s bottom; stop by and ask him to show you how it works.

When Doug complained awhile back during the building process that the telescope and rocker box were too heavy for the platform by about 30 lbs., **Dan Newcombe** suggested that a good way to reduce the weight would be for Doug to give him the primary mirror. Nice try, Dan.

***An Open Letter (to Tom & Jeanie Clark).** “I would just like to let you know how much I enjoyed the Chiefland Star Party held a few weeks ago. This was my first time to Chiefland Astronomy Village, and I was impressed by the viewing, the site, and most of all – the people. I had a grand time! I bumped into fellow Atlanta Astronomy Club member **Tom Crawley**, who promptly invited me down to his house, but I was enjoying everything and everybody up on the main observing field so much that I forgot to go visit him! Oh well, maybe I’ll remember to next time, I hope.

On Friday night, three of us went with Steve Knight to your workshop, hoping to get a glimpse through your 36-inch ‘scope. Thank you for the impromptu tour of your shop and the new ‘scope you are building, and for the views you provided us

through the “Yardscope” of NGCs 253 and 891 as well. 253 was fantastic in the amount of detail that could be seen, and although 891 wasn’t giving up as many of her hidden charms as 253 you made us feel kind of special by letting us climb ‘way up there on the ladder and view it when it was in Dobson’s Hole. Due to the danger involved, I know you don’t often do that for strangers, and I thank you again! By the way, I was impressed by how easily your big ‘scope moved when pointed almost straight up like that; I had no problem centering and tracking the object. Just how high from the ground is the focuser of the Yardscope when pointed at the zenith, anyway?

Also enclosed is \$20. Please start my subscription to *Amateur Astronomy Magazine* with the most recent issue published.

Thanks again,

Steven “Saratoga Smitty” Smith

(Did Tom ever answer your question, Smitty? -Ed.)

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The Sky In January. **Mercury** (mag. -0.5) will be a bright, easy target, low in the WSW sky at twilight in late Dec., but will sink lower and fade each evening after New Year’s. **Saturn** (mag. -0.4) will be equally easy in the E sky after sunset, lying below and to the left of *Zeta Tau*, one of the Bull’s horns. (It’s been in that same general area for months now.) Saturn will be up all night, with 4 or 5 of its moons visible nearby telescopically, the brightest being mag. 8.3 **Titan**.

Jupiter will be a fine evening target in the E, best viewed after ten o’clock.

Venus and **Mars** will be morning stars in Jan., the former unmistakable at mag. -4.4 and showing a half-moon phase telescopically. Orange Mars will be fainter, lying near its superficial look-alike, **Antares** (which means “rival of Ares [Mars]”) in *Scorpius*.

The annual **Quadrantids meteor shower** (named after a discarded constellation, **Quadrans Muralis** in the N portion of **Bootes**) peaks at about midnight on one of our Cox Field observing nights, **Fri., Jan. 3rd**. With the new moon having just passed, the Quadrantids should provide a good show on a clear evening, i.e., about 40 meteors per hour at peak.

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A Marker of Another Color

article by **Keith Cox**

(Editor’s Note: This article first appeared in the Feb., 1998, issue of the Observer.)

Phil Sacco pointed out at the January (1998) meeting that, when using a red dry erase marker to outline constellations on a star chart, the lines disappear under a red LED or flashlight. I decided to apply my considerable math and physics skills to the problem under highly controlled lab conditions. I selected four dry erase markers – red, black, blue and green (amazingly, they turned out to be the very same colors that were lying on my desk!) – and subjected them to extensive scientific testing on my *Sky Atlas 2000.0 Laminated Field Edition* star charts. The pages of my charts are black with white stars.

The red markings I applied faded away when the red light came on, as Phil had predicted they would.

The three remaining colors had to pass three tests: not only did they have to make legible lines on the charts, but they also had to allow the user to read, in normal or red light, any writing on the chart that they marked over.

Black was easily seen, even on my black charts, in normal light and under the red glow. Unfortunately, the “M” in **Andromeda** disappeared, so black was out. With the field now narrowed down to two contenders, I continued the experiment.

The blue marker showed up very well on the charts, with and without red light, but it allowed only some of the writing to show through. Bye, bye, blue.

Convinced by now that I was on the right track, I applied green markings to a page of my laminated *Sky Atlas 2000.0*. Sure enough, the green showed up splendidly under normal as well as red lighting, and the underlying writing could be read easily.

So if you’re looking for a good chart marker, go to Wal-Mart or Office Depot and buy a green dry erase marker. Just don’t draw little green Martians on your charts unless you want people to think you’re a nut case.

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Constellations of the Month - January				
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	Messiers	Caldwells	Double Stars	Herschel 400
Auriga	M36 M37 M38	C31 IC 405	Theta Aurigae	NGC 1664 NGC 1857 NGC 1907 NGC 1931 NGC 2126 NGC 2281
Lepus	M79	<i>none</i>	Gamma Leporis	NGC 1964
Orion	M42 M43 M78	<i>none</i>	Beta Orionis Delta Orionis Iota Orionis Lamda Orionis Sigma Orionis Struve 747 Theta 1 Orionis Theta 2 Orionis Zeta Orionis	NGC 1788 NGC 1980 NGC 1999 NGC 2022 NGC 2024 NGC 2169 NGC 2186 NGC 2194
Taurus	M1 M45	C41	118 Tauri Chi Tauri	NGC 1647 NGC 1817