

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Flint River Astronomy Club
Vol. 7, No. 4 June, 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**: tmoores@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. Thurs., June 12: FRAC meeting (Bill Warren's house at 1212 Everee Inn Rd., Griffin, 7:30); and **Fri.-Sat., June 27-28:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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President's Message. I know you'll want to join me in issuing a hearty "Welcome Back!" to one of FRAC's first members, **Freida Maddox** of Williamson, Ga. Freida attended a couple of the club's first meetings and observings back in 1997 when those events took place in or adjacent to the Boy Scout hut in Sunnyside. We're glad to have you back with us, Freida.

Also, let me say how proud I am of those who came to our Astronomy Day festivities at Kohl's. Well over 200 people came out to see what we had to offer, and did we deliver! We had five solar 'scope setups and several unfiltered telescopes to show the **Sun**, **Moon** and **Jupiter** to the masses. I don't believe anyone left disappointed. The handout stacks of photos, posters and general information went quickly, while the clouds left us hopping from the Sun to the daytime Moon and back again. We helped several Fayette Co. students earn some much-needed extra credit and enlightened a few of them along the way.

I think we should take **Felix Luciano's** idea of a regular outing and make it real, along with the idea of staging another Astronomy Day observing in the fall.

At the June meeting, we're going to revisit the star party plans and start getting ready to put one together for next spring. If you want to be part of the planning stages, I suggest that you come out and put in your two cents' worth. We got a lot of the preliminary work done last year, but there is still much to do.

Finally, I want to thank you all for standing behind me as president of FRAC. Your support has meant a lot to me. My best friends are right here in FRAC. Thanks for being the best club going. It's you, and not me, that makes FRAC great.

-Steve Knight

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Membership Renewals Due in June: Joe

Auriemma. Please send your \$12 check payable to **Steve Knight** or the Flint River Astronomy Club c/o Steve's address listed on p. 1.

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FRAC AND DR. SCHMUDE NEED YOUR HELP!!! You gotta admit, your membership in FRAC is largely pressure-free. We invite you to attend our meetings, observings and other activities, and we're always glad to see you there. But beyond paying your annual dues, we don't often ask you to *do* anything.

Well, this time we're asking for your help in

something we think is pretty important to FRAC and one of its members. It'll only take a minute or two of your time, but the impact of your helping us could last for years.

Sometime soon, you should be receiving the June issue of the *Reflector*, the A. L.'s quarterly newsletter. In that issue, you'll see that FRAC's own **Dr. Richard Schmude** is running for secretary of the A. L. Please take a minute or so to vote for Richard, using directions contained in that issue.

We're not a big club, so we need for every one of you to help Dr. Schmude in his bid for election. Think of it: *a FRAC member could be a national officer in the A. L.!!!* – and **your** vote could be the one that decides whether he makes it.

In the A. L.'s observing clubs, every family member is eligible to pursue and receive observing certificates and pins. We don't know whether that policy extends to voting privileges – but it should, or else FRAC's president and secretary would be allowed only one vote between them.

We aren't urging you to stuff the ballot box by, say, **Jerry Williams's** infant son casting a vote for Dr. Schmude – but unless the May issue states otherwise we think you should not only vote yourself but encourage other participating members of your family (e.g., **Grady & Cory Dukes, David & Brendon O'Keeffe**, etc.) to vote too.

At any rate, PLEASE take time to vote for Richard. He's a good man and a splendid spokesman for astronomy, and he'll do a *wonderful* job as secretary of the A. L. Please do your part in helping him to attain that lofty position. You'll be glad you did – and we will, too.

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. On May 3rd, eight club members – **Jerry Williams; Steve & Dawn Knight; David Ward; Mike, Karen & Devan Steen;** and **yr. editor** -- and one visitor (**Denzil Smith**) showed up to observe at Cox Field. And earlier, on Apr. 27th, the Cox Field attendees included **David & Brendon O'Keeffe, Smitty, Doug Maxwell, Steve & Dawn, Dan Newcombe, Jerry Carlson** and **yrs. truly**. Brendon and David hung

around till 4 a.m.

Dr. Richard Schmude was the speaker at our May meeting. His topic, "Recent Developments on Jupiter 2002-03," was one that he'll use again at this summer's ALCON.

Attending that meeting were **Dawn & Steve, Larry Fallin, Curt & Irene Cole, Tom Moore, Greg Potter, Smitty** and **yr. editor**.

Our Astronomy Day day/night public observing in Fayetteville was a huge success. FRAC was represented by **Steve & Dawn;** Dawn's mother, **Doug, Laura & Jennifer Maxwell; Larry & Veronica Fallin** and their guests **Tina & William Standard; Jerry Carlson; Smitty; Dan Newcombe; Scott Hammond;** and **yr. editor**. Depending on which part of the sky was cloud-free at any given moment, we showed our 250+ visitors the **Sun, Moon and Jupiter**, using solar filters, a variety of telescopes large and small, and even televised images (courtesy of Jerry and Doug). Enthusiasm was the order of the day: it was hard to tell who was having more fun, us or the people we were showing the sky to. Our event photographer, **Doug Maxwell**, has posted 22 photos of our Astronomy Day activities at www.bellsouth.net/personalpages/pwp-dmm.

We'd planned to have a Beaverbrook eclipse observing on May 16th, but the threat of poor skies kept our visitors away. Turned out that, by the time totality came around, many of us had good skies at home.

The **Moon** was in *Libra*, about 8 degrees W of **Delta Sco** and slightly W of 5th-mag. **41 Lib** when totality began. A line of three mag. 6 stars trailed away to the SW from the Moon; by 11:50 the Moon had occulted the nearest of the three.

David O'Keeffe saw the eclipsed Moon as red, as did an Orrs teacher. From **yr. editor's** home, it was a dirty billiard ball to the naked eye, with the maria appearing gray in binoculars and the rest of the surface taking on a soft orange tint.

Incidentally, for all the Flat-Earth Society members worldwide, here's a question: *If the Earth is really flat, why is its shadow round as it crosses the Moon's face?* (Probable answer: It's an optical illusion devised by NASA to confuse the gullible masses

whose taxes support the space program.)

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. Our June FRAC meeting will be held at **Bill Warren's** house at 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA, at 7:30 on **Thurs., June 12th**. To get to Bill's house from, say, N of Griffin, come S on U. S. Hwy 19/41 and stay on the 4-lane past the Griffin exit, past Ga. Hwy. 16 (the Newnan exit), past Ga. Hwy. 362 (the Williamson exit) and turn left at the stoplight at Airport Road. Turn right at the 4-way stop at Everee Inn Rd., and then go one block and turn left at Roberts St. (Our red brick house is on the left at that corner; there's a "1212 Everee Inn Road" sign in the front yard.) Park in the driveway, or on Roberts St.

We won't have Beaverbrook observings in June or July.

Our Cox Field observing weekend will be **Fri.-Sat., June 27th-28th**.

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This 'n That. How would you like to own a genuine piece of **Mars** valued at more than \$1,000? Or a free Celestron Nexstar GPS, a Meade LX 200 GPS, or a Discovery Marscope Dobsonian telescope? You can get details on how to enter and win one of those fabulous prizes in this "no purchase necessary" contest at www.astronomics.com.

*Our happy wanderer **Felix Luciano** reported in to say that he used his Televue 85 while he was in Puerto Rico in May. His most memorable moments came when he observed the magnificent globular cluster **Omega Centauri (NGC 5139)** for the first time. It lay, he reported, "some 25-30 degrees above the horizon," or at least twice as high in the sky as we ever see it at Cox Field. "I was able to detect it naked eye as a faint fuzz once I found it using the 'scope," Felix said. "It was huge, with small groups of stars scattered outside the cluster." Felix also noted "a distinct glow surrounding/emanating from the cluster. What a sight!"

*Several of our members have expressed an interest in making their own solar filters. Before doing so, you might want to consider the following warnings from **Gary Hand**, who was responding to a question on Yahoo!groups: telescopes regarding the safety of using a Mylar or Baader film filter as opposed to buying a glass filter:

"There are several issues regarding making your own filters that for some reason are never discussed. Resolution is important, but not as much as safety. Pinhole (leaks in the film) are the least of the concerns. Here are a few (others).

"1. Metalized Mylar/polymer filters are inherently more dangerous to work with. These materials have the filtering agent laid on the film and not within the substrate itself. The slightest stretch, like holding it in both hands and snapping it like a piece of paper, opens thousands of microfractures in the coatings. I do not recommend these materials for (amateur telescope makers). Several companies offer them pre-made.

"2. The metalized coatings wipe off fairly easily and it is hard to tell (that such has occurred simply by) looking at them. Last year at Astrofest, I demo'ed a Baader filter in a 6" refractor. I would ask people to take a quick look at the solar image. All agreed it was a nice image. Then I would take the eyepiece out and have them look at the filter through the scope. The center 1/2 of the filter coating had been rubbed off of one surface in transporting it to the show. Taking the filter off the scope and looking at it, no one could see the damage, but it certainly was no longer safe for general viewing. These metalized coatings are more fragile than, say, an aluminized mirror coating that has a hard SO2 coating on (it). They simply should not be touched and great care must be taken if you are making it yourself.

"3. All metalized coatings sublime; that is, (they) evaporate directly from solid to gas. It is the same as ice cubes getting smaller in your freezer. Anyone who has looked at them through a telescope mirror with old coatings knows that the coatings thin out over time even if it is never touched or cleaned. I have (a) 10-year-old mirror in the store. Looking at it, it appears to be as reflective as new. But if you hold it up to a light bulb, you can see through it, where you could not

with a new mirror. You just can not tell the damage (by) looking at it. The glass filters usually have 5-year warranties or longer. Mylar filters all have 1-year warranties. What are the makers of these filters telling you? Solar filters have a definite life span.

“Whatever you do, be careful. Personally, I would not make my own solar filter out of metalized Mylar. I would buy one, either glass or Mylar already made. In either case, car brakes and solar filters are really bad places to save a few bucks.” –**Gary Hand**

***Tom Clark**, editor of *Amateur Astronomy Magazine*, wants to hear from you. He’d like for you to submit a short item or a larger article (1,200 to 3,000 words) for publication in his magazine. Tom isn’t trying to compete with “the professional polish and stuffy attitude of the big boys (*i.e.*, *Astronomy* and *Sky & Telescope*. –*Ed.*) here, either: what Tom is looking for is a simply told, conversational piece of writing – “just a bunch of guys and gals having a good time, sharing their hobby with others.”

(Actually, we already have a good start in that direction: a “Reader’s Forum” letter to the editor by **Smitty** appeared in the Summer ’03 issue, as did a longer “Star People: Real People in Astronomy” profile of FRAC’s **Scott Hammond**. **Steve Knight**’s article, “Keeping Heat In Its Place,” is due to appear in the Fall ’03 issue. So it’s not like we’re venturing into unknown waters here.)

Tom feels that each of us has something to say about telescopes or astronomy that others might find interesting, informative or entertaining. If you don’t know what to write about, he offers a number of starter sentences to kick-start your thinking:

“The best observing session I ever had was...”

“I’ll never forget that night. It was...”

“The most fun I ever had in astronomy was when...”

“The best telescope I ever used was...”

“My favorite observing place is...”

“I just built a telescope and...”

“My favorite objects to observe are...”

“I made a mistake on my last TM (telescope making) project. It was...”

“This new thing is just great! It...”

“I was very disappointed in...”

“Here are some objects I bet you have never observed...”

“I wish somebody could tell me how to...”

“I bought that new telescope because...”

“My favorite astronomy music is...”

“My favorite charts are...”

“We just had the best astronomy vacation at...”

“The best small telescope I ever used was...”

“My favorite binocular objects are...”

“Here’s a person I’ll never forget...”

“My astronomy guru is...”

“My favorite accessory is...”

“I just saw the neatest thing...”

Of course, you don’t have to choose one of those topics to write about, but you get his drift: write about whatever interests you – people you’ve met, tech projects you’ve undertaken, memorable events, personal experiences, etc., that have contributed to your understanding or enjoyment of our hobby.

Tom suggests that you “send in (your letter, item or article) typed or on a 3.5” disk saved as TEXT **and** in your favorite word processor format.” If you include photos, “send in twice as many as you think we will need...Photos should be sharp with an uncluttered background. If possible, 3x5 or 4x6 is fine – enlargements are not necessary. Since articles appear in the order received, the sooner you send them the sooner they will appear in print. Please write your name and address on each page of your hard copy.”

Submit your letters for the “Reader’s Forum”, short items or long articles to: **Tom Clark, 5450 NW 52 Ct., Chiefland, FL 32626**, or e-mail them to him at tom@amateurastronomy.com. Personal profiles for the “Star People” column should be sent to **Robert Reeves, 520 Rittiman Rd., San Antonio, TX 78209**, or via e-mail at reeves10@swbell.net.

*(President’s Note: I’ll be glad to check your tech data and details for accuracy, and if you’re unsure of your writing skills **Bill W.** will edit your material for grammar, clarity, etc. [You’ll still be listed as the sole author, of course.] If you want us to, that is. All ya gotta do is ask us.*

And don’t think that just because Tom wants your articles we don’t! Take the above topics and write

*your own article for the Observer! For the sake of making **Bill's** job easier, please double space your lines and print it out for him. It's how I started and will be a great place for you to start as well.*

Oh, one more thing: If you'd like to subscribe to Amateur Astronomy, it costs \$20 for one year or \$36 for two years. You can use Visa or MasterCard to order your subscription via Tom's answering machine (352-490-9190), or by e-mail or regular mail at his address listed above. Or you can send him a check made out to Amateur Astronomy Magazine. But you don't have to be a subscriber to have something you've written accepted for publication. –Steve Knight)

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The Sky In June. Although **Venus** and **Mercury** will be morning “stars,” all of the planets will be available in June, if you know where to look and have the patience to find them.

To observe **Saturn**, look to the WNW below the crescent Moon in early June.

Jupiter will set around midnight in early June. At 10:55 p.m. on June 14th, the Jovian moon **Ganymede** will spend seven minutes crossing in front of **Europa**.

Pluto will require at least an 8” to 10” or larger telescope to be seen; page 77 of the June issue of *Astronomy* contains an excellent finder chart for Pluto.

Neptune (mag. 7.9) will rise about midnight in early June, and about 10 p.m. by month's end. Look telescopically for Neptune's small, blue-green disk one degree WNW of mag. 4 **Theta Capricorni** in June, or 2 degrees – a pinky-width held at arm's length against the sky – N of **Mars** on June 13th.

Mars, growing steadily larger and brighter in June, will be mag. –1.4 by the end of the month, at which time it will rise before midnight. On June 19th, Mars will lie 2 degrees N of the **Moon**.

Uranus (mag. 5.8) will be 3.5 degrees N of Mars on June 19th. You won't see any surface features on Uranus, since it's roughly 1.8 billion miles from the **Sun**, but you *will* see its pretty blue disk even in binocs.

Venus will rise an hour before dawn in June; on the 21st it will be ½ degree – a Moon-width – N of

Mercury (mag. –0.3). Mercury will be gibbous (i.e., fat, but not full) and Venus nearly full.

The ninth planet on our list – the **Earth** – will be visible all month. Look down.

On June 13th, asteroid **12 Victoria** (mag. 8.8) will be 17' – less than 1/3 of a degree) N of **Eta Ophiuchi**. One way to identify the asteroid is to draw the star field containing Eta and then go back to it in a couple of hours and see which bright “star” has moved.

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Astronomy Day Comments, Part I: Smitty. “I think we all had a grand time; I know I did. I wish we could have showed folks more objects; we had plenty of scopes to do so, that's for sure. I think we interacted very well with the public. They were very interested in us and what we do. Even though basically we could show them only 3 objects in the sky, folks wanted to take a look at them time and again whenever the clouds parted. Congrats on the good turnout.”

Astronomy Day Comments, Part II: Doug Maxwell. “For those who couldn't make it, Astronomy Day was awesome. I think it was our best event ever. We had a tremendous number of visitors, and even though the clouds were a constant battle we showed them some really good views of the **Sun**, **Moon** and **Jupiter** between the clouds. I tried to take lots of pictures, but it got so busy I didn't have much time for that after things got going.”

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Smitty's Snippets

With practice, you can detect several dozen galaxies up to 30 million light-years from Earth. They are not easy to find, but just seeing them with binoculars is astonishing. For 30 million years, the galaxy's light has been on its way to Earth, ending its journey by entering the eyes of a curious observer. Not bad for binoculars.

-Terence Dickinson & Alan Dyer,
The Backyard Astronomer's Guide, 2nd ed.

Toronto (Firefly Books, 2003), p. 20

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