

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Flint River Astronomy Club
Vol. 7, No. 10 December, 2003

Officers: President/Treasurer, **Steve Knight**, sdknight@bellsouth.net; Vice President, **Larry Fallin**: lbj@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., Nov. 28-29: Cox Field observings (at dark); **Fri., Dec. 12:** Christmas dinner party/meeting (Hong Kong II buffet restaurant, 6:30); **Fri.-Sat., Dec. 19-20 and Fri.-Sat., Dec. 26-27 :** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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Secretary/Treasurer's Message. Steve & I (and eight other FRAC members) enjoyed another great trip to Chiefland.

The first couple of nights down there were clear until moonrise. Wed. morning brought *very* strong winds and monsoon-caliber rains. We awakened to

find lakes on the observing field, but everyone had plenty of warning so there was no 'scope damage.

After the rains cleared and the lakes dried, the sky was cloudless for the next three days and nights. Thursday brought several surprises, the first being the arrival of **Joe Auriemma**. Later, we watched an excellent bolide cross 60 degrees of sky.

Then there was the aurora. **Joe Mize** went around at 5:30 p.m. telling everyone of a possible aurora later that evening. The information from "Space Weather" indicated a possible aurora for the Chiefland area around 11 o'clock. We sat down to dinner, and around 7 o'clock we got a knock on the door and were told to come see the aurora. The beautiful red and green streaks moved across the sky for an hour and a half. I called my mom in Griffin so she could see it.

Of course, the day's pleasant surprises couldn't go unpunished, so late Thursday evening the power to the field went out, angering those campers whose heaters and electric blankets stopped working (even though they are not permitted).

The rest of the weekend paled, of course, to Thursday's events and views, but they were still wonderful Chiefland-quality nights. Unfortunately, **Tom Clark** spent most of the week in the hospital with a possible heart attack and having his coronary arteries roto-rootered. He was able to return to the field on Friday, which made everyone's day.

But enough about Chiefland. I look forward to seeing everyone at **Hong Kong II** for Christmas dinner at **6:30 on Fri., Dec. 12th**, and clear skies for awhile.

-Dawn Knight

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Membership Renewals Due in November: Tom & Katie Moore; and Terry & Michael Parks. Please send your **\$15** check payable to FRAC c/o **Steve Knight** at his address on p. 1.

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. Start with Chiefland. Ten FRAC members – **Smitty, John Wallace, Doug Maxwell, Steve & Dawn, Larry Fallin, Felix Luciano, Joe Auriemma, Scott**

Hammonds, and yr. editor – enjoyed incredible skies for varying portions of the week-long star party. On Wednesday, for example, at least seven stalwarts stayed up till 3 a.m. or later, logging at least a hundred objects collectively.

We had 16 at our November meeting: **Felix, Doug, Scott, Dawn, Steve, Smitty, John, Larry, Tom Moore, Curt & Irene Cole, Bill Snyder, Erik Erikson**, yr. editor, speaker **David Ward** and visitor **Chuck Sims**, who returned the following evening at BB along with Steve, Dawn, Felix, John, **Avery Smith** and yr. editor. David's talk went a long way toward preparing us for the upcoming comets.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. We'll have Cox Field observings on **Fri.-Sat., Nov. 28th-29th** – yeah, we know, it's the Thanksgiving weekend, but the new moon is on the 24th. It's better, we think, to schedule observings that many of you may not be able to attend than to not schedule them and imply by their absence that you can't or shouldn't go to Cox Field on those days.

The same holds true for our club observings on **Fri.-Sat., Dec. 19th-20th** and **Fri.-Sat., Dec. 26th-27th**: Come if you can, and don't worry about it if you can't make it. The new moon is on the 23rd.

Between ends of the month, we'll hold our annual Christmas party at Griffin's **Hong Kong II Buffet Restaurant** on Hwy 19/41 at **6:30 on Fri., Dec. 12th**. If you're coming from say, Jonesboro, Hong Kong II is on the left (east) side of the divided highway, opposite the Racquethouse fitness center on the right and sandwiched between a Shell service station and Blockbuster's on the left. There's a stoplight at that corner.

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This 'n That. Several facts were immediately apparent from the **Alcon 2003** group photo that appeared on p. 12 of the Sept.-Nov. issue of the *Reflector*. First, FRAC was well represented at the convention, with three club members – **Felix Luciano, Dr. Richard Schmude**, and **Tom Moore** comprising maybe 1/30th of the participants in the

photo. **Katie Moore** attended Alcon, but wasn't in the picture.

Second, when the photographer told everyone to indicate for the photo how good they thought their club was, Dr. Schmude raised an index finger to indicate that FRAC is No. 1, and others in the photo raised two fingers in a "V for Victory" sign; Tom raised five widespread fingers to let the world know that he considers us a 5th-rate club.

Finally, while it reflects poorly on the A. L. that they allowed Tom to be in the photo in the first place, at least they asked the guy in front of Tom to raise a beefy arm in front of Tom's face. But he was too slow, and the A. L. must bear the shame of having Tom's face peeking out for all the world to see, ruining what was, by all accounts, otherwise a very good convention.

*Congratulations to **Doug & Laura Maxwell**, FRAC's newest grandparents.

***Two From Scott Hammonds: 1. From New Mexico.** "All I can say is, WOW! Everyone should get a chance to experience dark skies like we had on three of our four nights out there. The Milky Way was visible from horizon to horizon. I felt like a kid in a candy store just staring at the sky. The folks next to me were using a 30-inch Dob, and I got a nice look at M33."

***... and 2. From His Church's Parking Lot.** My church had a Fall Festival set up in the parking lot on Sat., Nov. 1st, as a Trick or Treat alternative for the kids. Volunteers were asked to decorate a trunk or the back of a truck and pass out candy. I set up my Televue 4" refractor for tracking the Moon, and over 200 children and adults took a peek. It was fun seeing the expressions on their faces when they saw the craters on the Moon. I can only imagine how much fun it would have been had Saturn been higher in the sky. A lot of adults told me it was their first look through a telescope. No doubt there will be a few new telescopes for Christmas this year just from those quick looks at the Moon."

***Chiefland Goings-On, Part I. Steve K.’s** brilliantly succinct reply to the question, *How can we get these great Chiefland skies back home?*: “Two words. Power outage.”

***...Part II.** Speaking of **Steve**, he came up with what must be a unique observing project at Chiefland, i.e., a week-long Herschel 400 Marathon. During his and **Dawn’s** week down there, Steve bagged **139** Herschels. (He also qualified for a “Katie’s Club” certificate for finding and identifying all five of the galaxies comprising **Stephan’s Quintet**.)

***...Part III. Smitty** finished his Caldwell Club ordeal and started on the FRAC 50 list. **Doug Maxwell** and **yr. editor** also delved through most of the list. **Scott Hammonds** got some fine photos of the aurora. A shadow transit of Jupiter was one of **Felix’s** highlights.

***...Part IV. From Doug Maxwell:** “There are no words that can describe how awesome the week was. Thursday was one of the most memorable days of my life: tremendous activity on the sun viewed through a Coronado setup, an aurora that evening from all the solar activity, and then a fireball that everyone on the field saw as it came from west to east in the northern sky while everyone was watching and photographing the aurora. I’ve never seen anything like it...Most of us followed Comet Encke over a period of days, drawing and logging its location. And I actually won a door prize.”

***Part V.** When **yr. editor** almost backed his Chevy Blazer over **Steve’s** telescope – actually, we stopped with 18” to spare – El Crabbo didn’t see the humor in our saying that we were “just trying to autocollimate the Frankenscope.” Sheesh, whadda grouch! Just wait till *he* gets senile.

***...Part VI. Overheard** (or maybe just made up): “Everything was going fine in the Port-A-Potty last night, until the first *plop!* I heard was my car keys.”

*One of the little-known (but very real) advantages to being a member of FRAC is that *it automatically raises your I. Q. level by at least 50 points!*

Think about it: Aside from family members, most of the people you meet who know little or nothing about astronomy automatically assume that you must be extremely intelligent, or else you wouldn’t be involved in such a complex and intellectually demanding activity. And while we like to think that they’re right, one look at **Tom Moore** is all it takes to shoot down that illusion.

Or is it?

Hey, we’re **astronomers!** You can tack on an “amateur” to the term, or call yourself a “stargazer” if you like, but consider: 1. We’re in the same field as those who teach astronomy or write books about it, we just don’t get paid for what we do. In fact, we pay for it every time we renew our FRAC dues or buy new equipment. 2. More importantly, with the exception of **Dr. Schmude** (who epitomizes what a professional astronomer should be), we spend a lot more time actually seeing what’s happening up there in the night sky than most of the pros who spend their “observing” time staring at a computer monitor or printout sheets.

We’re **astronomers**, goshdarn it! And if the pros can’t accept that fact because we don’t toss out six-syllable words like candy at a Christmas parade, it’s *their* problem, not ours. One of the most enjoyable aspects of conducting public observings is that our audiences treat us with respect. Many of them would like to do the things we do, but they just aren’t smart enough (at least, not in their own estimation).

They could be, though. They could get smarter in a hurry if they wanted to. All they have to do is take up astronomy and join FRAC.

It’s not just an ego boost, it’s an I. Q. boost, too.

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