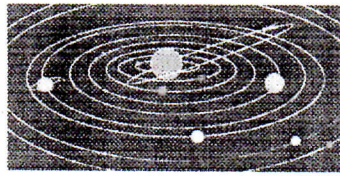


THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



Vol. 5, No. 2

FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

April, 2001

Officers: President, **Larry Higgins:** (770) 884-3982; <larrylhiggins@yahoo.com>; Vice President/newsletter editor, **Bill Warren:**(770) 229-6108<warren1212@mindspring.com>; Secretary (**Dawn Knight**)/Treasurer (**Steve Knight**): (770)227-9871, membership renewals to Steve at 114 Central Lake Circle, Griffin, GA 30223 <sdknight@bellsouth.net>; AlCor, **Neal Wellons**, and Web Site Coordinator, **Cody Wellons**, (770)946-5039; Librarian, **Katie Moore** (770)228-6447. Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. FRAC web page: <<http://welcome.to/frac>>.

Please notify **Bill Warren** promptly if you have a change of address or e-mail.

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Club Calendar. Thurs., Apr. 12: FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook media center, 7:30); **Fri., Apr. 13:** BB observing (at dark); **Fri.--Sat., Apr. 20-21:** Cox Field observings, at dark; **Sat., Apr. 28:** Astronomy Day observing at the Griffin Kroger store (12:00-whenever); **Sat., May 5th:** Astronomy Day rainout date.

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Vice President's Message. I've said it before in those rare moments when I stop slinging the bovine excrement, but it bears repeating:

FRAC IS THE BEST ASTRONOMY CLUB IN THE UNIVERSE, BECAUSE IT HAS THE BEST PEOPLE. From the very

best among you all the way down to **Larry Higgins**, I wouldn't trade *any* of you for *anyone* in *any* other astronomy club, *anywhere*. (Did I get enough *anys* in there? If not, I love you all, *anyway*.) I can't imagine a better group of people for me to be around as I slide

head-first into second childhood and senility than *you*, my fellow FRACsters and funsters. How we've managed to amass such a congenial, compatible -- and *caring* -- group in only four short years is frankly beyond me, but I consider myself blessed to so often enjoy the privilege of your company.

Case In Point #1: The folks at Beaverbrook have never asked anything of us to balance out our monthly use of their school, its facilities and equipment; they have been unfailingly grateful for whatever efforts we've made to support astronomy in their school. Well, this month they asked -- and **boy!**, did we respond!

As you'll read elsewhere, BB needs money to finance an important undertaking at their school, and we were asked to chip in whatever we could afford to help defray their expenses. Given the tight finances that result from trying to keep our dues low, I couldn't see us giving more than \$10-\$25 to help out the school, esp. with our A.L. dues coming up in May. I asked for donations anyway, though -- and before you could say "I gave at the office," the 15 members present at our "birthday party" club meeting dug deep enough into their wallets to present **\$117.00** to the school -- *enough money to pay for nearly 50 of the more than 600 tee shirts they're buying for their students to wear at the school's "Beaverbrook Master School Celebration" to be held on March 30th!*

Jerry Williams started the ball rolling with a \$20 bill, and after that Steve said the money came in so fast that he couldn't keep up with who was giving how much. It didn't matter, though. The point was made. When it mattered most, our club responded in an overwhelmingly positive manner.

If you weren't there but would like to chip

in with whatever you think is appropriate -- well, they'll be happy to accept your donation. Even if the festivities are over as you're reading this, the debt remains, as does our debt of gratitude to Beaverbrook for hosting our club for the past four years. You can give cash or a check for any amount (made out to Beaverbrook Elementary School) to **Steve or Dawn Knight, Larry Higgins, or me.**

Case In Point #2: When I told **Chuck Hancock** how much I liked his Masters (golf) hat, he didn't give it to me as I requested jokingly -- but at the next club meeting Chuck gave me a Masters ball marker that resembles an A. L. observing pin.

What Chuck didn't know when he gave me the ball marker is that his thoughtfulness will allow me to lord it over AAC's **Phil Sacco**, who will be eligible for an A.L. "Masters" pin when that program gets underway: when I get my 10th pin and qualify for an A.L. Masters pin, I'll be the only person in the world (including Phil) with two different -- and authentic -- Masters pins. Thanks, Chuck.

And thanks again, on behalf of **Larry H.** as well as me, to everyone in FRAC for showing in such a very convincing manner how much your club means to you.

-Bill Warren

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Just as a professional mechanic would never expect to make a living with cheap discount store tools, the knowledgeable amateur (astronomer) does not expect to enjoy astronomy with a discount store telescope...The vast majority of telescopes sold today...are of such poor quality that they will teach people to hate astronomy.

-Robert Haler
The Reflector, Feb. 2001, p. 14

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. Seven FRAC members -- **Tom, Katie & Kathy Moore, Dawn & Steve Knight, Larry Higgins** and **yr. editor** -- showed the sky to about half a dozen members of the GHS

Science Club on Mar. 1st.

Fifteen members showed up to celebrate FRAC's fourth birthday party on Mar. 8th, which included an astronomy cake by **Roxanne Ward** and other tasty goodies by **Dawn Knight** and her mother. We watched Part One of "The Astronomers," which included footage of **John Dobson** and his "Let me *shooow* you the sky!" approach to astronomy. Dobson's revolutionary mounting system brought new meaning to the term large as applied to amateur telescopes. Fifty years ago, **Steve K.**'s "Big Boy" would have been one of a handful of the largest -- and therefore most expensive -- amateur telescopes on the planet. For that -- and for the "sidewalk astronomy" concept he developed -- John Dobson probably is the most influential amateur astronomer of our time, ahead of such notable overachievers as **Walter "Scotty" Huston, Carl Sagan, Eugene Shoemaker, and Ken Walburn.**

We had 14 in attendance at our Feb. 27th Cox Field observing: **Larry Higgins, Dan Byous, Mike Stuart** and his wife, **Steve & Dawn Knight, Tim Astin, Katie & Tom Moore, Larry Fallin, David Ward, yr. editor** and two visitors.

There were 15 members and four guests at our Mar. 23rd observing: **Tim Astin, Chuck Beckham** (with his CCD-imaging gear), **Ken Wilson** (with his new 10" Meade LX200), **Dan Byous, Larry Higgins, Larry Fallin, Steve & Dawn Knight, Mike & Danielle Stuart, Donald Harden, Joe Auriemma & 2** guests from San Antonio, **Katie & Tom Moore, yr. editor** and two other visitors. Larry F. was the only attendee to seriously pursue the Messier Marathon, finishing with 84 Messiers at 6:00 a.m. when the clouds rolled in before sunrise. ("My total logged Messiers to date is 96," he informed us.)

Both Steve K. and Larry F. found a really neat early evening sight: **The Trapezium** without its accompanying nebulosity.

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Membership Renewals Due in April: **Alex & Nelda Langoussis; and Robert Hall.** Send your \$12 check made out to **Steve Knight** and

signify for "FRAC dues" at the bottom of the check. Steve's address is listed on p. 1.

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There is a theory that if ever anyone discovers exactly what the universe is for and why it is here, it will instantly disappear and be replaced by something even more bizarre and inexplicable. There is another theory which states that this has already happened.

-Douglas Adams,

The Restaurant at the End of the Universe

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This 'n That. BEAVERBROOK ATTAINS MASTER SCHOOL STATUS. Under the capable guidance of principal **Ken Bozeman** and media specialist **Louise Warren**, Beaverbrook became only the 2nd school in Georgia -- and the 7th in the U. S. -- to achieve "Master School" status in the highly acclaimed Reading Renaissance/Accelerated Reader program used by more than 55,000 schools across the nation. To celebrate their accomplishment, BB is planning a day of festivities on **Mar. 30th**, at which time the students will be presented with "Master School" tee shirts that were partly funded by contributions from FRAC members at our March club meeting.

Ken and Louise want to thank everyone in FRAC for assisting in making their dream a reality. Those in attendance at our Mar. meeting included **Dawn & Steve Knight, Larry Higgins, Larry Fallin, Ken Walburn, Mike & Danielle Stuart, Donald Harden, Tim Astin, Joe Auriemma, Chuck Hancock, Charles Sykes, Neal Wellons, Jerry Williams** and yrs. truly.

*e-mail changes: **Mike Stuart**
<mgstul@peoplepc.com>

*"Blowing the Lid Off a Clever Scheme to Bilk FRAC of Untold Millions of Dollars of Member Contributions": An Investigative Report by **Bill Warren, FRAC's Ace Investigative Reporter.** At last it can be told: upon taking office as club treasurer, **Steve**

Knight and his seductively beautiful accomplice **Dawn** (a.k.a. "Dawn") planned to drain our bank account and run off to Tahiti for a lifetime of revelry, carousing and feasting at the expense of our honest, hard-working members.

Unfortunately, when Steve went to the bank to enact the pair's nefarious scheme, he found that he had to pay \$2.50 to get the account back up to zero. (Those pesky A. L. dues, y'know.)

Now, instead of eating roast pig on Bora Bora, the Knights plan to share a bag of Fritos at Cox Field -- if and when our bank balance ever gets high enough to warrant such a hefty expenditure, that is.

(And if you believe any of this nonsense, you obviously aren't aware of the concept of using fillers to avoid leaving empty spaces in newspapers, magazines, etc.).

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. Our club meeting on **Thurs., Apr. 8th**, will feature a guided tour of the Spring Messiers by **yr. humble editor**. To spice things up, we're also including a brief stroll through **Markarian's Chain**, a notable string of galaxies that begins with the "**Smiley Face**" in *Virgo* and ends at **M88** in *Coma Berenices*.

We'll hold our monthly BB observing on the following night, **Fri., Apr. 9th**, in front of the school.

Our Cox Field observings this month will be **Fri.-Sat., Apr. 20th-21st**. (See **Lyrids Meteor Shower**, p. 4.)

To celebrate this year's Astronomy Day, we'll set up our telescopes in the Griffin Kroger parking lot on **Sat., April 28th (rainout date: Sat., May 5th)** and show customers the Sun during the daylight hours and whatever features are visible from there on Sat. evening. Anyone who has a solar filter is requested to bring it for the observing, which will start at noon on the 28th and will continue for as long as people show an interest in stopping by to look at the sky.

To get to Kroger's from, say, Jonesboro, come S on Hwy. 19/41 through Hampton, past Birdie Rd., Hardee's and McDonald's, and

through the spotlight at McIntosh Road (Hwy. 92). Make a U-turn at the Ky. Fried Chicken on the left, then go N past Western Sizzlin Steak House and turn right at the Blockbuster video store. Kroger will be ahead on the left.

Our May meeting, which will feature **Richard Jakiel**, AAC's Observing Chairman and author of "More Bridges, Tails and Rings" in the May '01 issue of *Sky & Telescope* (pp. 124-126), as our guest speaker. Rich's talk will deal with "Amateur Contributions to the Study of Astronomy Throughout History"; it's a subject we've been trying to get him to write a book about for several years now.

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As marvelous as the stars is the mind of the person who studies them.

-Dr. Martin Luther King (1929-1968)

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The Sky in April. As two familiar players, **Jupiter** and **Saturn**, make their exits this month after delightfully extended visits, **Venus** becomes a morning star and **Mars**, never a rival for them in size or brightness but easily detectable in any telescope or binoculars, rises at about 2 a.m. The April issue of *Astronomy* (p. 63) offers tips for observing the red planet, and the May issue of *Sky & Tel* has two articles on Mars, including a cover story (p. 102), "A Grand Return of Mars": "The red planet has begun its best apparition since 1988. Here's a telescope user's guide to Mars for the coming months."

With a good E horizon you can spot **Mercury** before dawn during the first week of April. (Note: If, like your addeleated editor, you tend to focus your attention on one thing to the exclusion of everything else when observing, you might want to wait and observe Mercury when it's in the W sky and the Sun has already set. We don't issue the *Observer* in Braille.)

The **Lyrids Meteor Shower** peaks on the night of **Apr. 21st-22nd**, making it a highly desirable target for our Sat. night observing on the 21st. *Astronomy* says the Lyrids' "swift bright meteors" should appear at a rate of

15-20 per hour that night.

On **Apr. 18th-19th**, 10th-mag. **Comet 24P/Schaumasse** will be just over 2 Moon-widths N of the star **Beta Tauri**. You may see the coma (head) and a faint, small tail at higher telescopic magnifications.

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The moon never beams without bringing me dreams.

-Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

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Rating the A. L. Observing Clubs, Part 4

by **Bill Warren**

(Editor's Note: Last month we looked at the Urban, Meteor, Sunspotters and Planetary clubs. This time we're winding up the series in the rarefied air of the extremely difficult or time-consuming observing projects.)

11. Asteroid Club (25 asteroids for a certificate, 100 for a pin & certificate). Only hard-core enthusiasts will pursue this one, since each asteroid must be sketched "showing the position of the asteroid in relation to the nearby stars" and "each asteroid must be observed at least twice in different positions, and at the time of the 2nd observation you must verify that the object is no longer in the position where it was observed the first time," i.e., you must draw the star field(s) showing where the asteroid was and where it moved to.

One hundred times. With 100 asteroids. Ugh.

They also recommend buying the A. L.'s *A Guide to Asteroid Observing* (4 pp., \$1.00). But I have one if you need to make a copy.

As of Feb., 2001, only 5 Asteroid Club pins had been issued. Guess why.

12. Herschel 400 Club (400 deep-sky objects, including: 102 open clusters, 24 planetary nebulae; 10 diffuse nebulae, some of which also contain open clusters; 34 globular clusters; and 230 galaxies).

If the Messiers whetted your appetite for

deep-sky fare, this project will stuff you like a turkey. About 160 of the targets are relatively easy in any aperture of 6" or larger, and another 80 are no more difficult than most of the Messiers.

My tips regarding the 400s: 1. Use as many atlases as you can get your hands on. *Deep Map 600* is probably the best place to start, since it contains about half of the 400s. (*Sky Atlas 2000.0*, 1st ed., contains 320.) 2. Look for the easiest (i.e., brightest) ones first; it'll give you the confidence you need to keep going when it gets harder, as it will eventually. 3. Have an organized plan of attack. I divided the 400s by seasons, so I always knew which ones to look for when I went out to Cox Field. (I listed the ones in *SA 2000.0* by map numbers, circled the brightest ones to remind me to look for them first, and then tracked them down one by one on each map.) 4. Buy -- or check out our library copy of -- the A. L.'s *Observe the Herschel Objects* (\$7.00); it'll give you an idea of what to expect to see, how to describe it -- you can't use their observations as your own, of course -- and where to find the ones that aren't in *SA 2000.0*.

Kepple & Sanner's 2-vol. *Night Sky Observer's Guide* (\$69.90 for both) contains everything you need to know about virtually all of the Herschel 400 objects (and about 3/4 of the Herschel IIs as well); I just wish it had been available when I was working my way through the 400s. Luginbuhl & Skiff's *Observing Handbook and Catalogue of Deep-Sky Objects* (\$37.95) is almost equally helpful regarding written descriptions of what you're likely to see in 6", 10" and 12" 'scopes, but has few drawings or photos.

I can evaluate your Herschel 400 observing log. (Incidentally, it is permissible to use setting circles [but not a GoTo mechanism] to find the 400s -- but you need an equatorial mounting to do it that way, of course.)

13. Arp Peculiar Galaxies (338 targets, pick any 100). **Halton C. Arp** listed over 300 galaxies as being "peculiar" in that they aren't behaving like "normal" spiral or elliptical galaxies are supposed to do. A peculiarity of this particular A. L. observing club is that,

because many of the Arps involve multiple galaxies, you get credit for an Arp if you observe any one of its members. For example, Arp 85 consists of the peculiar galaxy NGC 5195 and its larger, better-known companion, **M51 (NGC 5194, the Whirlpool Galaxy)**; I observed both of them -- they're so close that you could hardly fail to do so -- but I chose 5195 as being the easier to observe and describe.

At any rate, the Arps include 7 Messiers and 28 Herschel 400s. See me if you're interested in taking on the Arps; I can tell you which 100 are the best targets to go after. First, though, you might want to consider a warning from the A.L.'s Arp Club coordinator: "Since this is an advanced observing program for light buckets, it is recommended that you use a telescope with an aperture of 12.5 inches or larger."

Send your Arp observing logs to the A. L.'s **Mike Benson**, of Nashville, TN.

14. Herschel IIs (400 objects, 323 of which are galaxies). If some of the Herschel 400s were obscenely difficult, the IIs are positively pornographic!, the best and brightest of the latter coming in at mag. 10.5 or fainter. (At writing, I've found 222 of the Herschel IIs after 21 months of searching.) As the A. L. points out, "Most of the objects are between mags. 11 and 13...While an 8-inch aperture under good dark skies will be able to do a good portion of the list, a 10-inch aperture or larger will probably be needed to complete the whole program." So you can't say you weren't warned. (Because they are larger and thus more diffuse, I might add, mag. 13 deep-sky objects are *much* fainter than mag. 13 stars.)

Herschel II observing logs can be evaluated by **Candace Pratt** or **Carole Cole** of the Rose City Astronomers Club, Portland, OR.

15. Southern Skies Binocular Club (100 objects). The difficulty here lies in the sad fact that we can't see all -- or even most -- of the objects on the list from this far north. **Mike Benson** of Nashville, TN, evaluates Southern Skies observing logs.

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