

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Flint River Astronomy Club
Vol. 8, No. 12 February, 2005

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Club Calendar. Fri.-Sat., Feb. 4-5: Cox Field observings (at dark); **Tues., Feb. 8:** Orrs Elementary School (Griffin, 7:15); **Thurs., Feb. 10:** FRAC meeting (BB media center, 7:30); **Fri.-Sat., Feb. 11-12:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Sat., Feb. 12:** Home schooling observing (Cox Field, 5:30).

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Editor's Message. Pay close attention now: *Beginning Feb. 1st, FRAC will be switching over to a*

new universal payment schedule. Everyone's 2005 membership renewal dues date will be Feb. 1, 2005.

However, because most of you already paid a portion of those dues in 2004, we have prorated your 2005 dues as follows:

If your membership renewal date was between:

- *Feb. 1st-Mar. 31st, you'll owe \$15.00;
- *Apr. 1st-May 30th, you'll owe \$12.50;
- *June 1st-July 31st, you'll owe \$10.00;
- *Aug. 1st-Sept. 30th, you'll owe \$7.50;
- *Oct. 1st-Nov. 30th, you'll owe \$5.00;
- *Dec. 1st-Jan. 31st, you'll owe \$2.25.

And here's how much you'll need to pay FRAC on or after Feb. 1st:

\$15.00. **Tim & Celia Astin; Larry & Veronica Fallin; Scott Hammonds; Che' & Bonita Judon; Felix Luciano; Matt & Suzanne McEwen; Smitty; Ken Walburn; John Wallace; David & Roxanne Ward; Bill Warren; and Jerry Williams.**

\$12.50. **Curt & Irene Cole; Peter & Claudia de Guzman; Jamey Jenkins; Doug Maxwell; Dan Newcombe; David & Brendon O'Keeffe; and Bill Snyder.**

\$10.00. **Joe Auriemma; Steve & Dawn Knight; and Mike & Danielle Stuart.**

\$7.50. **Kathy Davis; Cory & Grady Dukes; David Hoover; and Charles Sykes.**

\$2.50. **Jim & Rebecca Hamilton; Tom & Katie Moore; Lee & Travis Russell; and Chuck Sims.**

A check for the appropriate amount will pay your dues through Feb. 1st, 2006. Please send your check, to **Steve Knight** at his address listed on the upper left-hand side of this page. (Steve wants me to remind you that your check should be payable to **FRAC**, and *not* to him.)

If you have any questions about any of this, please contact Steve or me.

Finally, I know you'll want to join me in extending our heartfelt condolences to **Ken Walburn**, whose mother passed away in mid-January.

While in the McDonough area, I stopped by to see Ken (who, although no longer actively involved in FRAC, is one of the club's co-founders and still a member). Like **Larry Fallin**, Ken is presently into motorcycles, having recently purchased a "big Harley." He is also recuperating from five broken ribs

suffered while body surfing on a gravelly road the day he bought his Hog. Move over, **Evel Knievel!**

-Bill Warren

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. While our Jan. 7th-8th Cox Field observings were weathered out, five members came out for an unscheduled observing on Sun., Jan. 9th under good but not spectacular skies. Attendees included: **Smitty, Doug Maxwell, Matt McEwen, Joe Auriemma** and yr. editor.

We had nine members at our Jan. meeting: **Mike Stuart, John Wallace, Steve & Dawn Knight, Curt & Irene Cole, Smitty, Chuck Sims** and yr. editor.

An extraordinarily clear, still evening brought 13 people – eight members and five visitors – to our Jan. 14th Cox Field observing: **Smitty & Josh Smith, Matt McEwen, Chuck Sims, Mike Stuart, Dan Newcombe, John Wallace, yr. editor** and visitors **David Cox** and **Chris Something-or-other** (not his real name) and his wife and two children.

Dan looked dapper (and roasty-toasty warm) in his new winter camos. **Mike** was highly pleased with his new Orion ED eyepiece. Ten-year-old **Josh** tried out his new 3" reflector – a Christmas present – and dazzled Dan and yr. editor with his skills at finding the comet and other things. **Matt** tinkered with his new 'scope. **John** didn't look for Herschel 400s but was, as always, a joy to be around. **Smitty**, decked out in his multi-layered winter garb which included enough clothing to keep a family of five warm, looked like a grizzly bear heading for hibernation. He was wearing so much that, if anyone had called for a round of applause, he couldn't have joined in.

Meanwhile, **Chuck** passed the time by skeet-shooting passing airplanes with his green laser pointer. (Just kidding, in case any FBI agents are reading this.) And yr. editor was typically himself, i.e., confused at the top of his lungs and tripping over Dan's and Matt's observing gear.

By all accounts, our visitors had a great time, probably because Dan was at the other end of the observing area.

The following evening, Jan. 15th, offered some excellent observing opportunities for those who haven't yet completed the requirements for a certificate and pin in the A. L.'s new Cloud Cover observing club. ("Is that funnel-shaped cloud over there a cumulonimbus, or just a cirrus with a bad attitude?")

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. We didn't include it in our Club Calendar for February because the details have not yet been ironed out, but we may have an observing for a group of about 30 Griffin girl scouts as early in February as the 2nd or 3rd. We'll let you know through FRAC groups when, where, and how to get there if indeed the observing is finalized.

Our February Cox Field observing weekends will be held on the first two weekends of the month, i.e., **Fri.-Sat., Feb. 4th-5th** and **Fri.-Sat., Feb. 11th-12th**.

FRAC will conduct a public observing at Orrs Elementary School in Griffin on **Tues., Feb. 8th**, provided that the weather cooperates. The observing will follow a PTA meeting at the school. If the sky is clear on the 8th, we'll set up in front of the school at 7:15 p.m. Since the new moon falls on the 8th, we should be able to show them **Comet Machholz** and **Saturn** even under the light-polluted conditions that inevitably accompany school observings.

And if it's cloudy, stay home.

We hate to be iffy about public observings, but in this case a PTA-associated observing presents unique parking and logistic problems for us. We can (and will) use cones to block off a parking area in front of the school so we won't have to carry our telescopes and equipment but a few feet. But if we need to go indoors under inclement weather conditions, we can't also reserve other parking spaces near the gym (where the PTA meeting will be held) unless we arrive before the parents – say, around 6 p.m. We can't set up our 'scopes in the gym while the meeting is in progress; if we wait until after the meeting to set up in the gym, most of the parents will already have left by the time we set up; and it's doubtful that **Doug, Smitty, Steve**

and others with big telescopes want to carry them the 30-50 yards from the front of the school to the gym.

Thus, our caveat: *If it's cloudy on the 8th, stay home.*

To get to Orrs from, say, Jonesboro, stay on U. S. Hwy. 19/41 past McIntosh Rd., the RR overpass and the Griffin exit, and get off at the next exit, Ga. Hwy. 16 (the Griffin-Newnan exit). Turn left there, cross over the 19/41 Bypass, and turn left at the gas station at the 2nd stoplight. Turn left again at the 4-way-stop past Home Depot, then turn right at the first road and the school will be ahead of you.

Turn left into the winding road to the parking lot, and the parking area for FRAC will be blocked off by cones, as near as you can get to the school. (Traffic flow in the parking lot is one-way, counter-clockwise.)

Our club meeting will be at Beaverbrook at 7:30 p.m. on **Thurs., Feb. 10th**. The major order of business will be electing officers for the upcoming year.

On **Sat., Feb. 12th** – the last of our four Cox Field observing dates in Feb. – we'll host an observing for a group of home-schooled children and their parents. The event was scheduled by **David O'Keeffe**, who will be in charge of the observing.

As with the Orrs observing, we're going into this event literally "in the dark," in the sense that, at writing, not even the coordinator at their end has any idea of how many participants we should expect: anywhere from a careful to 90 people or more. Your participation will help to ensure that, in the event that the number is closer to 100+ than to a handful, FRAC will be prepared to meet the need in typically fine fashion.

We hasten to remind you that, while your own participation will be greatly appreciated, it is neither required nor expected of you if you're at Cox Field that evening. While many FRAC members enjoy participating in public observings, Feb. 12th is, first and foremost, a club observing night.

C'mon out to the Cox if the sky is clear, and do whatever turns you on (within moral and legal bounds, of course: the only "pot" you bring with you should be your belly). If that includes showing the sky to visitors, fine; and if you prefer to follow your

own observing agenda, that's fine too. In either case, we'll be happy to see you there.

P. S.: *If it's cloudy, stay home.*

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This 'n That. More About PTA and School

Observings. Have you ever wondered why we haven't taken our telescopes indoors at Beaverbrook for a PTA program on astronomy? Well, we did that once or twice, and they haven't asked us to do it again.

Did someone ask, *Why not?*

It's because, as much as we enjoy astronomy, it takes something more than that to get parents to attend a PTA meeting.

In our case, we set up in the cafeteria where they were holding a PTA-sponsored barbecue dinner fundraiser, and for 2-3 hours we talked about telescopes and astronomy with parents and children who came to eat or to pick up their dinners.

Since BB discontinued their "Eatin', Greetin' Meetin'" dinners a few years back, though, they haven't invited us back in that capacity because they have a better way of ensuring large attendances at their PTA meetings: offer programs where large groups of children perform onstage, whether by singing or performing skits, etc. Orrs Elementary does the same thing, and doubtless the practice extends to many if not most other elementary PTAs.

Every month, a different grade level is assigned a PTA program, with the idea of having as many of those students actively involved as possible. Parents and grandparents flock to such meetings, eager to see little Johnny or Susie up there on the stage, waving at them, singing off-key, picking their noses, scratching themselves, fidgeting and forgetting their lines in brief skits. Other parents show up simply because their children need a ride to the school – but whatever the case, they're *there*.

As for PTA observings – well, parents, many of whom are tired after a long day's work and not overly interested in astronomy in the first place, don't always eagerly embrace the idea of standing around for 30 minutes while their kids look through telescopes at obscure objects that they don't really understand, after having already sat through a 45-min. PTA program.

(Not to mention that many of the kids' bedtimes aren't conducive to staying afterward to look at the night sky.)

Single-class or grade-level observings present far fewer problems, which is why they are so often successful. With no formal program to precede them, they can begin earlier in the evening. And because such observings normally are arranged by classroom teachers who have a healthy respect for (if not a genuine interest in) astronomy, attendance at such functions is often tied to classroom performance. Even at the elementary level, teachers are required to teach about astronomy, and the ones who ask us to bring our telescopes to their schools know that we can do a better job of it than they can. We know the subject better than they do. It is not at all uncommon for teachers to offer extra credit for children who attend these class or grade-level observings.

Telescope For Sale. **Matt McEwen** is selling an Orion Skyquest XT8 Dobsonian with two eyepieces and other trinkets. His asking price is \$340.

So here's what you get: The 'scope, complete with a 6x30 finderscope and the original boxes, manuals, etc; a Sirius 25mm Plossl eyepiece and a Celestron 9mm Plossl; a dew zapper built under **Steve K.**'s directions with the focuser and secondary mirror heat wired. A Telrad isn't included in the deal, but there are quick disconnects to wire up one.

Matt is also also selling a Celestron 32mm Plossl eyepiece, like new, for \$30, and a Celestron 15mm Plossl, also like new, for \$25.

Says Matt, "All prices are negotiable. Pics are available upon request, or I can meet you somewhere if you want to look at anything. Please ask any questions. Also, if you're interested in the 'scope but not the eyepieces, or if you want different eyepieces, we can work it out."

If you're interested, you can contact Matt at (770)467-0534, or by e-mail at mbmcewen@bellsouth.net.

*Recent Cox Field visitor **David Cox** (no relation to **Mr. Loyd Cox**, the landowner and our friend) wants us to "Please be on the lookout for a telescope, 12 in. or larger, preferably used and in good shape."

David hasn't lost one, he wants to buy. (**Steve**, this could get you a leg up toward that 24-in. Starmaster you're daydreaming of.

24 inches. Hmm. At the observing height on one of those babies, it oughta be called *Stairmaster*, not Starmaster.)

*Says **Smitty**, "For those who are planning to attend the **Peach State Star Gaze 2005**, **Peter Macunber** of the Atlanta Astronomy Club has announced that PSSG will be held at Whitewater Express (in Tennessee) from **November 2-6, 2005**. But there's a problem: The **Chiefland Fall Star Party** will be going on at the same time."

Chiefland starts on **Sun., Oct. 30th** and continues until the following **Sun., Nov. 6th**; PSSG starts on **Wed., Nov. 2nd** and continues until **Sun., Nov. 6th**.

See a conflict there? Since Chiefland is considered one of the finest dark-sky sites in the entire eastern U. S. – and certainly in the southeastern U. S. – it doesn't make much sense for the AAC to go head to head with them, especially since, by all accounts (but not **yr. editor's**, since he's never been to WWE) the Whitewater Express site isn't in the same ballpark in terms of excellence as an observing site. At least, that's the consensus among FRAC members who've been to both.

Ah well, "Ours not to reason why," as the poet says. Ours is to decide which star party to go to that weekend -- Chiefland or the PSSG.

The answer might seem cut-and-dried for most of us – but then again, it might not. Consider the following "This 'n That" item, also from **Smitty**:

***Speaking of Chiefland**, **Smitty** reminds "those of us who visit the Chiefland Astronomy Village in Florida" that "CAV dues are due this month."

CAV's **Joe Mize** writes, "All members' dues are due in January every year if you want to get the renewal rate of just \$20 per year. On Feb. 1 the dues revert back to \$35, just as if you were joining for the first time again...Please take advantage of our discount renewal rate and pay your dues on time. There are NO exceptions for those who pay their dues late. They will be \$35 again.

“Remember, the Chiefland observing field is for paid-up MEMBERS ONLY after Feb. 1st. You must be a club member or attend with a club member as his invited guest to use the facilities. The club observing site is provided by, supported by, and taken care of by its members.”

*It is somewhat humbling to see **Titan** up there by **Saturn** and realize that man has soft-landed an object on a celestial body as small and far away as Titan is.

Yr. older-than-the-hills editor can recall when, during the frantic 1960s space race with Russia to be the first to land a man on the **Moon**, it was said that hitting the Moon with an object from **Earth** was equivalent to hitting a bull’s-eye with a BB gun from five miles away.

At 766 million miles away from the Earth, Saturn is almost 3,220 times farther away than the Moon – so far away, in fact, that it takes sunlight an hour and 16 minutes to reach the planet.

Using the BB gun analogy, then, hitting tiny Titan, which is only 1-1/2 times larger than our Moon, from Earth is comparable to scoring a bull’s-eye from more than 16,000 miles away.

Not even an intrepid turkey hunter like **John Wallace** could do that.

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The Sky in February. **Saturn** will be in *Gemini* all month, and will be up almost all night. Its rings, although still impressive, are beginning to flatten.

Jupiter will rise after ten o’clock in early Feb., and around 8 p.m. later in the month. On **Feb. 9th**, the Jovian moons **Callisto**, **Ganymede** and **Io** will be bunched together around 11 p.m.

Venus, which has been a beacon in the E pre-dawn sky recently, will vanish entirely after early Feb.

Mars will lie between **M8 (Lagoon Nebula)** and **M20 (Trifid Nebula)** on the mornings of **Feb. 7th-8th**.

Comet Machholz (C2004 Q2) will be a fine target during the early part of Feb., as it was in Jan. on those few occasions when the sky was sufficiently cloud-free for us to see it.

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