

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

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

Vol. 11, No. 8 October, 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**.

Webmaster, **David Ward** and **Tom Moore**;
Ga. Sky View/Astronomy Day Coordinator,
Steve Knight; Observing Chairman/Public
Observing Coordinator, **Larry Higgins**;
Program Co-Chairmen: **Larry Higgins** and
Bill Warren; Publicity: **Curt Cole**; NASA
contact: **Felix Luciano**; and Event
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Club Calendar. Fri.-Sat., Oct. 5-6: Cox
Field observings (at dark); **Thurs., Oct. 11:**
club meeting (7:30 p.m. at Stuckey Hall on the
UGa-Griffin campus); **Fri.-Sat., Oct. 12-13:**

Cox field observings (at dark); and **Mon.,
Oct. 22:** public observing (7:30-9:30 p.m.,
Fayetteville Public Library).

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Vice President's Message. Okay, it's
official: *It's Baaaaaaaaaack!!!*

Georgia Sky View 2008 has been
reinstated, with **Steve Knight** in charge. It'll
be a 3-day, 2-night weekend star party,
running from April 4th-6th.

Steve says he is planning to lower the fees
this year and go back to our original \$26
registration fee. So what was already an
incredible bargain will be even more
affordable next year than it was in 2007.

Frankly, I like the idea of reducing the
registration fee. **Sam Walton**, Wal-Mart's
founder, proved that offering lower prices
attracts customers in droves. The fact that not
one, but *two* of the ten richest Americans are
heirs of Sam Walton shows that his philosophy
wasn't too far off the mark.

To break even, Steve says, we need 39
registrants. But we're aiming a whole lot
higher than that. Steve is right when he says
that we aren't hosting a star party to raise
money – but he's equally correct in
anticipating having to set a cutoff point of 125
attendees, because bargains attract customers
the way cookouts attract flies. How many
registrants we wind up with next April will
depend on how many people we can reach
with our message that *If you're an astronomer
who wants a Big Bang for your Buck\$, Ga.
Sky View '08 is the place to be next April 4th-
6th.*

At any rate, thanks for caring about FRAC.
Just remember, we care about you, too.

Finally, here's a warm "Welcome Back!" to **Dan Pillatzki**, who rejoined the club at the Sept. meeting. Those of you who don't know Dan will find that he fits in very nicely with our regular cast of merrie misfits.

-**Bill Warren**, Vice President

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. We had 8 members – **Larry Higgins, Joel Simmons, Steve & Betty Bentley**, the two **Tom's (Danei & Moore)**, **Curt Cole** and yr. editor -- at our 1st Cox Field Fri. observing in Oct.; and 9 more attendees -- **Charles Anstey, Felix Luciano, Larry H., Heather Sherbourne**, yr. editor and four guests (**Randi Higgins, Marilyn & Yarden Lewis** and a friend) -- on Sat. evening.

Highlights of the Fri. session included a rather bizarre discussion among Tom M., Steve and Larry about who had the smallest hole – referring, of course, to the amount of visible sky available from their backyards.

Tom won that particular debate. When, several years ago, we had our Dec. meeting and party at Tom & Katie's home, **Steve Knight** brought along his brand-new 14-in. Dob. Eager to try it out, as soon as the meeting was over Steve rushed out, set up his 'scope in the small parking area behind Tom's house, then looked up and asked, "Hey, Tom, where's the sky?"

The other Tom – Danei – was delighted with his new 11-in. Starmaster VersaScope. Joel (among others) was blown away by the richness of the summertime Milky Way on a clear evening. It's an unforgettable sight.

On Sat. evening, Larry took Randi and her friends on a guided tour of the night sky and

its myriad wonders; Heather, closing in on her 1st A. L. pin, tracked down targets on the Double Star list; and yr. editor, testing the murky waters of the Planetary Nebula Club, found three easy targets but, despite the noble assistance of Felix and Charles, was unable to locate the faint (mag. 11.4), tiny (14") disk of **NGC 6147** in *Aquila*.

We had 16 members at our Sept. FRAC meeting, including **Dan Pillatzki**, who joined the club at the meeting. Other attendees included: **Steve & Betty Bentley, Tom & Brit Danei, Ken Poshedly, Steve Knight, Charles, Erica & Jeffrey Anstey, Alan & Sally Bolton, Joel Simmons, Larry Higgins, Tom Moore** and yr. editor, who served as moderator for the discussion that followed.

The main order of business was, of course, *discussing and voting on matters pertaining to FRAC's star party, Georgia Sky View*. Including five absentee ballots, a total of 16 votes were cast, representing 57% of the membership list.

Four basic questions were discussed and voted on. Breakdown of the results was as follows:

**Should GSV be held or re-tabled?* (15 votes for having it, 1 vote for re-tabling);

**Should Steve Knight be in charge of every aspect of the event, or should he work under the guidance of a committee of officers and board members?* (12 votes for Steve, 4 votes for committee);

**Should site selection for GSV '08 be limited to best available dates for Camp McIntosh?* (15 Yes votes, 1 No); and

**Which format should be followed, 4 days/3 nights or 3 days/2 nights?* (8 votes for 3/2, 7 votes for 4/3, 1 abstention).

So Yeah, we're gonna hold **GSV '08** at Camp McIntosh as a 3-day, 2-night weekend star party. Steve has already reserved the site for April 4th-6th, so mark it down on your calendar in day-glo colors. (See p. 4.)

And is there anyone on either side of the issues involved who isn't glad the jousting is over and we finally can get back to business as usual and doing what we do best, having fun?

The following Fri. observing session was clouded out, but 10 members showed up the next evening: **Charles Anstey, Tom Moore, Steve & Betty Bentley, Joel Simmons, Felix Luciano, Steve Knight & Angela Smith, Tom Danei** and yr. editor. The evening's highlight (or lowlight, depending on whether you found what we were looking for) was an impromptu search by several of us for the teensy, faint (8" in dia., mag. 11.3) little planetary nebula **PK64+5.1**, better known as **Campbell's Hydrogen Star**.

Charles was the first to find it, using his computerized 11-in. Celestron. Yr. editor never found it, of course, but Steve B. quickly located it in his 18-in. Obsession, using an O-III nebula filter.

Which reminds us: we need to resurrect the "Katie's Club" observing award certificate, which was intended to honor just such difficult but ultimately successful manual searches for things that no rational human has any business searching for, far less finding. ("Katie" was, of course, **Katie Moore**, who, on a cloudy evening several years ago, found **The Trapezium** at a light-polluted public observing site where only naked-eye **Betelgeuse** could be seen in *Orion*.)

For that matter, we also need to resurrect our "Zombie Observer" award program that

recognizes members who stay up all night observing. **Larry Higgins** developed the Zombie concept, 'way back when he was observing chairman of the Atlanta Astronomy club.

On Sept. 20th, **Steve Bentley** and yr. editor gave a talk on the constellations to 2nd graders in the Beaverbrook Elementary School library. It felt like homecoming.

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This 'n That. For whatever reason, we're seeing a rather dramatic upsurge in time spent at the telescope by our Cox Field participants, and we think it's a very healthy sign. Part of it is due to increased attendance at our club observings, of course – but several members have also become involved in various A. L. observing club projects.

(For those of you who, like **Charles Anstey, Joel Simmons, Tom Danei, Larry Higgins** and others, have GoTo capabilities, we hasten to point out that *computerized finder systems are perfectly acceptable in no less than 16 of the A. L.'s 28 observing clubs. Some of them – Are you reading this, Charles? – even accept ccd-imaging and astrophotographs.*)

Tom Moore says that, if he had GoTo and the A. L. allowed it in that program, he could finish the Lunar Club in no time flat.

Not likely, Tom. Some people couldn't find pizzas at Papa John's.

*At the Sept. meeting, **Joel Simmons** said something simple yet profound that bears repeating: "I joined FRAC to enjoy my hobby while sharing with folks who have the same interests."

Caught up in the hustle and bustle of modern life, we sometimes forget that we joined FRAC to have fun.

So here's an early New Year's Resolution for you: instead of resolving to lose weight (which, if you're like 99% of the population, isn't going to happen anyway), why don't you resolve to *spend five minutes a day thinking about why you joined FRAC and how you can make your membership as much fun as you hoped it would be when you joined the club?*

(Uh-oh. Now **Larry Higgins** will show up naked at the next meeting.)

Hey, if you want your life to mean more than it does now, just remember that the more you give of yourself, the more you get back in return. The very act of committing yourself to someone or something – *anything*, but in this case, FRAC – will give your life more meaning than it had before you took that step.

From there, it's just a matter of reminding yourself occasionally, as Joel reminded us, why you made that commitment in the first place.

*As you probably noticed, starting with this issue we've deleted most of the phone nos. and e-mail addresses on p. 1. To compensate, we'll be sending out copies of our updated membership lists every 6 months or so.

*From **Steve Bentley**: “At the last meeting, I brought up the idea of selling calendars to help raise funds for the club's treasury. I've ordered and received 30 calendars, already sold one and am buying two more for myself, so that leaves 27 for you. They make great Christmas stocking stuffers.

“The calendars are *Astronomy* magazine's “Deep Sky Mysteries 2008.” They have beautiful full-color photos for each month. They also have ample space on the calendar for penciling in doctor's appointments, birthdays, anniversaries, etc., and include information on upcoming astronomical events, national holidays, moon phases and much more.

“The retail price of the calendars is \$12.95, but we're selling them for \$12. By ordering them for the club (at my own expense, I might add), they cost me \$7.12 apiece. For each sale, \$4.88 will go into the club treasury after I recoup my investment – I put them on my charge card. Not only will you get a very nice calendar at a discounted price, but you'll be helping the club with your purchase. This just might keep our dues down in the future. This endeavor is strictly for the club's benefit, and not mine.

“I'll have the calendars available at the Oct. meeting and every meeting thereafter until they're all sold.”

Yr. editor has used *Astronomy* calendars exclusively for many years, and he can tell you from personal experience that they are absolutely wonderful.

We should remind you, too, that **Tom Danei** has finished the FRAC cd's, and they too will be for sale at our Oct. meeting and thereafter for the low, low price of \$5.00. It's the sort of stocking stuffer you need to buy for yourself, just for being such a nice person.

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Upcoming Events. With the lazy, crazy, *hazy* days of summer largely behind us, the sky appears to be settling down a bit. We had a

total of 27 members and guests at our three Cox Field observings in Sept., and we're hoping for more of the same this month. Our first two Cox Field observings will be on **Fri.-Sat., Oct. 5th-6th**.

Our club meeting, at **7:30 p.m.** on **Thurs., Oct. 11th** in the Stuckey Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus, will feature **Larry Higgins's** entertaining and informative "Astronomy On a Shoestring" talk.

Our second Cox Field observing weekend will be on **Fri.-Sat., Oct. 12th-13th**.

We'll have a public observing at the Fayetteville Public Library from **7:30-9:30** on **Mon., Oct. 22nd**. We've had good crowds there in the past, so we hope you'll be able to attend. If you're new to astronomy, we'll tell you what to find, how to find it and what to tell viewers about what they're seeing.

To get to the Fayetteville library from, say, Griffin, go N on Ga. Hwy 92 (McIntosh Rd.). When you enter the Fayetteville city limits, turn left at the first stoplight to follow 92, then continue to follow 92 by turning right at the Rite Aid (on the left) stoplight. The library and its parking lot (where the observing will be held) are on the left, a mile or more from Rite Aid.

To get to the library from Jonesboro, head W on Ga. Hwy. 54, and when you come to the Hwy. 92/85 intersection, turn left. The library is about two blocks ahead on the right.

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TRADING PLACES

The Wit and Wisdom of Prof. Stargazer

We recently caught up with **Prof. Theophilus Stargazer**, the world's foremost

authority on astronomy, cosmology and dirty Scrabble. Aware of the professor's busy schedule and short attention span, we limited our interview to one question: *If you could be anybody in FRAC, who would you want to be?* Here was the esteemed professor's reply:

"Well, let's see.

"Being **Larry Higgins** would be a real gas, if you take my meaning. His GoTo contains the coordinates for finding the Observe-A-Potty in the dark.

"I could be **Steve Knight**, but I don't think my telescope could take the heat. *(If you're too new to FRAC to understand that, ask Steve about the time he set his 'scope on fire. -Ed.)*

"Trying to be **Bill Warren** would be largely wasted, since apparently the only thing he ever hears is the dinner bell.

"When Bill told me I shouldn't have said he doesn't spell very good, I replied, 'You don't hear very good, either.'

"I'd love to be **Felix Luciano**, whose telescopes, equipment and observing skills are top-of-the-line. But I can't find things in Spanish, and my GoTo was made in China.

"I'd love to have **Dan Newcombe's** wit – and according to most people I'm halfway there.

"Once, in a rage, I told Dan, "**I'm twice the man you are!**" He said, "Yes, and if you don't quit eating so much you'll be *three times* the man I am."

"Then there's **Curt**. What can you say about a guy who believes that dark matter is actually composed of thinly sliced cabbage? He calls his theory Cole's Law."

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