

# THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 1, No. 2

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

April, 1997

**Officers:** President, Larry Higgins (227-2233); 1st Vice President/newsletter editor, Bill Warren (638 Pinehill Rd., Griffin, GA 30223/ 770-229-6108); 2nd Vice President/Secretary-Treasurer, Ken Walburn (954-9442); AICor, Melanie Handy (228-6214); Librarian, Keith Cox (227-8171). Club mailing address: 2431 Old Atlanta Road, Griffin, GA 30223

**Club Calendar:** **Thurs., Apr. 3:** Special Hale-Bopp observing session (7:00, Williamson, see map); **Thurs., Apr. 10:** Meeting (7:30, Beaverbrook Elem., see map); **Fri., Apr. 11:** Observing session, Beaverbrook Elem. (8:30); **Mon., Apr. 14:** Mars observing with Richard Schmude at Gordon College (Barnesville, 7:30); **Fri., Apr. 25:** Observing session, East Coweta H. S. (7:00, see map); **Fri., May 16:** "Relay for Life" observing session (7:30, Flynt Middle School.).

**President's Message.** A bright comet, a lunar eclipse (Mar. 23), a new meeting site (with sanitary facilities!), an exciting April observing schedule, guest speakers who will make you wish we held meetings every week instead of once a month, and an energetic club whose membership is growing by leaps and bounds -- what more could anyone ask for in a new astronomy club? I couldn't be happier with the way things are going.

There's a very nice lady you haven't met yet who is doing a lot to help our club:

she's **Louise Warren**, Bill's wife and media specialist at Beaverbrook. Louise made the FRAC buttons for our club, designed our newsletter, set up the TV, radio and newspaper interviews referred to on p. 3, and arranged for us to have a meeting/observing site where we don't have to risk poison ivy or snakebite in answering nature's call. Louise can't attend our meetings due to a standing commitment on 2nd Thursdays, but that's all right. She's a very important part of our club, and I appreciate all that she is doing for us.

Thanks, too, to Beaverbrook principal **Ken Bozeman** for so graciously allowing us to hold our meetings at his school.

Finally: I hope you'll make plans to attend as many of the observings as possible this month. It's important to the club and our goal of showing the wonders of the heavens to those who haven't seen them -- but it's also important for **you** to take advantage of every opportunity to practice with your scope, binoculars, etc., under the night sky. You learn best by **doing**, and you'll also be helping others in the process.

-Larry Higgins

**Cox Named Club Librarian.** In addition to persuading his parents to allow FRAC to observe on their property in Williamson, Keith has also graciously volunteered to house and maintain our club library. Thanks, Keith!

**Mar. 7 Observing Session.** Nineteen people showed up for the club's first official observing session held at Sunnyside on Mar. 7. Skies were clear and the weather mild, but "seeing" was less than ideal due to an earlier brush fire somewhere nearby. The diehards -- Larry, Ken Walburn and Smitty -- finally packed it in about 2 a.m.

Incidentally: I'll have pencils, paper, and even a couple of clipboards available at all meetings and observing sessions, in case anyone wants to take notes or make rough sketches of what they see, etc. And while I'm on my soapbox, let me say this: if you're a beginner who doesn't know much about the night sky, telescopes, or whatever, please don't be shy about asking Larry, me, Smitty, or other "experienced" stargazers for help. We may not have all the answers, but we can help you find them. That's what we're here for. Our goal is for you to leave every meeting and observing session glad that you came and looking forward to the next one.

Let me show you NGC 2362, a lovely little open cluster in Canis Major, and help you find the small green planetary nebula NGC 2392 (the Eskimo or Clown Face Nebula) in Gemini that Art Russell writes about in this month's "Star Hops" -- and then maybe you'll help me find M33 in Triangulum. It's the only winter Messier object I haven't seen. If I miss it now, it'll be six months before it's up again.

**Mar. 13 Meeting.** Now, you tell us: Was Jerry Armstrong everything we said he'd be, or not? What an impressive start for our speaker series! As is always true of multi-talented individuals, Jerry is a very busy person with great demands on his time; we thank him and his wife Judy for taking time to visit and share Jerry's knowledge, experiences and talent with us -- and for donating the first book to our

club library as well.

Thanks, too, to Larry for the long hours and hard work he's put into getting our club off the ground and into the night skies in such splendid fashion. Next time you find yourself enjoying a meeting or having a good time at an observing session, be sure to tell Larry about it before you leave. In a very real sense, we wouldn't even have a club if not for his vision, commitment, experience and leadership.

**Upcoming FRAC Meetings.** The April 10 meeting will be held at our new meeting site, the media center of Beaverbrook Elementary School. (Coming from Jonesboro, turn right off 19/41 onto Birdie Road at the 3rd blinking light past Atlanta Motor Speedway; from Griffin, turn left at the 1st blinking light past Cronic Chevrolet.) The school is set back off the road to the right at the bottom of the hill. (See map.) Our speaker will be **Rich Jakiel**, editor of the Atlanta Astronomy Club's newsletter, The Focal Point. Rich, an authority on deep-sky observing, has written several articles for the astronomy magazines. His latest article, "Exploring Southern nebulae," appeared in the Jan., 1997, issue of **Astronomy**. Rich's slide presentation will highlight the "Virgo Cluster," a group of about 3,000 galaxies 65 million light-years from Earth and located in the area of the sky where the constellations Virgo, Coma Berenices and Leo converge. The Virgo Cluster includes 18 Messier objects, making it doubly important to anyone who (like me) is trying to earn a Messier pin by observing all 110 -- actually, 109 -- Messier objects.

The speaker at our May meeting will be **Richard Schmude** of Gordon College. His subject will be the planet Mars; after the meeting we'll adjourn to the field to observe Mars under Richard's direction.

We'll remind you again next month to bring your telescope to the May meeting.

We've tentatively scheduled **Art Russell** of AAC to speak at our June meeting. Art's topic will be "Star-Hopping for Beginners." Miss your cousin's wedding if you must, but **don't** miss Art's appearance at FRAC. Your cousin will forgive you eventually, but you'll never forgive yourself if you miss Art's talk.

**FRAC in the News.** On Thursday, March 6, club president Larry Higgins appeared on the nightly news show hosted by Henry Lunsford of **WCOM-TV**, Griffin's local Channel 9. The show aired at 6:00 p.m., and was re-broadcast at 10:00 p.m.

Larry was also telephone interviewed by Griffin radio station **WKEU**'s Eddie Whitlock on Saturday, March 8. The interview was aired several times during the following week.

Matt Matich, a staff writer for the **Griffin Daily News**, interviewed Bill Warren and Ken Walburn at the March 13 club meeting. His article, "Area residents form group to study stars," described the club's activities, interests, and purposes, and appeared on p. 1-A of the March 14 **GDN**. A photo taken at the meeting appeared in the "Camera on the Go" section of the **GDN** on March 21.

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### **Newsflash: FRAC Club Members Will Display Universe to Public!**

by Steven "Saratoga Smitty" Smith

When it comes to the night sky, many people don't know one star from another. Most of the general public has never looked at any celestial object through a telescope. What has become known as

"sidewalk" observing began a few years ago when John Dobson set up his telescope on the sidewalks of San Francisco for people to look through.

If everyone who owns a telescope were to show something of our universe to 100 people, most of the general public still would not know how small this speck of fragile space dust called Earth is. If every scope owner were to allow 1,000 people to view through his or her eyepiece, the proportion of informed public would still be very low. Unfortunately, some telescope owners do not let outsiders look through their instruments, and others -- GASP! -- charge a fee for a view of the cosmos!

Some of us regard ourselves as "Sidewalk Astronomers," however: when we aim our telescopes skyward anyone who wants to view the universe through them can do so -- at no cost. Sidewalk observing can be done anywhere: your yard or a driveway, a public park, a campground, or a school. Anywhere and anytime you share your view of the heavens with the public you are performing sidewalk astronomy and, in my opinion, you are adding a little to the good of mankind.

A FRAC sidewalk observing session for East Coweta High School's astronomy class and the general public as well is scheduled for Friday evening, April 25, in the school's football stadium. We need as many club members and their telescopes and binoculars as we can get to help out. Will you join us and become a "Sidewalk Astronomer" for the evening?

A map to ECHS appears in this newsletter. You can call me at (770) 583-2200 for more information regarding the location, weather conditions, etc. I hope to see you there!

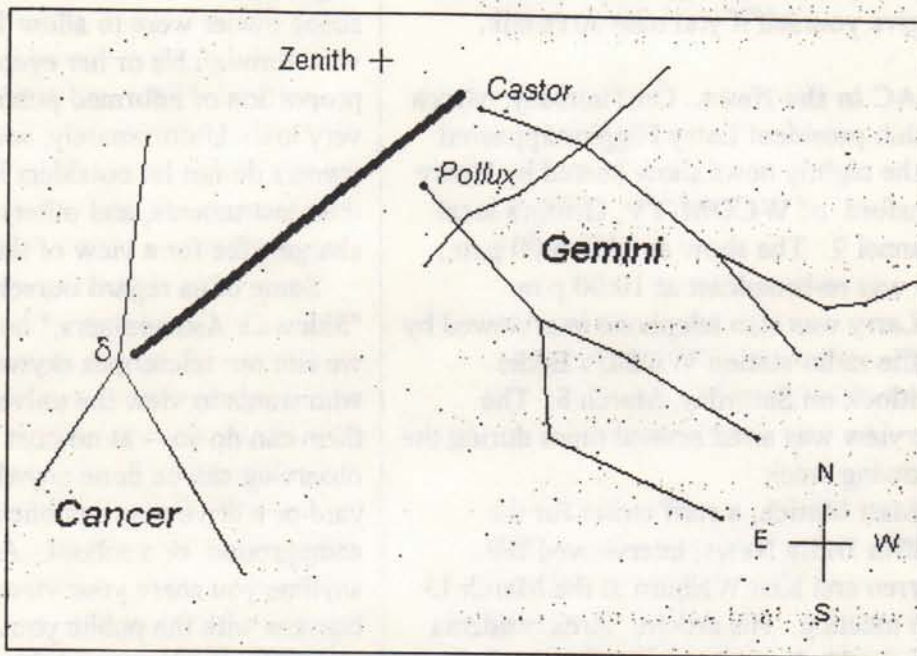
## Beginner's Star-Hops; March, 1997

By Art Russell

Look out! The weather is improving. But, remember March 1993. Just when it looked as if it were time to bid adieu to "Old Man Winter," blam, the "Blizzard of '93!" So look out, winter weather can still have its way with us!

Last month we visited several deep-sky objects located in the constellation of Gemini, "The Celestial Twins." This month we'll jump from them to the constellation of Cancer, "The Crab," as a preface which will lead us in May to the Virgo cluster of galaxies! In the meantime, this month, we'll take a look at two of Messier's open clusters, a double star, and a galaxy which you may be able to find even with smaller telescopes.

The way to Cancer is relatively easy under dark skies if you start in last month's constellation, Gemini. Extend an imaginary line southeast from Gemini's prominent stars of Castor, Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) Geminorum, and Pollux, Beta ( $\beta$ ) Geminorum, for a little less than 20 degrees, or the distance spanned by your outstretched hand held at arm's



length against the night sky. There, you'll find the dim star Delta ( $\delta$ ) Cancri. You'll immediately notice that Cancer is a dim constellation. For best viewing, you'll want to get as far away as possible from city lights and light pollution in order to easily find this constellation.

**Star-Hop #1. M44, NGC 2632, "Praesepe" or "The Beehive Cluster."** Locating M44 from Delta ( $\delta$ ) Cancri is typically very simple. In fact, even under moderately light polluted skies, you'll typically be able to see M44 as a naked eye object well before you ever locate Delta Cancri. However, if you must star-hop, it is only about 2 degrees, or twice the distance spanned by your little finger held at arm's length against the night sky, to the northeast. Here, the glow of M44's many stars is immediately visible, even under a full Moon. Needless to say, adding even a little magnification, such as you might in using a set of binoculars, will immediately reveal a multitude of stars. In moderate sized telescopes, even more stars are visible and they may in fact take on the shape of a "Martini Glass" in appearance. However, don't use to big a telescope or add too much power. This is a large open cluster and with larger scopes or higher powers you will look *through the cluster* and miss out on its beauty!

**Star-Hop #2. M67, NGC 2682.** M67 is a much smaller and much dimmer open cluster than M44. You won't be able to see this open cluster with your naked eyes. If you can, please donate your eyes to me! However, even though M67 is 1/3 the diameter of M44, it is comprised of more than twice as many stars, although they are all much dimmer. Locate M67 by starting at Delta Cancri and extending an imaginary line a little less than eight degrees, or a little less than 4 times the distance between Delta Cancri and M44, to the southeast to find the dim star Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) Cancri. M67 is located less than 2 degrees or twice the distance spanned by your little finger at arm's length against the night sky, due west of Alpha Cancri. You will be able to find M67 in a set of common binoculars, but you will only resolve a few stars. The

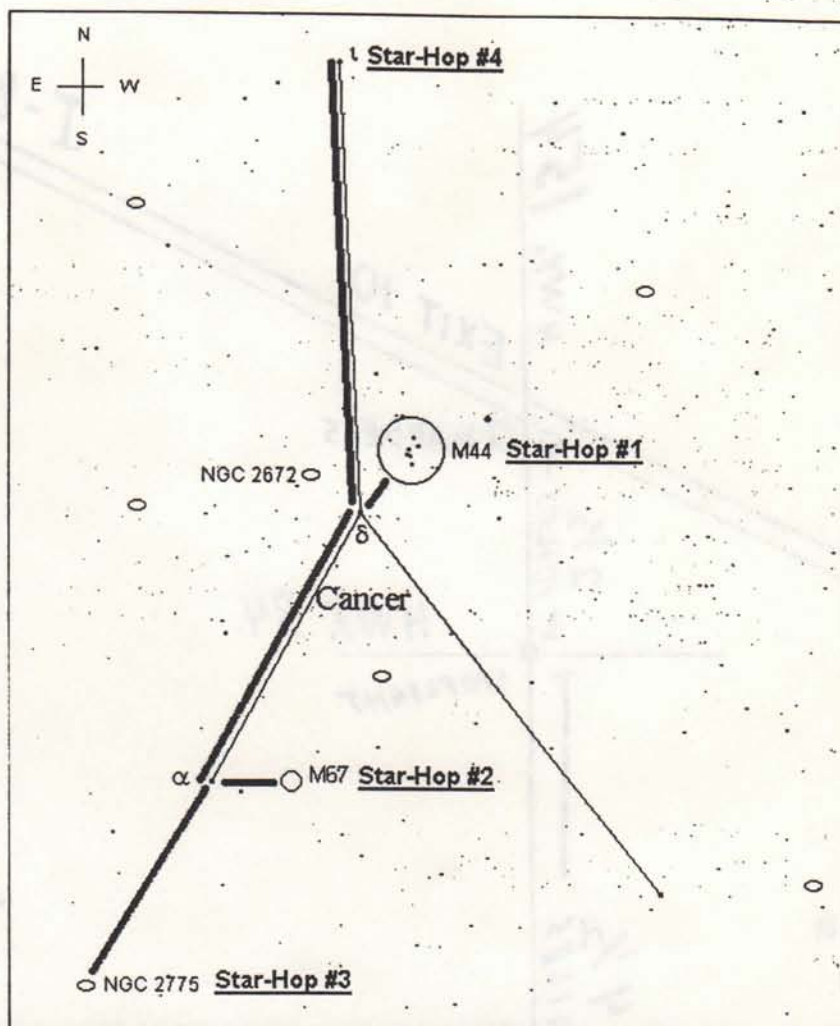
remaining stars in this open cluster will appear as a nebulous haze. In moderate sized telescopes at moderate power, many of the stars will appear resolved, however, many more will still remain to be resolved at even higher powers.

### Star-hop #3. NGC 2775.

Other than Cancer's notable open clusters, M44 and M67, Cancer is really a constellation of galaxies, even though it doesn't have that reputation. In fact, under very dark skies, you can find as many as 9 galaxies visible within the boundaries of M44.

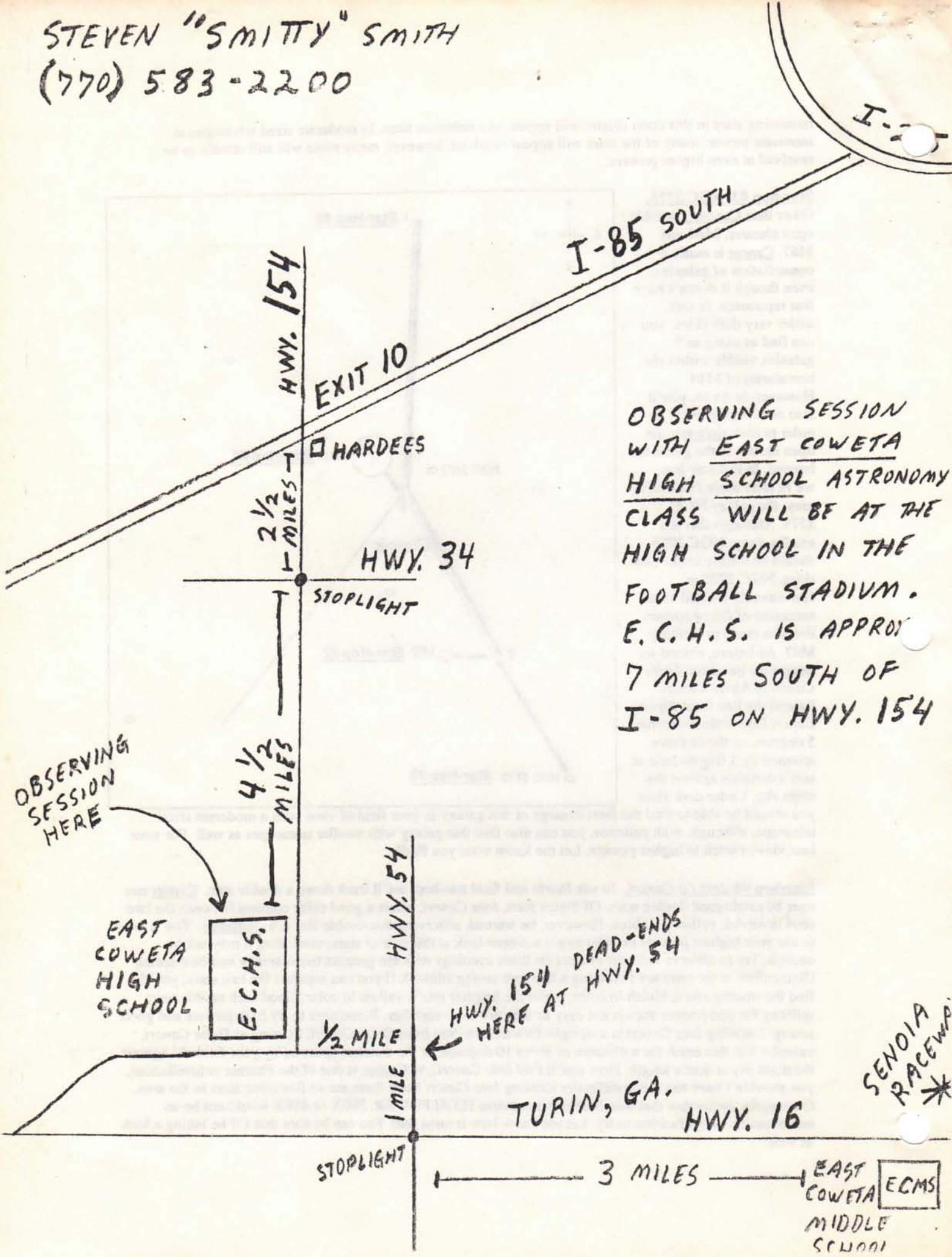
However, to do so, you'll also need high powers in order to look through the open cluster to the galaxies beyond. In this star-hop, we're after more fascinating prey, the galaxy NGC 2775. Although this is a small galaxy, NGC 2775 should be visible under dark skies. NGC 2775 is conveniently located as an extension of the imaginary line you made in locating M67. As before, extend an imaginary line from Delta Cancri to Alpha Cancri. Extend the line from Alpha Cancri for a little more than 5 degrees, or the distance spanned by 3 fingers held at arm's distance against the night sky. Under dark skies

you should be able to find the faint smudge of this galaxy in your field of view with a moderate sized telescope, although, with patience, you can also find this galaxy with smaller telescopes as well. For your best view, switch to higher powers. Let me know what you find!



Star-hop #4. Iota (i) Cancri. In our fourth and final star-hop, we'll track down a double star. Cancer has over 80 catalogued double stars. Of these stars, Iota Cancri, offers a good color contrast between the two stars involved; yellow and blue. However, be warned, observing this double star is a challenge! You'll need to use your highest powers in order to get a proper look at this pair of stars; even then, it may not be enough. Try to observe this pair of stars on those evenings with the greatest transparency and best seeing (Remember, if the stars are twinkling a lot, your seeing stinks!). If you can separate the two stars, you'll find the smaller star is bluish in color, while the brighter star is yellow in color. Good luck on this pair; splitting the component stars is not easy as they are close together. Remember to try high powers and good seeing! Locating Iota Cancri is a straight-forward star-hop from Delta Cancri. Starting at Delta Cancri, extend a line due north for a distance of about 10 degrees, or the distance spanned by your fist held against the night sky at arm's length. Here you'll find Iota Cancri. As Cancer is one of the dimmer constellations, you shouldn't have too much difficulty locating Iota Cancri since there are so few other stars in the area. Once again, remember that this double star requires HIGH POWER. 300X or 400X would not be an unreasonable magnification to try. Let me know how it turns out! You can be sure that I'll be taking a look as well!

STEVEN "SMITTY" SMITH  
(770) 583-2200



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OBSERVING SESSION HERE

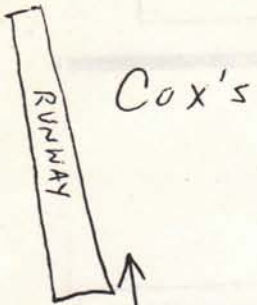
EAST COWETA HIGH SCHOOL

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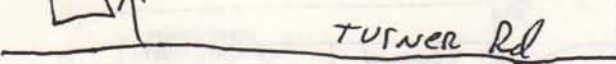
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SENOLIA RACEWAY \*

EAST COWETA MIDDLE SCHOOL ECMS

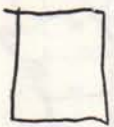


Cox's

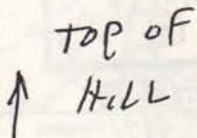


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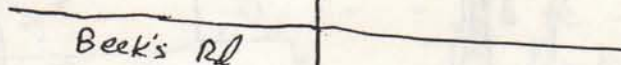
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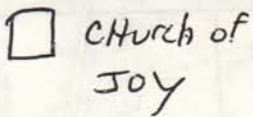
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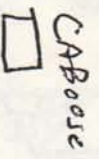
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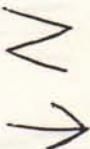
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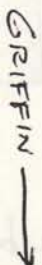
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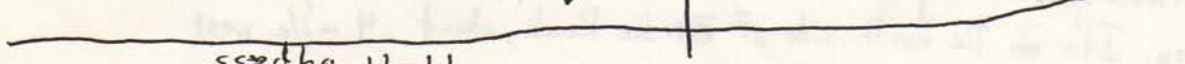
CABOOSE



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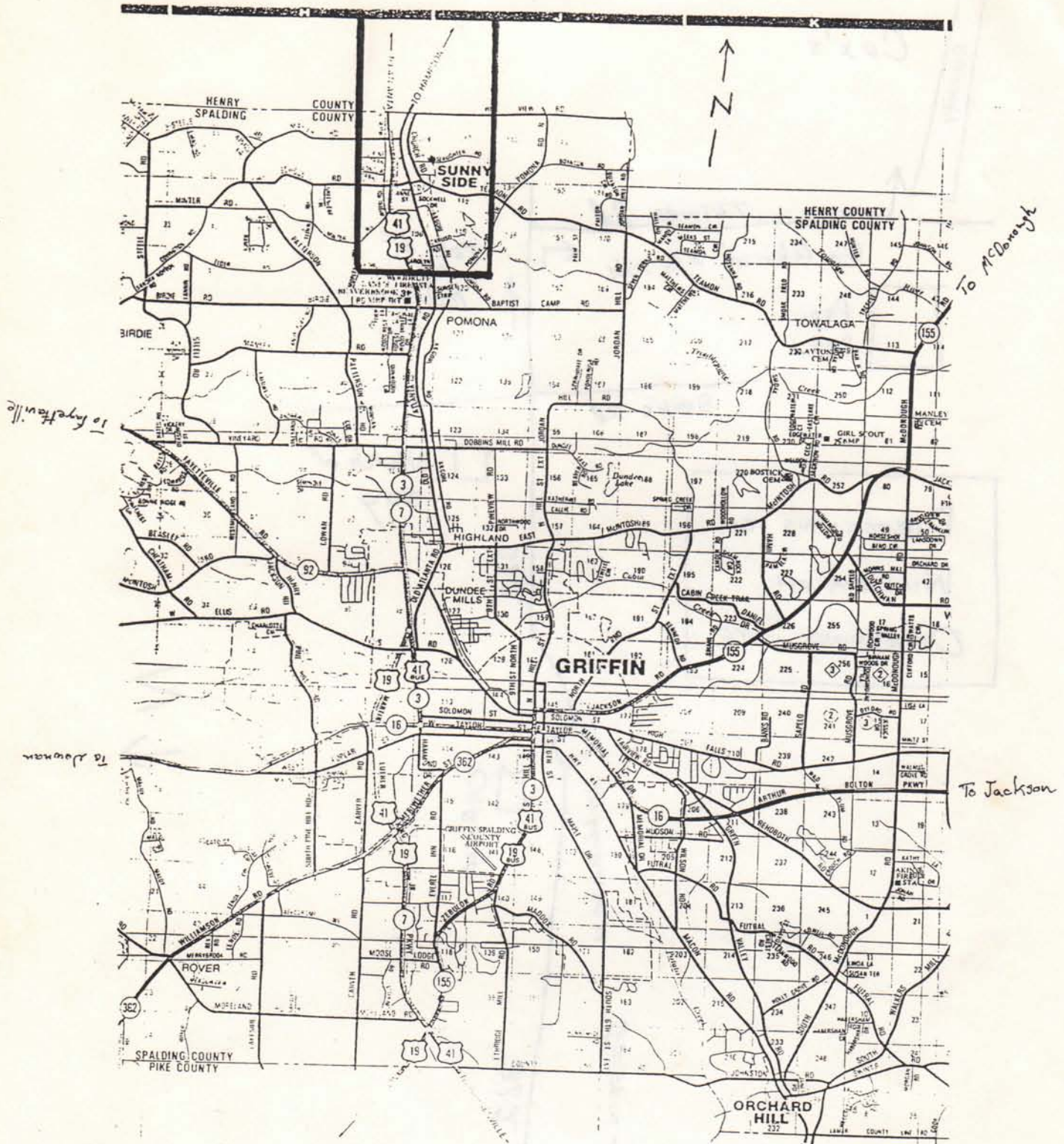


GRIFFIN



1941 Bypass

# DIRECTIONS TO BEAVERBROOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



Beaverbrook is just below the dark rectangle at the top of the map. It's on the north side of Birdie Road, about .4 mile west of 19/41, at the bottom of the hill.