

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT
RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

An Affiliate of the Astronomical League

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

Board of Directors: **Dwight Harness;** **Joel Simmons;** **Tom Danei;** and **Felix Luciano.**

Alcor/Webmaster, **Tom Moore;** Ga. Sky View Coordinator, **Steve Bentley;** Observing Coordinator, **Dwight Harness;** NASA Contact, **Felix Luciano;** Event Photographer, **Tom Danei;** and Newsletter Editor, **Bill Warren.**

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. Sat., May 1: “The Garden” solar observing (Griffin, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.); **Fri.-Sat., May 7-8:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Thurs.-Sun., May 13-16:** Ga. Sky View weekend star party (Camp McIntosh).

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President’s Message. FRAC’s 7th annual “**Georgia Sky View – A Stellar Experience**” weekend star party is almost upon us, and we need your support more than ever before!

As of April 10th, just 18 people had registered for **GSV**. Folks, we can – and desperately need to – do better than that! Compare that with last year’s total of 26 *FRAC members alone* out of a total of 61 attendees who attended **GSV ’09**, and you’ll see why there’s a certain sense of urgency about **GSV ’10**.

We’ve always been “The Little Club With Big Ideas,” and **GSV** is one of the biggest. It’s something we’re all proud of.

No other club as small as ours in the U. S. offers a 4-day, 3-night star party – but to ensure its continued success, we need *YOU* to be a part of it. **Steve Bentley** has done a fantastic job of getting ready for **GSV ’10**. It is, however, more than just a one-man show: it takes a lot of people to keep things running smoothly.

It’s a fact: you’ll get more “Bang For Your Buck\$” at **Ga. Sky View** than at any other weekend star party anywhere. Other star parties may be bigger, but veteran star party-goers constantly express amazement that we don’t charge higher registration fees, considering the amenities, activities, options and space available at Camp McIntosh.

So here’s what you’ll get in a nutshell:

*A football field-sized observing field with plenty of room for your family, your vehicle, a tent, your telescope and equipment without feeling crowded by others around you;

*Two dormitories (one for the men, one for the women)) with cots, closets, showers (with hot water) and restrooms if you prefer not to camp out;

*A large dining hall/meeting area where we conduct our programs and have snacks, soft drinks and hot coffee available 24/7 for a small fee;

*A list of guest speakers including 2008 A. L. Award winner **Dr. Richard Schmude;** **Phil Sacco;** **Stephen Ramsden;** **Tom Crowley;** and **Art Zorka.** The latter three on that stellar list (pun intended) are speaking on topics that have never before been addressed at **GSV:** solar astronomy (Stephen), radio astronomy (Tom, who is president of the Society of Amateur Radio Astronomers); and Art’s talk on mankind’s earliest astronomers. You can find out more about our speakers and their topics by visiting the **GSV** link on our website;

*A Saturday afternoon potluck dinner/cookout. FRAC will supply the burgers, dogs, soft drinks and fixin's, and attendees are asked to bring one food item to round out the menu. (If it needs refrigeration, we'll store it in the camp refrigerator.);

*If you're new to astronomy, you'll get to see incredible telescopes and equipment the likes of which you've never seen before. You'll meet fascinating people and make new and lasting friendships. You'll learn more about astronomy and telescopes in those three days than you'd get from a year's worth of club meetings. And if you're having trouble with your telescope, you're around astronomers who can help you with your problems. You can do whatever you feel like doing, for as long as you wish. For three full days, you can kick back and relax in the pristine setting of Camp McIntosh without worrying about the outside world.

Really, folks, it's a win-win situation for you, and I hope you'll do everything in your power to join us. In six years of **Georgia Sky Views**, we've never had anyone tell us they wish they hadn't come, and this year's event promises to be the best of all.

-Bill Warren

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. Spring has sprung, and not a minute too soon for all of us!

The Bluebirds & Bluegrass arts and crafts festival at Dauset Trail was a tremendous success for the event organizers and FRAC. Warm weather and sunshine brought out 3,250 visitors to that event. We – **Steve & Betty Bentley, Larry Higgins, Dwight Harness, yr. editor and Alan & Sally Bolton** – were constantly busy showing folks the **Sun** and talking about astronomy and FRAC. Our booth was set up near the trampoline, the rock-climbing wall and a pay-to-see exhibit of exotic and dangerous snakes, so there was no dearth of passersby visiting our booth.

Fortunately, the 12-foot-long, 85-lb. yellow anaconda lying on the ground about ten feet from Steve showed no interest in eating him. (Who says snakes don't have good taste?)

We had seventeen members and guests at our April meeting – **Betty & Steve Bentley; Dwight & Laura Harness; Stephen Ramsden** (he's an air traffic controller who works on Thursday evenings, and said he was on his lunch break); **Tom Moore; Roger Brackett; Cynthia Armstrong; Charles Turner; Felix Luciano; Carlos Flores** and his grandson, **Izeyah Narvaez; Larry Higgins; Steven "Smitty" Smith; Jessie Dasher**; our speaker, **Dr. Richard Schmude**; and **yr. editor**. Richard showed us how to use spectroscopes to split various light sources and elements into their unique spectral signatures.

At one point, Richard divided us into groups for a little test. Betty, Cynthia and yrs. truly comprised one group. Cynthia immediately came up with the correct answer, to the delight of her partners who were trying to appear at least marginally intelligent.

It was, as always, a superlative performance by Dr. Schmude; it reminded us once again how fortunate we are to have such a brilliant teacher and spokesman for astronomy in our club.

We had three members – **Larry Higgins, Carlos Flores & yr. editor** – and three visitors – **Tim & Diane Cunard**, and Carlos's grandson, **Izeyah Narvaez** – at our Cox Field observing on Apr. 9th.

The following evening found nine intrepid FRACsters – **Alan & Vicky Pryor, Larry Higgins, Carlos Flores, Laura & Dwight Harness, Felix Luciano, Charles Turner** and **yr. editor** hard at work and play at Cox Field. Alan and Charles were trying out new 'scopes (see p. 3), and Felix used an H-Alpha filter to bag a highly photogenic **Owl Nebula (M97)**. You can see his handiwork in his fragroups photo album. Dwight chased down Messier objects in *Leo* and *Virgo*. And a good time was had by all.

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This 'n That. REMINDER #1: Speaking of spring, don't forget to check out **Smitty's** article on warm-weather observing, "Attack of the Martian Mosquitoes," on our website. It's a comprehensive, informative and funny guide to maximizing your observing comfort in springtime and summertime.

***REMINDER #2:** If you're planning to attend **Ga. Sky View 2010**, you might want to go to our website and run off a copy of our GSV equipment checklist so you won't leave anything behind except your cares and worries.

REMINDER #3: In case you're waiting until the last possible moment to register for **GSV '10**, at the April meeting **Steve Bentley** pointed out that **May 5th** is the deadline for you to order a **Ga. Sky View 2010** tee shirt.

*From our "**Make It One More for the Road, Bartender, It's Time for Me to Go Observing**" **Dept.:** To fill a niche that didn't need filling, Japanese space scientists have produced "Space Barley," a beer concocted from barley grown in orbit. The taste is said to be out of this world. (Detractors might say it's barley normal, if you'll pardon the awful pun.)

*On Sun., Apr. 11th, the *Griffin Daily News* featured a front-page article, "Astronomy club members share universe of knowledge," about recent talks to the Griffin Kiwanis Club by (a) **Dwight Harness** and **yr. editor**, and (b) **Stephen Ramsden**. The article was accompanied by a color photo of Dwight standing behind his telescope.

We'll leave it to Dwight to say whether his appearing out of focus in the photo was a disappointment or a blessing.

***New Telescopes.** Two members were trying out their latest acquisitions at Cox Field on Apr. 10th: **Charles Turner** is the proud owner of a Celestron 6" f/8 (1,200mm focal length) achromatic doublet refractor; and **Alan Pryor** is enjoying his new Takahashi 5-1/4" f/7.7 (1,000 mm. f.l.) Ortho-Apochromatic triplet refractor.

In case you're new to astronomy and are wondering why, when Charles has a 16" reflector and Alan a 20" reflector, they might be oohing and aahing over much smaller telescopes – it has to do with what each type of 'scope is best used for. Says Alan, "I tried the Takahashi on **Saturn** with a 7mm eyepiece and 2x Barlow. Boy, was that a sharp image at 285x!

Then I compared that view with my 20" Obsession (reflector) with an 8mm eyepiece at 317x. Despite giving away 14-3/4 inches of aperture/lens, the Takahashi's image was superior in clarity and definition.

"With nebulas and galaxies, though, the Obsession was the clear winner."

***Fitting Right In.** New member **Roger Brackett** is donating about a dozen astronomy books to FRAC for us to do with as we wish – sell them, give them away as door prizes, or whatever other purpose we might have for them.

Upon hearing that our present collection of door prizes for **GSV '10** is not as extensive as last year's due a lingering bad economy, **Stephen Ramsden** is donating some items from a recently purchased lot of astronomy equipment.

Felix Luciano arranged for FRAC to receive a shipment of handout materials from NASA to be distributed to visitors at our public observings.

Charles Turner, who sells commercially prepared astrophotography posters, donated several of them, including a stunning **Milky Way** mosaic, to be used as doorprizes for **GSV '10**.

*About 24 minutes before our club meeting on Apr. 8th, a 71-ft.-wide asteroid zipped by the Earth at a distance of just 223,000 miles, or closer to us than the **Moon** is.

The asteroid, **2012 GA6**, was discovered by astronomers with the Catalina Sky Survey in Tucson, AZ prior to its close encounter. They quickly determined that it posed no threat to Earth – or, more specifically, to the people who would be waiting outside Stuckey Hall for our FRAC meeting to begin.

Last January, another, smaller asteroid measuring something like 33-50 feet wide passed within 77,000 miles of Earth on its way to wherever asteroids go after they've had their fun scaring us half to death.

***An Open Letter from Neal Wellons.** "Thank you for your exceedingly kind and generous profile of me in the *Observer* ("Neal Wellons: Armchair Astronomer," Mar. 2010, pp. 4-6). I still read the newsletter from your website, and I continue to be

impressed by the interest and knowledge that I see in the members of FRAC with whom I was associated over the years.

“I’m still an avid ‘armchair astronomer,’ and reading is my main interest in a very happy retirement. My library of ‘keepers’ that I have read and enjoyed includes about 70 books on astronomy, mostly astrophysics and cosmology. I also have a small library of general and quantum physics books that I have read to help me better understand the formation of the universe.

“I am very interested in astronomy sites, and have visited the Very Large Array, Arecibo Radio Observatory, Mt. Wilson (including the Ga. State Univ. CHARA Array), the observatories on Mauna Kea, the Laser Interferometer Gravitational Wave Observatory in Louisiana and the Hubble mockup at the Smithsonian. I have not visited a new site in quite a few years, but I have been planning to add the Green Bank (West Va.) radio telescope to one of my road trips and revisit the VLA and add Barringer Meteor Crater to my bucket list when we do a trip out west. I am very impressed with the club visits to the meteor craters in our area. What great field trips!

“Best regards to you and all of the members of FRAC.”

*(Hey, Neal! If you’re reading this, here’s a field trip closer to home that your many longtime friends in FRAC wish you’d take: a visit to one of our meetings or Cox Field observings. And if you revisit the Smithsonian, be sure to look up **Katie Moore** at the new National Observatory located outside the main complex. She’d love to see you. –Ed.)*

*NASA’s dilemma of being a political football didn’t begin with **Pres. Obama**, although it may seem that way because he’s presently attempting to dramatically overhaul NASA or do away with it altogether. He said recently, “Privatizing NASA would be a good thing.”

Overlooking the question of why the nation’s health care system should be run by the federal government and NASA shouldn’t be, a larger question remains: *Why do so many people regard NASA and the U. S. space program as “an extravagant feat of technological exhibitionism,”* as philosopher/historian

Lewis Mumford once described it? Here’s why, in two quotations from the 1980s:

“The space program is morally indefensible, not in itself, but because it has been given priority over the feeding and clothing and housing of the poor majority of the human race.” -British philosopher **Arnold Toynbee**.

“Moon rocks are OK when everyone is eating.”
-TV writer **Goodman Ace**.

And here’s **Bill Gates**’s response, also from the ‘80s: “What if **Columbus** had been told, “Chris, baby, don’t go now. Wait until we’ve solved our No. 1 Priorities – war and famine, poverty and crime, pollution and disease; and illiteracy and racial hatred.”

*Then there was American inventor **Lee DeForest** who, in 1957, predicted that “Man will never reach the **Moon**, regardless of all future scientific advances.”

Yeah, Lee, and there’s also that lunatic fringe out there who believe that someday man will use sophisticated electronic devices – let’s call them *computers* – to do his work for him.

***Space Cartoon #1:** An alien creature is standing by its spaceship in the desert, aiming a ray gun at a nearby Saguaro cactus with its prickly arms raised high. The alien is saying, “We have ways of *making* you talk, Earthling.”

***Space Cartoon #2:** This time it’s an American astronaut standing on Mars, facing a 50-ft.-tall Martian blonde who looks exactly like **Pamela Anderson**. The astronaut says to her, “Take me to your ladder, I’ll see your leader later.”

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. FRAC starts May in a big way with our UGa-Griffin solar observing at **The Garden on Sat., May 1st**, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

We’ll conduct two indoor presentations hosted by **Stephen Ramsden**, at 10 a.m. and again at noon, with refreshments and then solar observing following each of them. We’ll show our visitors the **Sun** in a variety of ways ranging from solar sunglasses and #14

welder's glass panes to Stephen's array of white-light, H-Alpha and calcium-K filtered telescopic views, **Steve Bentley's** new H-Alpha-fitted 'scope and other members' white light filters.

We need your help, too, to babysit the 'scopes during the indoor presentations and to give out refreshments and soft drinks after the presentations.

You don't need to be a solar expert to help out with the observings, either. We'll have expertise aplenty with Stephen and other FRACsters manning the telescopes. If you want to help out during the observing periods but don't have a telescope or solar filter, hand visitors a pair of solar sunglasses or a pane of welder's glass, tell them how to use them ("Put them up to your eyes and then look at the Sun"), and the Sun will do the rest. They will be duly impressed.

As **Larry Higgins** pointed out recently, many people are as impressed with seeing the Sun through solar sunglasses or welder's glass as they are with the more sophisticated telescopic views, probably because in the former case they're finding the Sun themselves rather than simply looking at what we've found for them.

Then there's The Garden itself. You'll want to tour it, both for its stunning beauty and to remind yourself how lovely the world is after a long, cold winter.

To get to The Garden from, say, Jonesboro, come south on U. S. Hwy. 19/41. After you pass the Griffin Hardee's and McDonald's on the right, go through the traffic light at Ga. Hwy. 362 (Fayetteville Rd.) and the next one at Racquethause (on the right), and take the Griffin exit just past the RR overpass. Get in the right-hand lane, and follow the S-shaped curves to the stoplight at Ellis Road. Turn right, and just past the bridge over the 4-lane look to the right for the big Univ. of Georgia Research and Education gated wall on the right. Turn right, and the road leads directly to The Garden. We'll set up our telescopes on the field just beyond The Garden.

*******Please Note the Following:** Since our regular meeting night is also the first day of **Ga. Sky View 2010**, *we will NOT have a club meeting in May*. Consider that weekend to be an extended club meeting – and for gosh sakes please try to attend!

Our official May Cox Field observings will be limited to **Fri.-Sat., May 7th-8th**. (You are, of course, welcome to go to Cox Field on the **14th** and/or **15th**, too, but we'd rather see you at **Georgia Sky View**.)

GSV 2010 will run from 2 p.m. on **Thurs., May 13th** through noon on **Sun., May 16th**. Anyone wanting to help set up the camp that morning should meet at the Huddle House on Hwy. 16 in Jackson at 8:30 a.m.

As always, **GSV** will be held at the spacious Camp McIntosh facility near Indian Springs State Park.

Directions to Camp McIntosh from all directions are posted on our website. Basically, it boils down to getting off I-75 at Exit 205 and heading east on Ga. Hwy. 16 for 10 mi. to Jackson.

Go through Jackson on Hwy. 16, but where 16 branches off to the left, stay on U. S. Hwy. 23/Ga. Hwy. 42. And where Hwy 42 branches off to the right, take 42 to Indian Springs State Park, about 3 mi. ahead.

Go past two entrances to ISSP (both on the right), and when you come to the caution light at Mt. Vernon Church Road (there's a gas station on the right), turn right.

Mt. Vernon Church Rd. is straight for exactly one mile. Where it curves left, go straight on the other, unmarked paved road. That road curves to the right and leads to the entrance gate at Camp McIntosh. (The camp is no more than 100 yds. from Mt. Vernon Church Rd.)

Park in front of the big brown building (the dining hall), and the registration window will be on your right on the porch.

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The Planets In May. **Venus** will be up from sunset till about 10 p.m. At mag. -3.9, it will be about half a magnitude fainter than usual, but still about 15 times brighter than any star, so you'll have no trouble identifying it in the W sky.

Mars (mag. 1.1) will be up until about midnight, but too small to get much surface detail telescopically. **Saturn** (mag. 1.0) will rise around sunset and stay up all night. Its rings will still be flattened in our view, like a stick protruding through both sides of a ball.

Since the open rings' glow normally bleaches out most of Saturn's moons from view, this is a good time to see how many moons you can identify.

Neptune, Jupiter, Uranus and Mercury rise at various times between 2 a.m. and sunrise, Mercury of course being the late riser.

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Prof. Stargazer Plays Word Association

With Space Movies

(interview by ace *Observer* reporter Bill Warren)

As you know, FRAC's own **Prof. Theophilus Stargazer** is the world's greatest living authority on astronomy, cosmology, the space-time continuum and jokes involving a priest, a rabbi, a Baptist minister and a duck.

Aware that the esteemed professor must be tired of answering the same old questions in our interviews, I decided to try a new approach:

Me: Let's play Word Association, Professor.

Prof. Stargazer: Is it anything like Kwik Six Picks? If so, I can win you billions and billions of dollars in this week's lottery for just a five dollar fee. (I take all major credit cards.) My winning combination is based on numbers I got from an ancient Mayan calendar.

Me: No thanks, I'll pass. What we'll do is, I'll mention a space movie or creatures from outer space, and you tell me the first thing you think of. Want to play?

Prof. Stargazer (sighing): The things I do to satisfy my parole officer. Having a kidney stone removed would be less painful. But go ahead.

Me: "Armageddon."

Prof. Stargazer: Is that a movie? I thought it was a knock-knock joke involving Cox Field observings.

Me: What do you mean, sir?

Prof. Stargazer: Knock-knock.

Me: Who's there?

Prof. Stargazer: Armageddon.

Me: Armageddon who?

Prof. Stargazer: Armageddon outta here, it's clouding over.

Me (groaning): I shouldn't have asked. Okay, sir, here's another space movie: "Alien." What does that remind you of?

Prof. Stargazer: My mother-in-law. Except *she* usually leaves her teeth on her bedside table.

Me: The movie "2001: A Space Odyssey."

Prof. Stargazer: Loved the HAL 2000 computer. Hated the black obelisk that kept showing up. It reminded me of my wife's meat loaf.

Me: Okay, how about "Close Encounters of the Third Kind"? What did you think of that?

Prof. Stargazer: When the creatures came down the ramp from their spacecraft to meet the humans I thought, *Now, there's some guys who'd look great in turtleneck sweaters!*

Me: Professor, we have time for one more movie: "Predator."

Prof. Stargazer: Oh, that's easy: **Larry Higgins** on steroids.

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