

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Newsletter of the FLINT RIVER
ASTRONOMY CLUB
(an affiliate of the Astronomical League)

Vol. 11, No. 9 November, 2007

Officers: President/Alcor, **Curt Cole**; Vice President/Newsletter Editor: **Bill Warren**; Secretary-Treasurer: **Irene Cole**; Board of Directors: **Larry Higgins, Tom Danei** and **Felix Luciano**.

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Club Calendar. **Fri.-Sat., Nov. 2-3:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Thurs., Nov. 8:**

FRAC meeting (7:30 in the Stuckey Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus); **Fri.-Sat., Nov. 9-10:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Thurs., Nov. 15:** UGa-Griffin class, 7-9 p.m.; **Fri., Nov. 30:** Peachtree City Library class presentation (2-3 p.m., 2nd-4th graders).

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Ga. Sky View Coordinator's Message.

*(Editor's Note: This column was prepared jointly by **Steve Knight** and **Bill Warren**.)*

"Why don't you guys throw your own star party?"

That simple question posed by **Phil Sacco**, the speaker at our Nov., 2001 club meeting, set in motion a thought process that gradually took shape over the next two years. It became a reality in the spring of 2004 with the first annual **Georgia Sky View** weekend star party.

Steve: I'm proud to have been at the helm of GSV from the beginning. We hoped to have a quiet little star party: invite a few friends, have a few speakers, have a good time and see what happens. And here we are, five years later and still around. I'm determined that **GSV 2008** will be the best one yet. We have a regular following who come every year, and our list of door prizes is the envy of other star parties. It's hard to beat the feeling I get when I walk the field and see our friends and guests having the time of their lives. This little look-back tells where we came from, and where I hope we're going.

*From the June, 2004 Observer (p. 3):
"And what might one expect to find at the far end of the universe? Probably **Tom Moore**, moaning, 'Why did they leave out 'A Stellar*

Experience' in my winning entry for the name of our star party, Georgia Sky View 2004?"

Steve: The first GSV was one of the most stressful things I'd ever experienced. I'd never done anything even remotely similar to planning a star party. I couldn't have done it without **Dawn**, and we couldn't have done it without the constant support of the club. I worried about every little detail, had more uneasy moments than I care to admit, almost cancelled it twice, and in my terror even considered stepping down as coordinator. But it slowly came together despite my doubts, the event date arrived on schedule – and **GSV 2004** went off without a hitch. It just went so well, so easily. Not a single problem that wasn't ironed out with surprising ease. While I have refined GSV over the years since then, that first one is my darling and I wouldn't have changed a thing about it. When I think of GSV, 2004 is the one that stands out in my mind.

*From the June, 2004 Observer (p. 2): "We had video games and parentally supervised swimming at the lake beach for the kids; a computer available for the adults; cinnamon rolls and sausage biscuits (courtesy of **David & Roxanne Ward**) for sale in the dining hall at midnight on both nights; and – best of all in most participants' estimation – a special door prize just for the kids: a 6-in. Hardin Dobsonian reflector and accessories valued at \$300.*

The kids-only drawing was Steve's idea; probably more than anything else, that simple, thoughtful gesture exemplifies the depth of Steve's commitment to creating a star party with something for everyone."

Steve: The next three GSVs were more of the same. The last two saw our potluck dinner become an instant success. The 3-day format was nice, but it hit the budget a little hard. Hopefully, we'll add that back in the future. Our speakers have been nothing short of spectacular, year after year. Phil took his nightly talks about the stars to a new level with the addition of a campfire near the dining hall. I was afraid of complaints, but everyone seemed to enjoy it. I hope to have a surprise this year for that portion of the party. We've had a few refrigeration problems along the way, but **Doug** has expertly taken care of them. Seems as if the park personnel are satisfied with Doug doing the yearly maintenance for them, but he doesn't seem to mind. Much.

"This was the first star party we've ever been to, and probably the best we'll ever go to." -David O'Keeffe, 2004

Steve: I'm hoping that **GSV '08** will reach new and even higher standards of quality. But I need input to help bring it to that new level. I don't want to see it grow to more than about 150 people in attendance, and if we ever hit that number we may have to consider scaling it back some. It may feel too big. I want to preserve that small, cozy atmosphere. I'd like to return to the 3-day format and have a larger mix of speakers.

I don't know if we'll have **Jon Serrie** back, but if we do, look for a concert on the field after the potluck dinner. I'm hoping to reach a large number of astronomers in the southeast region this year through the use of the A. L. address list. I have a few other ideas, but I'd really like to have more input from each of

you. That's what GSV was built on originally, a mix of ideas from everyone that was shaped into the event that it is today.

*"I just wanted to take a moment to say what a wonderful time I had at the **Georgia Sky View Star Party**. I had the most fun! Can't wait till next year." -**Karma Gardner**, Cumberland (TN) Astronomical Society, 2004*

Steve: The future looks good. We have a good following, a great site and some great people. I owe a huge debt of gratitude to all of you who have helped along the way, from early financing to planning and the all-important on-site help. The event would not be possible without you, and I hope you'll want to keep the dream alive for many years to come.

-Steve Knight

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. An excellent crowd of 19 members and guests attended our Oct. meeting: **Curt & Irene Cole; Tom Moore; Tom Danei; Steve & Betty Bentley; Steve & Aimee Mann; Charles, Lisa, Erica, Jeffrey & Ron Anstey** (Charles's dad); **Steve Knight; Doug Maxwell; Jim Chiu;** new member **Dwight Harness;** ex-member **Joe Auriemma;** and yr. editor.

When **Larry Higgins** announced that he had to work and wouldn't be able to give his scheduled talk, yr. **long-winded editor** (whose philosophy is, *Why use 25 words or less when 2,500 words will do the job?*) agreed to take Larry's place.

If you attended the meeting, you already know the book you should order as a Christmas stocking-stuffer for every elementary student in your life: *POOR PLUTO*, a lovely little book written by 3rd graders at Tokay Colony Elementary School in Lodi, CA and published by Scholastic Books, Inc.

A "Kids Are Authors Award" 1st-place winner in 2007, the book tells of the efforts of a 3rd grade class to come to the aid of poor Pluto, who, according to their teacher, "Scientists have just decided can no longer be a planet. Now, there are only 8 planets, so please remove him from your (diorama) project. I'm sorry." It's a nice little book that your children and grandchildren will adore.

We had 18 members at three Oct. Cox Field observings: **Larry Higgins** and yr. editor (all 3 nights); then-guest and now-member **Dwight Harness** and **Curt Cole** (Oct. 6th); **Tom Danei, Heather Sherbourne, Steve & Aimee Mann** and **Steve & Betty Bentley** (Oct. 11th); and **Felix Luciano, Doug Maxwell, Steve Knight & Angela Smith** on Oct. 12th. Heather started working on the Planetary Nebulae list – she's such a fine, dedicated observer -- and it was great seeing Dougmax and his Superscope at Cox Field again!

Top honors in the "Having a Good Time Dept." went to Steve Mann and his new MySky that he was trying out for the first time. It worked flawlessly, showing Steve what he was pointing it at and *telling* him about it as well.

He'd better be careful, though – and not just because neat stuff like that has a mysterious way of winding up in yr. editor's equipment box, either. When Steve let us

listen in on what the male voice was saying about **NGC 7731**, an elongated galaxy in *Pegasus*, the voice paused...almost as if someone were looking around furtively...and in a soft tone -- almost a whisper-- it said, “Don’t tell Steve I said this, Bill, but Aimee is a very beautiful woman, and I get so lonely in here...”

(Hey, we just report the news; whaddaya think, we’re making it up? -Ed.)

On Mon., Oct. 15th, **Doug Maxwell** staged a virtuoso one-man observing in his front yard in Brooks. The event was cancelled due to pot-hole skies, but not everyone got the word and two families showed up anyway. **Yr. editor** was there, but it was Doug’s show all the way, and man!, did he make the most of it. He had his telescope hooked up to a t.v. set, and he must have shown them a dozen different things, hopscotching from one object to another under low, fast-moving clouds that seldom permitted the same object to be seen for more than 30 seconds at a time. It reminded yr. editor once again of how talented Doug is, and why he’s so valuable to FRAC. As is true of every outstanding observer, Doug considered those iffy skies a challenge, not an obstacle.

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This ‘n That. Hey, **Steve (Knight)**, forget **Jon Serrie**: between **Dan Newcombe**’s snoring and **Larry Higgins**’s breaking wind, we already have a nightly concert on the field at **GSV!**

*Just a reminder that **Steve Bentley** still has some 2008 *Astronomy* calendars left, and will be selling them at the Nov. meeting at the low, low price of \$12 apiece. **Yr. editor** has

already bought four of them – one for himself and three for Christmas presents – and will buy at least one more because they make such terrific stocking stuffers. Consider:

*Most adults consult a calendar at least 6-8 times a month, for one reason or another. When you give a calendar -- especially one as eye-catching as this year’s *Astronomy* calendar is -- to a friend, relative or anyone else, they’ll think about you, whether consciously or subconsciously, every time they use it;

*Its attractive photos of deep-sky objects will serve as a year-round reminder to others of your association with astronomy.

Being an astronomer, whether amateur or professional, carries built-in status that you can’t find elsewhere unless you’re a member of Mensa, the club for the ultra-intelligent.

For starters, astronomy is a highly respected science – unlike, say, the fake science of *astrology*, which predicts or suggests human events and behavior based on alignments of the planets and constellations. And while practically everyone thinks they know what’s wrong with our public schools because most of us attended them, people who aren’t amateur or professional astronomers automatically respect us for our knowledge of something that they know absolutely nothing about. So giving an astronomy-related calendar offers the subtle reminder that you are in fact highly intelligent: *Why else would you become involved in such a complex science as astronomy?*

You probably think we’re kidding here – but we’re **not**. You may not be able to define or even spell *cosmologist* – but if you know the difference between a refractor and a reflector, you know more about astronomy than 99-44/100ths of the population; and

*Finally, and most importantly, your purchase of one or more (preferably the latter) calendars will help raise money for the club. So bring your checkbook to the Nov. meeting and do everyone a favor, especially yourself.

*From **Curt**: “The post office has 41 cent stamps available that have the **Aurora Borealis** and **Aurora Australis** on them. They look pretty nice.”

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“The Pleiades, the seven beautiful sisters, once attracted the attention of the handsome giant Orion, but although six of them had passionate affairs with various gods, they all rejected Orion’s advances and fled. Orion and his trusted dog, Sirius, followed the sisters and pestered them for five years without managing to conquer any of them. At last they grew so weary of his pursuit that they begged the great god Zeus to hide them. Zeus responded with the ironic trick of changing the sisters into stars; he also placed Orion and Sirius in the heavens. The Pleiades, Orion and Sirius are now fixed in eternal pursuit.”

-Jimmy Buffett,

Where Is Joe Merchant?, p. 153

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Upcoming Events. As you know, **Larry Higgins**, our observing chairman, schedules our Cox Field observing weekends around the phases of the **Moon** to provide maximum opportunities for deep-sky observing and imaging, and our public observings on other dates. Our Nov. Cox Field weekends will be

on **Fri.-Sat., Nov. 2nd-3rd**, and **Fri.-Sat., Nov. 9th-10th**.

Between those weekend dates, our club meeting will be held at **7:30 p.m. on Thurs., Nov. 8th**, at Stuckey Hall on the UGa-Griffin campus. Our speaker, **Steve Knight**, will talk about using heat rope to dew-proof your mirrors, Telrads and eyepieces.

A week later, from **7-9 p.m. on Thurs., Nov. 15th**, FRAC will conduct a 2-hr. class at the UGa-Griffin campus. If the weather cooperates, we’ll spend most if not all of our time outside, talking about telescopes and astronomy and showing the attendees the night sky via telescopes and binoculars. We hope **Steve Mann** will be there to show off his new MySky – and we hope *you’ll* be able to attend, too, since a fairly large crowd is anticipated and we may need several ‘scopes.

Steve Bentley and **yr. editor** are scheduled to do a daytime presentation at the Peachtree City Library from **2-3 p.m. on Fri., Nov. 30th**. We will, of course, welcome any other FRAC members who are free at that time to come along and help out: just let us know you’re available and we’ll either carpool or provide directions to the site.

As for upcoming meetings – if you aren’t already aware of it, we always hold our club meetings on the **2nd Thursday of every month**, with occasional exceptions such as our annual Christmas dinner party (more about that in the Dec. *Observer*).

In January, **Larry Higgins** will give his postponed “Astronomy On a Shoestring” talk, and in February **Steve Bentley** will talk about power sources for telescopes. So we think you’ll agree that we have a very interesting and informative array of speakers, activities

and program topics lined up for the next few months.

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Peach State Star Gaze '07: A Report

by Joel Simmons

Ever since **Ga. Sky View '07** I have wanted to attend another star party, especially since I only had binoculars at GSV and now have a telescope as well. So as soon as I found out about the **Peach State Star Gaze** I signed up. It is a little more costly than GSV – among other things, it's a week-long event -- but what the heck. I anticipated the event like a kid before Christmas. It did not disappoint.

While checking in, I found that **Joanne Cirincione**, one of the event coordinators, was a close neighbor of mine here in McDonough. A very nice young lady, Joanne did everything she could to make me feel at home, and she said for me to tell all her FRAC friends hello.

After setting up, there wasn't much for me to do till dark, so I toured the Deerlick Astronomy Village facility. It is quite an impressive place if your interest is astronomy. I have placed several pictures of it on the FRAC Yahoo group.

DAV is a facility created by a group of amateur astronomers to provide a dark site for themselves and others. There are two fields, one for construction of permanent facilities, observatories and housing, and one for camping. You can purchase a lot, lease a lot or purchase an annual camping field membership. The camping field has a restroom, shower facilities and electricity. The Atlanta Astronomy Club, sponsor of

PSSG, even had wireless internet access set up on the field for the star party.

As dark sites go, DAV is truly remarkable. There probably are darker sites out west and possibly in south Ga., but for easy access from middle and north Ga. I am sure there is none better. During the three nights I spent there, the transparency was super and seeing varied but wasn't bad. I observed **M15**, **M27**, **M57** and **M31** for the first time in binoculars. I didn't count the stars I could see in **M45** in binoculars, but there had to have been more than a hundred.

I spent most of my time imaging. (Why do astrophotographers call it "imaging"? Other photographers call it "making pictures.") I had three main targets: **M31**, **M45** and **M27**. The only way I can use my telescope for imaging is by piggybacking. The focal length is much too long for prime focus considering the tracking capability of the mount.

My attempts at M31 and M45 came out pretty good. I consider them to be my first astrophotos that are worthy of printing and showing off. And since my reputation as a photographer is based solely on the photos I allow others to see, I won't be showing my attempts at imaging M27.

There were a number of speakers I enjoyed listening to. One presentation was on robotic imaging: the speaker, **Bob Holzer**, can sit at his computer at home in Atlanta and photograph astro targets from his observatory at DAV. **Sean Walker**, an editor at *Sky & Telescope*, talked about calibrating images. Other workshops involved collimation, planetary imaging and light pollution.

An area of particular interest to me was discussed by **Michael Covington**, author of *Astrophotography for the Amateur*. Covington

talked about *Digital SLR Astrophotography*, which is also the title of his newest book. I had hoped he would have it available for purchase so I could buy one and have it autographed, but it was not on the market yet. He had brought along a copy of the author's proof sheets for folks to look at, though.

The absolute highlight of my trip was the door prize session. As Michael Covington entered the tent he told the moderator that he was donating his author's proofs as a door prize. All of the door prizes were on a table, and after each number was drawn the winner could have his pick of all the prizes available.

My ticket was the third one drawn, and Michael's proofs had not yet been taken. You would have thought my butt had a spring in it from the way I leaped up and went straight to the book. They stopped drawing for prizes while Michael autographed the manuscript for me.

I have a large collection of photography books, several of them autographed by the authors. This one by Michael Covington will be at the top of the list of my most prized possessions.

It has been not quite a year since I first looked at a Hubble photo and was blown away by its beauty. I know enough about photography to know I will never make a photo comparable to that Hubble astrophoto, but I have seen photos made by amateurs that are quite impressive. My quest is to join the ranks of those who make such exquisite and lovely photos. The experiences I'm having, the things I'm learning and the people I'm meeting along the way are making the journey even more rewarding.

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