

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the Flint River Astronomy Club
Vol. 9, No. 1 March, 2005

Officers: President, **Steve Knight:** sdknight@bellsouth.net; Vice President: **Steven (Smitty) Smith,** sara60@bellsouth.net; Secretary, **Doug Maxwell:** dougmax1@bellsouth.net; Treasurer, **Dawn Knight** (see Steve Knight above); Board of Directors: **David Ward:** dward51@bellsouth.net; **John Wallace:** JWCOSMOS@att.net; and **Scott Hammonds:** Scott@creatorsview.com; Public Observing Liaison, **Felix Luciano** Montb02@yahoo.com. Newsletter editor/ observing chairman, **Bill Warren:** warren7804@bellsouth.net; Webmaster, **David Ward** (see above); Alcor: **John Wallace** (see above); Club Librarian: **Curt Cole** 24E29D55C@speedfactory.net; Event Photographer, **Doug Maxwell** (see above). Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: www.flintriverastronomy.org, discussion group at <FRAC@yahogroups.com>. Please notify **Bill Warren** if you have a change of home address, telephone no. or e-mail address.

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Club Calendar. Tues., Mar. 1: Girl scout observing (Midway Methodist Church, 7:00 p.m.); **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 4-5:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Thurs., Mar. 10:** FRAC meeting/8th birthday party (Beaverbrook Elementary School, 7:30 p.m.); **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 11-12:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Fri.-Sun., Mar. 11-13:** Tennessee Spring Star Party (Fall Creek Falls State Park); **Fri., Mar. 25:** 4th-grade "Space Camp" observing, Hightower Elementary School (Conyers, Ga., 6-10 p.m.).

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President's Message. When I said a year ago that I wanted to take some time off from being FRAC's president, I didn't realize I was going to be so busy in my unofficial "retirement." But with my ongoing work with **Ga. Sky View**, searching for a new site and generally keeping my nose in things, it doesn't feel like a year has passed since I was your president.

I want to commend **Smitty** for leading FRAC so capably in 2004, and I want to thank all of you for giving me the opportunity to again lead you as president. In the past year, FRAC has become a force to be reckoned with in amateur astronomy in the southeast, due in no small part to the unqualified success of **Georgia Sky View 2004**.

Speaking of which...

Having told you last month that, due to upcoming renovations at Camp McIntosh and our inability to find an equally acceptable replacement site, we were going to have to cancel GSV '05, since then **Dawn** and I have learned that the renovations have been cancelled for this spring, possibly to be begun next winter.

So now it's back on.

We ARE going to host Georgia Sky View 2005 at Camp McIntosh, on the weekend of Fri.-Sun., May 6th-8th!

May 8th is Mother's Day, but that weekend was the best we could get. The only other available weekends were Easter and the Chiefland Spring Picnic, and we didn't think you'd want FRAC to compete with either of those events.

I wanted to add a day to GSV '05 and make it a 3-night event, but details such as finding speakers on such short notice made it impossible. Oh well, maybe next year...

There is much to be done between now and May 6th, but fortunately most of the planning from last year will transfer over fairly easily. I hope I can count on your help in making **Georgia Sky View 2005** as memorable and successful as last year's event was.

Among my favorite quotations is one from the English satirist **Jonathan Swift** (1667-1745): "Vision is the art of seeing the invisible." We would all do well to remember its meaning, that there is much to see and do, if we just look for it.

Two final thoughts.

First, please keep **Chuck Sims** and his family in your thoughts, Chuck's father having lost his 2-year-long battle with cancer on Feb. 13th. A donation was made by the club in his name to the American Cancer Society to try and help stop this terrible disease.

Second, please join me in welcoming to FRAC our newest members, **Charles & Lisa Anstey** of Newnan. (Better still, you can welcome them yourselves by e-mailing them at: canstey@numail.org.) We're thrilled to have you in our club, folks, and we hope you'll let us know what we can do to help make your membership meaningful, enjoyable and worthwhile.

-Steve Knight

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. A total of 20 stalwart souls braved 30+ degree weather at Cox Field on Feb. 4th-5th under skies that ranged from good (Fri.) to very good (Sat.). Attendees on both evenings included: **Doug Maxwell, Steve Knight, Felix Luciano, yr. editor** and **Charles & Ron Anstey, John Wallace** and **Dawn Knight** were there on Fri., and Sat. brought out **Curt Cole, Smitty, Chuck Sims, David O'Keeffe, Matt McEwen** and **Dan Newcombe**.

A girl scout observing was scheduled and cancelled or weathered out twice during Feb. If only **Chuck** could have waited till March to get his new 'scope, the girls might have seen, up close and personal, what glories the winter night sky possesses. Hope Chuck doesn't expect to get a discount on cookies this year...

Our Orrs Elementary School PTA observing on the 8th also was clouded out. Although disappointed, the children were somewhat mollified when we gave them **Chuck's** home phone number.

Fifteen members attended our Feb. meeting: **Matt McEwen, Dan Newcombe, Dawn & Steve Knight, Doug Maxwell, John Wallace, Curt & Irene Cole, Tom Moore, Larry Fallin, Smitty, Chuck Sims, Bill Snyder, Mike Stuart** and yr. editor.

Officer elections highlighted the meeting. Our slate of officers for 2005 includes: **Steve Knight,**

President; Smitty, Vice President; Doug Maxwell, Secretary; and Dawn Knight, Treasurer. Election of Board Members was tabled until the March meeting.

Also at the Feb. meeting, **Tom Moore** resigned as FRAC's Alcor and club librarian after 2-1/3 years of service. We kid Tom a lot in these pages because he's such a willing target, but beneath his quiet demeanor and ready wit lies an active and highly organized mind that is one of FRAC's most grossly untapped resources.

FRAC's new Alcor (A.L. correspondent) is **John Wallace**. Our new club librarian is **Curt Cole**.

Our other Feb. Cox Field observing weekend was well attended, with a total of 25 members showing up. **John Wallace, Smitty, Steve & Dawn Knight, Matt McEwen, David, Cherrie & Sara O'Keeffe, Doug Maxwell** and yr. editor attended both sessions; **Chuck Sims** and **Tom Moore (!)** came out Fri. night; and **Felix Luciano** and **Suzanne McEwen** were there Sat. night. Even **Mr. Cox** showed up for awhile on Sat. night. Now, if we could just get **Keith** to come back...

On Sat. evening, unfriendly-looking skies scared away all but about 40 parents and children from the home schooling observing. Later, **Felix** commented on the evening: "We had a good number of parents and kids come in. **David** did a presentation and afterwards we had the kids come along the 'scopes to take a look and ask questions.

"After starting off with so-so skies, the clouds parted ways and we were able to show quite a bit of the night skies.

"I believe the observing was a hit. I for one had a great time."

It was, indeed, an exceptionally fine evening, thanks not only to skies that decided to cooperate with us, but also to the excellent preparations of organizers **David & Cherrie O'Keeffe**.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. As you'll see below, it looks like an unusually busy spring for FRAC, so we hope that **Chuck, Felix** and **Smitty** will go easy on the new purchases until, say, June.

For starters, how about FRAC conducting *four* public observings in March?

We'll start off the month with an observing for about 20 girl scouts on **Tues., Mar. 1st** at 7 p.m. at Midway Methodist Church on High Falls Road in Griffin.

To get to the church 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 stay on Hwy. 16 all the way through Griffin as if you were going to the Relay For Life observing at Spalding H. S. Go past that turnoff, and when you cross over the RR tracks (the 2nd set of bumpety rails you'll have crossed over), it's 4.4 miles to the stoplight at High Falls Road. Turn left there, and the church will be on the right, 1.2 mi. from the stoplight.

Our Cox Field observings in March will be held on the first two weekends of the month, i.e., **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 4th-5th** and **Fri.-Sat., Mar. 11th-12th**. (The new moon will be on the 8th.)

On **Sat., Mar. 5th**, **David O'Keeffe** is bringing another group of home schoolers to Cox Field for an observing that will begin with solar observing at 5:00. (**Felix** and **Smitty**, it'll be another good chance for you to show off your new H-alpha 'scopes if you arrive early enough.) FRAC observing will continue afterward.

In fairness to anyone who might want to venture out into the unknown, we should mention that the Middle Ga. Astronomical Society (MGAS), a Macon-based astronomy club, is conducting an "MGAS March Madness" observing on **Sat., Mar. 5th**, at the Deerrun observatory of the "**Matthew**" who e-mails us at FRACgroups and whose last name **yr. editor** has never known.

For details and directions to the site, contact **Cousin George** at nightstars@cox.net or MGAS at their MGAS Yahoo group.

A week later, on **Sat., Mar. 12th**, **Steve Knight** is inviting a group of fellow Ga. Geocachers to Cox Field for some out-of-this-world (literally!) sky viewing. It oughta be fun: Steve says that several of the guys have told him that they had telescopes when they were kids...

FRAC's 8th Birthday Party will be at Beaverbrook at 7:30 p.m. on **Thurs., Mar. 10th**.

If you're looking for a new star party instead of heading out to Cox Field on the 11th or 12th, you might want to 'scope out (pun intended) the 1st annual Tennessee Spring Star Party, to be held at Fall Creek Falls, located about 70 mi. N of Chattanooga.

The weekend event will run from **Fri., Mar. 11th-Sun., Mar. 13th**. It's a free, walk-in, no-registration event, the only expenses being food and lodging at the Inn or group camping. (No prices were listed.) For more information, call toll-free at 1-800-250-8610 or e-mail them at watkinsk@comcast.net.

For those of you living on the E side of I-75 who have wished that we could conduct observings nearer to where you live – well, *your wish has been granted!* On **Fri., Mar. 25th**, we'll conduct a public observing for the 4th-graders at Hightower Elementary School in Conyers, Ga. They're calling it "Space Camp," and our portion of it will run from 6-10 p.m. that evening; it will be a good chance for our "east-of-75" members to enjoy it more by driving less, and to help us put on a good show.

Directions to the site were unavailable at writing, but will appear on our FRACgroups site.

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This 'n That. GA. SKY VIEW '05 IS ON AGAIN!!! From event coordinator and club president **Steve Knight** comes the following good news:

"**Ga. Sky View 2005**, hosted by the Flint River Astronomy Club, will run from **Fri.-Sun., May 6th-8th, 2005**, at **Camp McIntosh**, where the inaugural GSV was held in May, 2004. Registration will be \$30.00, with an additional \$2.00 for a weekend parking permit.

"For more information and an application form, see our club's web site."

*We won't be doing this on an ongoing basis, but as of Feb. 19th the following members have paid their 2005 dues: **Felix Luciano, Matt & Suzanne McEwen, Smitty, John Wallace, David & Roxanne Ward, Bill Warren, Curt & Irene Cole, Doug Maxwell, Dan Newcombe, David & Brendon**

O’Keeffe, Bill Snyder, Steve & Dawn Knight, Mike & Danielle Stuart, Tom & Katie Moore and Chuck Sims.

If your name is not on that list and you’ve paid your dues since Feb. 19th, you can skip the rest of this and move on to the next item. But if your name isn’t listed above and you *haven’t* paid, please send your check payable to the Flint River Astronomy Club for the appropriate amount listed in last month’s newsletter to **Dawn Knight** at 114 Central Lake Circle, Griffin, GA 30223.

*From **Curt Cole**: “An updated list of members’ gear is available on the FRAC-a site. If you don’t currently have access to the site, you’ll need to apply for it, since it’s open only to FRAC members.

“Don’t forget, the list is not to be distributed, either electronically or by paper copy, outside the club!

“Thanks to all who have participated. If you find any errors or have additions to your list, let me know. If you haven’t participated yet, send me your info and I’ll add it. If you ever want your info removed from the list, we can take care of that, too.

“Another option that I haven’t mentioned before is that, if you have security concerns, you can be identified by your initials if you don’t want your name to appear.”

For those who are new to FRAC, the purpose of this voluntary listing of members’ gear is to let other members know whom to contact regarding questions about the quality and performance of certain telescopes, eyepieces, etc.

*The A.L. has a new observing club – two, actually, although one of them, the **Southern Sky Telescopic Club**, contains many objects that lie too far south for us to reach with our telescopes.

Anyway, the brand-new **Globular Cluster Club** consists of 190 galactic and extra-galactic globular clusters, of which participants may select any 50 (including one from the “Challenge” category) for observation, description and classification. A telescope of at least 8 in. aperture is recommended for the quest.

There are two basic differences between the Globular Clusters Club and most other A.L. observing

programs. First, the list of globulars is not available online at their GCC link, and must be purchased in the form of an observing manual from the A. L. And second, the Globular Cluster Club is intended at least in part to be a comparison program in which you observe and describe various globulars, and then compare their concentration classes (i.e., stellar density toward their centers) in somewhat the same manner that **William Herschel** did in the late 1700s.

(From **Kepple & Sanner’s** *The Night Sky Observer’s Guide, Vol. 1*, pp. xxix: “The degree of star-crowding toward a globular’s center is expressed by its Shapley-Sawyer concentration class, class I globulars being the most star-dense and class XII the lowest.”)

This new observing club brings the A. L.’s total to 24, including: Sky Puppy Club; Constellation Hunter Club; Lunar Club; Urban Observing Club; Universe Sampler Club; Binocular Messier Club; Deep Sky Binocular Club; Southern Skies Binocular Club; Messier Club; Herschel 400 Club; Herschel II Club; Caldwell Club; Arp Peculiar Galaxies Club; Galaxy Groups & Clusters Club; Globular Cluster Club; Southern Sky Telescopic Club; Asteroid Observing Club; Double Star Club; Earth Orbiting Satellite Club; Master Observer Club; Meteor Club; Planetary Observers Club; Sunspotters Club and Comet Observers Club.

***Rod Mollise** has announced the formation of what sounds like a FUN new magazine, tentatively called *The Journal of Double Star Observations*. If you wanta get in on the ground floor, their first issue will be available (in electronic form only) beginning April ’05. For details such as how much a subscription costs, how many issues constitute an annual subscription, where to order from, etc., contact Rod at mollise@aol.com.

*Not one, but **two**, FRACsters – **Felix Luciano** and **Smitty** -- are proud possessors of new 40mm Coronado P.S.T.s, or Personal Solar Telescopes. (From **Jeff Medkeff’s** Jan. ’05 review of the P.S.T. in *Astronomy*: “As recently as ten years ago, many H-alpha solar filters cost more than \$10,000 [p. 78].” This one costs a paltry \$539 [tripod extra].)

The rest of us in FRAC are looking forward with special interest to this year's Astronomy Day day/night observing, when we can view solar prominences, filaments, and other elusive solar features through Felix's and Smitty's P.S.T.s – and then, when the **Sun** goes down, we can steal them!

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The Sky in March. For those who have never seen it (or simply want to see it again), **Mercury** will be a bright (mag. -1.4 to -0.4) "star" low in the W sky during the first 2-1/2 weeks of March.

Although viewing Mercury can sometimes be dangerous due to its proximity to the **Sun**, just wait till sundown to find it near the W horizon. You won't mistake it for any other star, since there are no other bright stars in the area.

Mercury will begin the month slightly more than three finger-widths held at arm's length above the W horizon at dusk; by **Mar. 12th** it will have risen to more than a fist-width above the horizon. Plan on arriving early at Cox Field on the **11th** and/or **12th** to see what the Sun's nearest neighbor looks like in a telescope. Although you won't see any surface features, its waning gibbous shape will be clearly evident in the scope (but not to the naked eye).

And that brings up a question that most of you already know the answer to, i.e., *Why do we see Mercury and Venus as round when their phases are less than full, or even crescent?* The answer, of course, is that both planets are so bright that our unaided eyes fill in the unlit portion of their disks.

Elsewhere, **Saturn** will be up during the usable portions of March evenings, lying in *Gemini* near the Twins, **Castor** and **Pollux**. **Jupiter** will be up almost all night, and **Mars** will rise in the pre-dawn hours.

Comet Machholz will spend the first half of March near **Polaris**. Still bright at mag. 6, the comet will, according to *Astronomy* (Mar. '05, p. 61) display a small but noticeable tail pointing toward the **Big Dipper**. A map on p. 61 shows the comet's location in the N sky throughout March.

A map on p. 57 of the same issue shows where to find 9th-mag. **Comet LINEAR** in *Eridanus* in March.

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Solar Observing Report: Felix Luciano

Date: Feb. 19, 2005, 3:40-4:10 p.m.

Conditions: Mostly cloudy with patches of clear blue skies, light wind. The **Sun's** disk is steady with no shimmering or heat waves radiating from the disk.

Equipment: 40mm PST 'scope; 20mm Plossl, 14mm, 12mm and 8mm Radian eyepieces and Televue Telepod mount.

Observation: Lone Sunspot #735 is large and roundish, with a wide, bright, large semicircular flare forming an arc that almost completely surrounds it.

Two small, dark filaments lie to the S of 735. A large, thin, finger-like filament stretches nearly from the ESE edge past the center of the Sun's disk. Two smaller, thread-like, faint prominences radiate outward against the black background from the disk's W edge.

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A Quickie from Professor Stargazer

Question: What is 93 million miles out in space, periodically generates massive disturbances that disrupt communications on Earth, and pays dues to FRAC?

Answer: Bill Snyder.

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