

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT
RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

An Affiliate of the
Astronomical League

Vol. 15, No. 12 **February, 2012**

Officers: President/Newsletter Editor, **Bill Warren:** (770)229-6108, warren7804@bellsouth.net; Vice President, **Larry Higgins;** Secretary-Treasurer, **Steve Bentley.**

Board of Directors: **Dwight Harness;** **Tom Moore;** **Mike Stuart;** and **Jessie Dasher.**

Facebook/Scouting/Ga. Sky View Coordinator, **Steve Knight;** Alcor: **Carlos Flores;** Webmaster, **Tom Moore;** Observing Coordinator, **Dwight Harness;** NASA Contact, **Felix Luciano.**

Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Rd., Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: www.flintriverastronomy.org.

Please notify **Bill Warren** if you have a change of home address, telephone no. or e-mail address.

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Club Calendar. Thurs., Jan. 26: Fortson Pub. Library observing (7:00 p.m., Hampton, Ga.); **Thurs., Feb. 9:** FRAC meeting (7:30 p.m., Room 5 of the Flint Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus; **Fri., Feb. 17:** Cox Field observing (at dark);

Sat., Feb. 18: Kurtz Rock observing (at dark); **Sat., Feb. 25:** Civil Air Patrol (CAP) presentation/observing (6:30 p.m., Griffin airport); **Sat., Mar. 3:** CAP rainout date.

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President's Message. HAPPY 15TH BIRTHDAY, FRAC!!!

Surviving for a decade and a half is a pretty amazing accomplishment for a little astronomy club. There are several reasons why we've succeeded, but the main reasons are the simplest.

Think back to your own first contact with FRAC. What was it that made you think it might be worthwhile for you to join the club?

Obviously, you were interested in astronomy. Regardless of your background, experience, or the circumstances that led you to us, you found yourself among people who shared that interest – people who could teach you whatever you needed to know, if that were the case, or help you solve whatever problems you might be having in astronomy.

Beyond that, however, from the very start you were treated, not as an outsider or a stranger, but as someone we'd like to get to know better. You didn't have to prove yourself to us or change anything about yourself to gain acceptance; all you had to do was join the club and give us a chance to become your friends.

Visitors and newcomers are invariably impressed and pleased – and maybe surprised as well -- at how easily they fit into our little family. But it's easy to fit in among people who like you and care about you.

Elsewhere...

Don't forget, your FRAC dues are up for renewal in February. Make your \$15 check payable to FRAC, and give it to **Steve Bentley** or me at the Feb. meeting, or mail it

to me c/o: **Bill Warren**, 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224.

And need I remind you that **Georgia Sky View VIII** (a.k.a. **GSV 2012**) is coming up next month? We need your help and support: at writing, less than a dozen registrants had signed up.

-Bill Warren

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. We had 15 members – **Betty & Steve Bentley, Dwight Harness, Charles Turner, Erik Erikson, Joe Auriemma, Carlos Flores, Tom Moore Woody & Ben Jones, Steve Knight, Steven "Smitty" Smith, Jessie Dasher, Felix Luciano** and yr. editor – and visitors **Aaron Calhoun** and **Michael Mumper** at our Jan. meeting. Aaron, who lives in Griffin, joined the club.

Our speaker, Charles "Prince of Darkness" Turner, gave a devilishly effective presentation on how to use and/or customize the *Skygazer 4.5* software program. Smitty generously donated a box of 2012 FRAC pocket calendars.

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This 'n That. **Carlos Flores** has graciously consented to replace **Tom Moore** as our Alcor (A. L. correspondent). Our thanks are extended to both of those gentlemen -- to Tom for a job well done, and to Carlos for relieving Tom of that added responsibility. (Tom is FRAC's webmaster, and also serves as a board member.)

*From **Brit Danei**, re her recent medical difficulty: "I really appreciated the club's get-well wishes and prayers for my recovery. I think they worked, because I got on so well! Please thank everyone for me. I hope to get out to one of the meetings soon and see everyone."

We hope you will too, Brit. And we hope you'll bring along that worthless

husband of yours. (*Heavens to Murgatroyd, how could such a terrible typographical error have slipped in? What we meant to say was "that worthwhile, wonderful husband of yours." Tom is a dear friend and one of FRAC's most cherished members, and we'd never suggest that he's not wonderful, worthwhile and witty – at least, not to his face. [Uh-oh, another typo. What's going on here? -Ed.]*)

Anyway, Brit, we're looking forward to seeing you again at an upcoming meeting, and we hope you'll bring Tom along if you have to. (*Oh no, that's typo #3! Where on earth are they coming from? What we meant to say, of course, was "Be sure to bring along that wonderful, wise, witty and worthwhile man of yours. Just don't let Tom know who you're bringing with you."*)

(Editor's Final Note: Helllp! My computer needs an exorcism!)

A Progress Report from Woody Jones.

"The door prize I won at the Christmas party was **Stephen James O'Meara's** *Observing the Night Sky With Binoculars*. It has been invaluable to me, teaching me things like measuring the sky with my fingers, hand and fist and teaching me about degrees, arc-minutes, arc-seconds, etc.

"My first order of business with my new Zhumell 12" 'scope was learning how to star hop with my Telrad. I fashioned 4° (Telrad fov) and 7° (binocular fov) overlays for my Sky & Telescope *Pocket Sky Atlas*. I saw real fast that I was going to need a bigger star atlas, but tried it anyway. I found that I was spending more time with the atlas than I was with the telescope. I wound up buying **Harvard Pennington's** *The Year Round Messier Marathon* and **Wil Tirion's** *Sky Atlas 2000.0, 2nd ed.* The *Sky Atlas 2000* is easier to plot, and the other book has a great chapter on using the Telrad to star hop. I'm spending more time with the telescope now, and less with the star atlas. All is well. I

realize that I have a lot of practicing to do, but I'm on my way now."

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. At 7 p.m. on **Thurs., Jan. 26th**, we'll conduct an observing at Fortson Public Library in Hampton, Ga. To get there from, say, Griffin, go N on U. S. Hwy. 19/41 to Hampton, and turn right at the Wendy's stoplight. Go about a mile on that road, and turn right where the road curves sharply to the left. The library is about 100 yds. ahead on the right.

Our club meeting will be held at 7:30 p.m. on **Thurs., Feb. 9th** in Rm. 305 of the Flint Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus. We'll elect officers and board members for 2012, and then we'll celebrate FRAC's birthday by socializing and eating ourselves senseless on **Betty Bentley's** incomparable culinary masterpieces. (If Betty had lived in Savannah, you'd never have heard of **Paula Deen**.)

The following weekend, we'll hold our club observings, on **Fri., Feb. 17th** at Cox Field and on **Sat., Feb. 18th** Kurtz Rock.

A week later, on **Sat., Feb. 25th**, FRAC will conduct a presentation/observing for members of the Griffin Civil Air Patrol at their facility at Griffin Airport. The indoor presentation will begin at 6:30 p.m., with the outdoor observing to follow. (We'll send out directions later.) The rainout date is **Sat., Mar. 3rd**.

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Why GEORGIA SKY VIEW Should Be Your First (or Your 100th) Star Party

by Charles Anstey

(Note: This excellent article by a former FRAC board member and GSV attendee first appeared in the Feb. '08 issue of the

Observer. It has been updated by the editor.)

If you have never attended a star party before, you might be uneasy about doing so. You may have heard stories about unfriendly observers at star parties complaining loudly about white lights or noise ruining their time under the stars. But the folks at **Ga. Sky View** aren't like that: they make attending a star party fun, easy and natural.

The Site. The event is held at Camp McIntosh, a group camp adjacent to (and part of) Indian Springs State Park at Flovilla, Ga.

The setup at Camp McIntosh is very simple. There is one large observing/parking/camping field, and a smaller one beside the dining hall. You can park your car on the large field and then set up your telescope and tent right next to it. Those with RVs or travel trailers normally set up along the edge of the large, tree-lined field to keep their vehicles from blocking the view of others on the field, and to minimize generator noise.

During the daytime hours, you can drive on and off the field all you want, whether to get something to eat or to go on a day excursion. Some people bring food with them, but many prefer to head out to the local restaurants for their meals.

The facilities at Camp McIntosh are excellent. There is a very large meeting hall/dining room/kitchen where presentations and the Saturday potluck dinner are held. You'll almost always find a few people there at any time, day or night. Drinks, coffee and snacks are available for \$0.50 to \$1.00 on the honor system. If it rains, the dining hall is more than large enough to accommodate everyone.

There are two bunkhouses, one for each gender, with bathrooms, showers and hot water. (Restrooms are also located in the dining hall.) The bunkhouses are located a

short walk from the observing field, and you may prefer to sleep there for a small additional fee instead of tent camping on the field. Each bunkhouse has about 20 top-bottom bunk beds on either side of the building, with bathrooms and showers centrally located between them.

GSV At Night. You shouldn't drive on or off the field at night unless there is an emergency. If you are really nervous about that issue (or if you have chosen to stay off-site), you can park in front of the dining hall and come and go as you please.

At night, most everyone will be observing, or simply wandering around between the observing field and meeting house. You may not need a light to get around, but if you use one, it should be a red-beam flashlight. If you accidentally turn on a white light, no one is going to yell at you to turn it off or demand angrily that you be removed from the premises. **GSV** is primarily a socially interactive event rather than a bunch of serious observers hunkered down at their 'scopes.

Regarding **GSV**: I think you get out of it what you put into it. Everyone is free to do as they will, and having fun is the order of the day. There are always observers willing to help you in setting up, or in answering any questions you might have. You need only to introduce yourself and ask.

As with most unfamiliar situations, your imagination of all the bad things that could happen is far worse than the reality. **Georgia Sky View** has a very simple layout, great facilities, and friendly people that make it an excellent choice as your first star party or your 100th.

(Editor's Note: For more information about Ga. Sky View 2012, including a registration form with price list, see the GSV link on our website at www.flintriverastronomy.org, and follow our Downloads link to "FRAC Observing

Rules and Guidelines," the last section of which deals specifically with star parties.)

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An Interview With Mrs. Stargazer

(Note: This article first appeared in the Nov. '04 issue of the Observer.)

Having interviewed **Prof. Theophilus** (pronounced: the awfulest) **Stargazer** on numerous occasions in the past, we thought it might be interesting to interview his wife regarding what daily life with the Great Man himself is like.

Question: Inquiring readers want to know, Mrs. Stargazer: What's it like living with the greatest astronomer the world has ever known?

Mrs. S.: How should I know? Dig up **Galileo's** daughter and ask her.

Oh, you mean Theo!

Let me put it this way. He spends all night in the dark with strange men, taking pictures, and says that he enjoys exposing himself to nature and the universe. He doesn't shave all winter because a beard keeps his face warm while observing. He doesn't use deodorant or aftershave lotion in warm weather because they attract insects. What woman wouldn't be thrilled with all that?

Question: Surely you're exaggerating a bit here.

Mrs. S.: Don't bet on it. Hey, we're talking about a man who spends half his income on stuff to repair, maintain or upgrade his telescope, and the only home repair tools we own are WD-40 and duck tape. The last movies he took me to were "Armageddon," "Red Planet" and "Contact" – and then he spent the next two months criticizing their bad astronomy! The only TV he watches is the Weather Channel. He

thinks **Seinfeld** was the guy who hosted the “Cosmos” series on PBS.

Not to mention that he’s gone most of the time.

Question: What’s the best part of being married to Prof. Stargazer?

Mrs. S.: He’s gone most of the time.

Question: But what about Prof. Stargazer’s many revealing insights into the origins and evolution of the universe? Aren’t you impressed with the magnitude of his accomplishments?

Mrs. S.: I’d be more impressed if he could fix the toilet. Last time it overflowed, he told me and the kids to buy a Port-O-Let. When we complained about that, he said I should have an affair with a plumber.

Question: That’s funny. Our members like the Professor’s wit. They think he’s a riot.

Mrs. S.: His wit? You’re half right. He’s a half-wit. He thinks **Pleiades** is a form of aerobic exercise.

They say he’s a riot? Yeah, a race riot. The last time I heard Theo laugh was when I told him I had just fallen down a flight of stairs. He stopped laughing when he found out I was carrying his telescope at the time.

Question: What do your children think of their famous father?

Mrs. S.: Ramon isn’t famous, he’s our pool boy.

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Upper Right: What could be more appropriate for Valentine’s Day than **Felix Luciano’s** photo of **Heart Nebula (IC 1805)**, which contains the open cluster **Melotte 15**? Heart Nebula (which is part of the “Heart and Soul Nebula” pair) lies in *Cassiopeia*, and is also known as **Sharpless 2-190**. Mel 15 is an easy visual target for binocs or a telescope, but the Heart is a different story. (10 exposures X 600 seconds)



Below: **Alan Pryor’s** re-imaging of **M33 (Pinwheel Galaxy)** in *Triangulum*. M33 is only slightly farther away from us than **M31 (Andromeda Galaxy)**, making M33 the 2nd closest spiral galaxy to us. Its spiral nature was first detected by **Lord Rosse** in his 72-in. reflector in 1850. It is a notoriously difficult visual target for small ‘scopes. (9 sets of 5 min. LRGBs)



Next Page, Upper Left: **Alan Pryor’s** re-imaging of **NGC 891**, a lovely edge-on galaxy in *Andromeda*. (12 sets of 5 min. LRGBs with a 1.6x tele-extender/flattener to give a f.l. of 1600mm)



Below: NGC 7538. Felix Luciano's photo shows more than you'll see visually of this little emission nebula in *Cepheus*. According to *Night Sky Observer's Guide* (Vol. I, p. 147), "Two magnitude 11 stars... suggest ghostly eyes peering from the nebula, and make it a miniature version of M78 in Orion."



Right: M42, the Great Orion Nebula. Alan Pryor's stunning photo of M42 captures the incredible beauty of this most popular of all winter observing targets. Even in a small telescope, this emission and reflection nebula (and birthplace of stars) resembles a bird in flight, its streamlined wings sweeping back to the south. Some folks see **M43**, the bright "backward comma" in Alan's photo, as the bird's head.

Surprisingly for a naked-eye object, the nebula apparently escaped notice by

astronomers from ancient times through 1610, when French astronomer **Nicolas Peiresc** observed it. It wasn't until 1658 when the Dutch astronomer **Christiaan Huygens** made the first recorded drawing of the nebula. His drawing included the bright little 4-star **Trapezium** of **Theta Orionis** stars (shown in Alan's photo as the bright area above and to the left of M43. Those stars don't appear per se in this photo because the nebula's delicate coloration requires exposures that overexpose and bleach them out. It's the price you pay to see the delicate interplay of colors that makes M42 so famous. (5 sets of 20 sec LRGBs, 5 sets of 60 sec. LRGBs and 8 sets of LRGBs)



To consider the Earth as the only populated world is as absurd as to assert that in an entire field of millet, only one grain will grow.

-**Methodorus of Chios** (4th cent. B. C.)

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