

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

NEWSLETTER OF THE FLINT
RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

An Affiliate of the
Astronomical League

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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;**
Mike Stuart; and **Jessie Dasher.**

Facebook/Scouting/Ga. Sky View
Coordinator, **Steve Knight;** Alcor, **Carlos Flores;** Webmaster, **Tom Moore;**
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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., Apr. 26: UGa-
Griffin lunar observing (7-10 p.m.); **Thurs.,
May 10:** FRAC meeting (7:30 p.m., Rm.
219 of the Flynt Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin
campus); **Fri.-Sat., May 18-19:** Cox Field
observings (at dark); **Thurs., May 24:**
UGa-Griffin lunar observing (7-10 p.m.).

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President's Message. If it's true as they
say that you're known by the company you
keep, FRAC is very well known indeed.

First, of course, there's **Dr. Richard
Schmude**, who has written three astronomy
books and countless articles, and has served
as the A.L.'s secretary and coordinator of
several important committees within the
Assn. of Lunar and Planetary Observers
(ALPO) and elsewhere. Dr. Schmude
received the Astronomical League's highest
honor, the A. L. Award, in 2008, and
although he is in great demand as a speaker
at Alcon and other national conventions, he
always finds time to speak at **GSV** and club
meetings.

Richard's intrinsic kindness and gentle
manner cannot hide the fact that he is one of
the most highly respected astronomers on
earth, yet in talking to him you get the
distinct impression that there's no one he'd
rather be talking with than you. That's true
whether you're a seasoned veteran or just
started in astronomy yesterday. He cares.
And it shows.

Then there's **Stephen Ramsden**, a down-
to-earth guy with a heart that's out-of-this-
world. You'll read more about Stephen
later; suffice it to say that a single newsletter
could not do justice to the man and how he
has chosen to live his life. Put simply,
Stephen Ramsden is a national treasure
whose impact on astronomy is beyond
measure.

Phil Sacco (see pp. 4-6) served as the
Atlanta Astronomy Club's president during
its greatest growth years, and he started the
AAC's Charlie Elliott affiliate chapter. He
also served as Southeastern Representative
to the A.L. (SERAL) for many years. We
know Phil as the guy who gives the
mythology of the skies fireside talks at
GSV, but he's much more than that. He is a
Master Observer who is proficient in every

aspect of astronomy, as well-liked as he is well-known.

Others: **Art Zorka**, another M. O., presently is Observing Vice President of the AAC, a position that was also once held by FRAC co-founder **Larry Higgins**. **Stephen “Smitty” Smith, Steve Knight** and **yr. editor** have had articles appear in national astronomy magazines.

And that’s some – but certainly not all, not by a long shot – of the company you’re keeping in FRAC.

Not bad, huh?

-Bill Warren

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Last Month’s Meeting/Activities. Steve & Betty Bentley, Dwight Harness and **yrs. truly** knocked their socks off at the Bluebirds & Bluegrass Festival at Dauset Trails on Apr. 7th. More than 3,800 people attended the one-day event, and we were busy all day showing the **Sun** via white light and H-alpha filters. Careful organization permitted us to move several hundred people through the lines to our ‘scopes without anyone having to wait very long, yet still spend enough time with each visitor that they didn’t feel as if they were being herded through. Dwight and Steve have a real flair for conversing with and educating the public regarding astronomy, telescopes and the sky. As Steve put it, “The more public observings you do, the easier it gets. I’ve done so many of them that I don’t think about it any more, it comes naturally.”

As for Betty – well, she hadn’t slept at all the night before, so that afternoon was one long nap for her. We’d never tell a soul that she snores like a dump truck shifting gears.

Such a pathetic attempt at humor at Betty’s expense is both demeaning and unkind, so we’ll try again with our sincere apologies. Actually, Betty, it sounded like **Leatherface** on the prowl in “Texas Chainsaw Massacre.”

(In reality, Betty slept but didn’t snore at all, but da debbil insists that we prolong the abuse by saying that she “slept very loudly.” -Ed.)

A rollicking crowd of 18 FRACsters – **Betty & Steve Bentley, Stephen Ramsden, Tom Moore, Dwight Harness, Woody & Ben Jones, Carlos Flores, Charles Turner, Erik Erikson, Smitty & Mackenzie Smith, Larry Higgins, Cynthia Armstrong, Jessie Dasher, Mike Stuart** and **yr. editor** – attended our April meeting. Stephen talked about his upcoming road trip that begins at the Smithsonian in Washington, D. C. and culminates with the Northeast Astronomy Forum (NEAF) in NYC, with stops at schools along the way to show a thousand more kids the **Sun**.

Acting on **Tom Moore’s** motion, the members present voted unanimously for FRAC to donate \$250 to Stephen’s Charlie Bates Solar Astronomy Project. It’s the least we could do to assist the most dedicated and generous solar astronomer in the U. S., if not the entire planet: at writing, Stephen has shown the Sun to 41,000+ people this year, and to nearly a quarter of a million people in the past 3-1/2 years. He donates, not just his time, but his financial resources as well: every one of those 250,000 viewers received a free pair of solar sunglasses at Stephen’s expense. Costing \$0.50 a pair, it doesn’t take a Ph.D. degree in math to figure out how much he is spending to educate the public. (That’s not to mention the cost of his array of expensive telescopes and solar filters, his new van for transporting his gear, the free tee shirts he distributes to kids and the cost of gas for his many trips to schools where he performs his magic.

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This ‘n That. Speaking of Stephen Ramsden: Did we mention that, at our April meeting where FRAC donated \$250 to

his solar astronomy foundation, Stephen donated lanyards and 400 pairs of solar sunglasses to FRAC?

*Finally, re **Stephen Ramsden**: we liked his reference to club membership at the April meeting as being “FRACtured.” As befits such a go-getter, Stephen’s mind operates in overdrive 24/7.

***Images of Ga. Sky View 2012 continued: Dancing With the Stars, Part 2.** Unwilling to concede the title of “Best Dancer at GSV” to **Doug Maxwell’s** telescope or to brothers **Jeremy & Cory Schiffer** (see last month’s *Observer*, p. 2), **Larry Higgins** displayed some nifty footwork of his own one evening on the observing field after disturbing a nest of short-tempered fire ants.

For a guy who until recently had been walking with a cane due to back trouble, Larry was surprisingly nimble and quick, a modern-day Old Saint Nick as he hurriedly shed his shoes, socks and pants to get rid of the angry ants whose sleep he had disturbed.

All that was missing was background music – maybe ABBA singing “Dancing Queen” (with the *queen* referring to the largest of the ants, and certainly not to Larry).

*In the May, ’12 issue of *Astronomy* (pp.58-59), asterisms guru **Phil Harrington** mentions two binocular asterisms, the **Polaris Engagement Ring** in *Ursa Minor* (featuring the North Star as the diamond), and the **Double Cross** featuring **Tau Leo** and three other visual double stars. (None of the four are binaries, they just appear as double stars from our vantage point in space.)

*We’ll have much more to say about it next month, but you need to start making plans to park yourself near a telescope with

a solar filter an hour before sunset on **Tues., June 5th**. At that time, **Venus** will begin its final transit of the **Sun’s** face in this century, and you want to be able to tell people later that you watched it happen.

FRAC will conduct a public observing – probably at UGa’s splendid facility, The Garden, in Griffin -- on that date, but plans for it haven’t been approved yet so we can’t state as fact that that’s where we’ll be. Stay tuned for next month’s *Observer* for details.

***Trivia Question:** How many of the 110 Messier objects did **Charles Messier** and his assistant **Pierre Mechain** actually discover? (Answer on p. 6.)

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. We’ll conduct our monthly UGa-Griffin lunar observing on **Thurs., Apr. 26th** on the lawn in front of the Flynt Bldg., from 7-10 p.m.

Our FRAC meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. on **Thurs., May 10th**, in Rm. 219 of the Flynt Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus. Our program will be an astronomy Quizbowl contest, and lemme tell ya, folks, they’re fun to participate in or to watch.

Basically, quizbowl is a competition between two teams to see which one can score more points by answering questions faster. Because we no longer have access to an electronic quizbowl set, contestants will “buzz in” by popping balloons rather than pushing a buzzer. All participants will receive tiny, el cheapo trophies to commemorate their first- or second-place finishes. You don’t have to participate, of course, but we’ll need help in running the event.

Our club observings will be held on the weekend of **Fri.-Sat., May 18th-19th**. Since the temperature will have warmed up considerably by then, we’ll conduct both observings at Cox Field.

Our May UGa-Griffin lunar observing will be from 7-10 p.m. on **Thurs., May 24th**. As I've pointed out many times, these observings offer an excellent opportunity for you to discuss with club members any problems you're having with your telescope or equipment, to pursue a Lunar Club observing pin under **yr. editor's** guidance, or to learn how to show the night sky to others.

FRAC members have been invited by **Art Zorka** to attend the **2012 Deerlick Astronomy Village Memorial Weekend Picnic on Sun., May 27th**, at 5 p.m. Grilling, socializing and setup will start at 4 p.m., and chow-down time is 5 p.m. There will be an Open House from 7:30-8:30 p.m. so that guests may tour some of the personal observatories.

Where: The DAV pavilion on Grier's Field, Deerlick Astronomy Village, Sharon, GA. A map to DAV is available at <http://www.deerlickgroup.com/PDF/DeerlickMap1.pdf>.

The event is open to anyone interested in DAV. If guests would like to camp on Grier's Field during the weekend, camping Sun. night after the picnic is free. There will be a \$5 camping fee per person per night for those who would like to come early & camp on Fri. and/or Sat. night. A full bath house is located on site. All of the usual dark sky rules will apply while camping at DAV. See www.deerlickgroup.com for details.

RSVP: anytime between now & Thurs., May 24th. Please e-mail **Karen** at picnic@deerlickgroup.com with (1) how many family & friends will be attending the picnic and (2) what you'd like to bring to the potluck. Bring any of the following suggested food dishes to serve 6-8: your favorite potluck dish or family casserole; bucket of fried chicken; corn, green beans or other veggie dish; cole slaw; salads – pasta, fruit, marinated or tossed; mac & cheese; chips, salsa or dip; or fresh fruit. No matter

what folks bring, no one will go away hungry!

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If we lived in the core of a globular cluster, the night sky would be enthralling, with thousands of stars shining as brightly as Venus appears to us on Earth.

-Jay Strader

Astronomy (May, 2012), p. 47

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The Solar System in May. There will be an annular (ring-like) eclipse on **May 20th**, but we won't see it. We won't see even a partial solar eclipse that afternoon, although it will be visible near the horizon at sunset in Birmingham and Knoxville.

Venus (mag. -4.7, as bright as it ever gets) will continue to ride high in the western sky before and after sunset during the first half of May. **Mars** (mag. 0) will be in *Leo* all month. Its disk will be small, though, making observation of surface features difficult.

Saturn (mag. 0.4) will lie within about 5° – three finger-widths held at arm's length against the sky – from mag. 1 **Spica (Alpha Virginis)** all month. Saturn's glorious rings have opened to us, and will continue to expand their tilt over the next five years if the world doesn't end on Dec. 21, 2012.

The annual **Eta Aquarids meteor shower** – remnants of **Halley's Comet** – will peak on the morning of **May 5th** during a Full Moon, but early arrivals and latecomers can be seen on evenings between **Apr. 19th-May 28th**.

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Phil Sacco's Recommended Astronomy Reading and Resources List

(Here, at long last, is Phil Sacco's roundup of the books, etc., he considers to be the most important for him and for you. His comments are in quotation marks. –Ed.)

Observing Reference Books. “The first two books on my list are for a serious observer to have in their library for research and reference. I have spent less time poring over them than any of the other books I’ve listed, and I’ve included them only as the best reference guides for observing.”

1-2. *BURNHAM’S CELESTIAL HANDBOOK, Vols. 1-3*, by **Robert Burnham** (Dover, 1978); and *THE NIGHT SKY OBSERVER’S GUIDE, Vols. 1-2*, by **Glen Kepple and George Sanner** (Willmann-Bell, 1998). “These books are for assisting deep-sky observing; they have the best drawings and photos for that purpose, and are the best reference guides for observing.”

Observing Books Phil Uses in the Field.

“I always have the following books on hand when I am going out on the field. The last three are on my list simply because they deal with my area of interest in astronomy beyond observing. They are the books I would hand someone who is interested in astronomy to start with. Learn the stories, then look for the principles in the heavens.”

3. *DEEP SPACE CCD ATLAS OF THE NIGHT SKY*, by **John C. Vickers** (Back River Observatory, 1994). “This was a MUST HAVE for me in observing the Arp Peculiar Galaxies and Herschel 400 objects. (My copy was a spiral bound notebook, but now it’s available in CCD form.) The images are all listed to scale, so associating what eyepiece would give you the same view as the images in the book is extremely helpful.”

4. *ATLAS OF THE MOON*, by **Antonin Rukl** (Kalmbach, 1990). “Absolutely the best lunar images and info for a Lunatic to have on hand. The information allows for accurate calculation of the terminator at any date/time.”

5. *THE CAMBRIDGE GUIDE TO THE CONSTELLATIONS*, by **Michael E. Bakich** (Cambridge Univ., 1995). “The best source for all things pertaining to constellations. Lists such things as: principal stars and their names; navigation stars; constellation locations; new and original constellations, including those that are now defunct; constellation names around the world; overall brightness listings and size rankings; meteor showers; Messier objects and finder charts; and much, much more.”

6. *DEEP SKY OBSERVING WITH SMALL TELESCOPES*, by **David Eicher** (Enslow, 1989). “Contains chapters on each type of deep-sky object, telling what we may learn from each. Chapters end with a list of binocular and telescopic objects that include descriptions and discovery dates. The objects listed are tremendous winners for public events, and stunning under dark skies with a typical amateur instrument.”

7. *STAR HOPPING: Your Visa to Viewing the Universe*, by **Robert Garfinkle** (Cambridge Univ., 1997). “Offers the best way to learn the night sky. Chapters are broken down by month and teach you what fov (field of view) is and how to associate fov’s with your binoculars or telescope. Each chapter lists prominent constellations for that month, some general mythology, and descriptions and discovery dates for objects included in the diagrammed star hops for that constellation.” (*Editor’s Note: I couldn’t agree more with Phil’s assessment of Star Hopping. This book is so rich in detail that it would take a full page to list all the ways it is useful. It’s one of the most important books in my astronomy library.*)

8. *STAR NAMES: Their Lore and Meaning*, by **Richard Hinckley Allen** (Peter Smith, 1990). “No one should call himself an astronomer without knowing the names of the most familiar stars. This book lists Roman, Chinese, Persian, Greek and

other names for every named star in the heavens. Basic mythology of the constellations is given. First published in 1899 and since reprinted and/or revised 8 times, this book is encyclopedic in nature and not intended for the casual reader.”

9. *THE NEW PATTERNS IN THE SKY: Myths & Legends of the Stars*, by **Julius D. W. Staal** (McDonald & Woodward, 1996). “The best reference guide I’ve found for astronomical mythology – and that’s saying a *lot!* Includes alternate constellation drawings.”

10. *THE COMPLETE IDIOT’S GUIDE TO CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY*, by **Kevin Osborne & Dana L. Burgess** (Alpha, 1998). “The finest research I’ve found on the totality of ancient mythology. Refers to the Greek and Roman tales, and has interesting sidebar notes on various tales regarding the myths.

“This book includes all of the mythology of the heavens, so it goes far beyond what the armchair astronomer would want as a reference. The authors tell you how to talk about mythology, why it’s important and why many people find it daunting. Along with **Edith Hamilton’s** *Greek Mythology* (which is specific to Greek myths), I consider *The Complete Idiot’s Guide to Classical Mythology* to be the bottom line where mythology is concerned. Both books stand on stilts above the commonly accepted *Bulfinch’s Mythology*, which is perhaps best relegated to the garbage dump.”

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Answer to Trivia Question on p. 3:

Messier discovered 38 of the objects, and Mechain discovered 28. Messier added 37 other objects that were previously known. In 1947, the American astronomer **Helen Sawyer Hogg** added seven more to the list, based on Messier’s observing notes.

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Below: NGC 4631 (a.k.a. **Whale Galaxy** or **Caldwell 32**), an edge-on galaxy in *Canes Venatici*. Imaged by **Alan Pryor**.



Says Alan, “I took well over 4 hrs. of exposures of usable frames, including 22 five-min. luminescent frames and 9 sets of RGBs at 5 min. per frame, plus a number of attempted frames that were messed up by various acts of Nature. My equipment included a 130mm Takahashi refractor (1,000mm f.l.) and a QS1583 ccd camera.

“I could tell I was out of practice because I made so many mistakes. One was making a misstep in polar alignment and confusing my computer about where the ‘scope was pointing. Another was not watching my wires as well as I should have, and a piece of Velcro on a wire got hung up on a piece of Velcro on the mount, resulting in tracking problems. It almost pulled the wires out of the dew heater strap before I noticed it, and the tension on the wire hit the switch on my motorized focuser. It took awhile for me to figure out why it would not change focus when I asked it to.

“I finished the photo and hit the sack at 6:30 a.m. It was a gorgeous night, though. The problems don’t show up in the photo, thank goodness.”

(Truer words were never spoken, Alan. That’s not a photo, it’s a masterpiece! -Ed.)

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