

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER



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FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

January, 2002

Officers: President, **Steve Knight:** (770)227-9871, 114 Central Lake Circle, Griffin, GA 30223 <sdknight@bellsouth.net>; Vice President/newsletter editor, **Bill Warren:** <warren1212@mindspring.com>, (770)229-6108; Secretary/Treasurer, **Dawn Knight** (see above); AICor, **Neal Wellons**, and Web Site Coordinator, **Cody Wellons:** (770)946-5039; Librarian, **Tom 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., Jan. 10: FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook, 7:30); **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 11-12 and Fri.-Sat., Jan. 18-19:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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President's Message. *FIFTY.* That's a good, round number. It represents half a century, half a dollar, and the number of memberships we currently have. Yep, believe it or not, we have **fifty** members now, our most ever. I'm happy to have all of you with us; it's a sign that FRAC is growing stronger every day.

I want to thank everyone who came to the Christmas party at Milano's. We had a great time, enjoying some really good food, and we got to spend some regular time together without worrying about things like programs, what to do next, etc. It was great seeing so many spouses and children present. I think we need to do that more often as a change of pace from what we normally do, so I'm going to throw down a challenge right here:

How about us having another "dinner on

the grounds for the Coxses -- say, this spring, in April or thereabouts? I'll put it together like I did last time if necessary -- but I'd like to see someone else step up and organize it this time. In doing so you'll find out, as I did, why our club is so very special.

Dawn and I are going back to Chiefland next March for the Messier Marathon; if the Marathon can be done anywhere, it's there. Three or four members have said they want to go, and so can you. It costs just \$5 a night to camp there, slightly more if you use things that take a lot of power such as heaters, griddles, etc. I'll check on the Messier Marathon Challenge that *Sky & Tel* ran a few years ago and will enter us if they are doing it again; if not, we'll give our own certificates.

We have some neat things in the works, and this is going to be our best year ever. Don't forget, at the Jan. meeting we'll discuss the need to improve our involvement with Beaverbrook. We'll entertain any and all ideas on the subject.

Thanks for hanging in there with us during the last few months of transition. Things are going more smoothly now and will only get better.

-Steve Knight

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. We had **30** members and guests in attendance at our December dinner meeting at Milano's, an all-time high for any FRAC function or activity. In a disgusting (to the rest of us) display of good fortune, **Rod Dougherty** and members of his family won *three* of our five special door prizes, including the featured attraction, a *Sky Atlas 2000.0, 2nd Edition*.

Tim Astin received his Universe Sampler pin and certificate, **Larry Fallin** received a Zombie certificate for staying up all night at Chiefland, and **Steve Knight** earned a Katie's Club certificate for finding the highly elusive but hauntingly beautiful **Horsehead Nebula (IC 434)**, also at Chiefland. (You need an H Beta filter to see it.) Steve reported that it looks like -- well, a horse's head. **Yr. editor** would be the last person in the world to suggest that the other end of the horse was at the eyepiece.

Also at that Dec. meeting, **Steve** prepared wonderful packets of astronomical handouts for everyone present, including free \$10 Moon filters courtesy of Hands On Optics, Inc.

Seven members attended our Dec. 15th Cox Field observing: **Jerry Williams, Steve & Dawn Knight, David Ward, Larry Fallin, yr. editor** and **Dr. Richard Schmude**, who encouraged those of us in FRAC to chart Jupiter's central meridian transit times. Jerry found 18 Messiers, bringing his total to 77. (He also gave all of us filter squares that had been used by the post office and were being discarded.) Steve's most important find of the night was cobwebs in David's telescope tube. Dr. Schmude's GPS reported Cox Field's coordinates as 33°9' N latitude and 84°26' W longitude.

Seriously, though, David, Larry & Steve -- let's call them "the Three Amigos," not "the Three Stooges" or "Three Blind Mice" -- did some nifty observing of their own that night, tracking down the eight faint galaxies around the 6th-mag. star *I Ari*. The search, suggested by **Ken Hewitt-White** in "Checking Off the Galaxies at 1 Arietis" (*Sky & Tel*, Dec., 2001, pp. 113-114), involved galaxies ranging from mag. 11.4 (NGC 691) to 15.5 (IC 1730).

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Membership Renewals Due in January:
None.

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This 'n That. The A.L. presently boasts 256 affiliate astronomy clubs and more than 18,000 members; it says a lot about the quality of our club that *FRAC members own 1/7th -- four --*

of the 28 Universe Sampler pins ever issued by the A.L. Besides **Tim Astin**, FRAC's other pin holders are **Dawn Knight, Phil Sacco** and **yr. editor Cory Dukes**, just turned 14 yrs. old, is close to completing his Universe Sampler requirements.

***Smitty** reports that the cashier at Milano's told him they were very happy to have had so many astrologers meeting at their establishment.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. Our club meeting will be at Beaverbrook at 7:30 on **Thurs., Jan. 10th**; we'll discuss ways to develop an interest in astronomy among BB students, our previous, half-hearted efforts in the past having proved ineffective.

Our club observations at Cox Field will be held on **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 11th-12th** (the new moon falls on the 13th), and **Fri.-Sat., Jan. 18th-19th**.

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The Sky in January. **Mercury** will be 15°-20° above the W horizon 45 min. after sunset between **Jan. 14-18**. **Mars** will still be up in the SW during the early evening hours of the month, but smaller and fainter than it has been in recent months. **Saturn** will be up all night all month (as will **Jupiter**, which, at 47" in dia., is about as big as it gets.)

The Jan. issue of *Sky & Tel* highlights the **Alpha (Δ) Persei Association (Mel 20)**, a large -- 3° -- and lovely group of bright stars at the junction of the main arms of stars that form the Atlanta Braves "A" shape of *Perseus*. In *The Deep Sky: An Introduction* (Sky Publishing, 1997), **Phil Harrington** points out that "The age of **Melotte 20** is only about 51 million years, younger than many diamonds found here on earth." (p. 173) Mel 20 is a Deep-Sky Binocular Club object.

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**The Lap of Luxury: The Denver
Observing Chair**

article by **Steve Knight**

The subject of observer's chairs came up recently on one of the web groups of which I'm a member. Several people recommended the Denver observing chair from the Denver Astronomical Society. Their on-line plans (see below) can be downloaded, and are simple and give exact figures regarding the materials needed, right down to how many nuts, bolts and screws the task requires. It can be built in a weekend, the only tools necessary being a circular saw, drill, and palm sander. My chair cost about \$30 to build, and when I add upholstery for the seat the total still won't exceed \$40.

Orion sells the same chair for \$169. (A photo appears on p. 94 of their Holiday catalog.)

The Denver chair is very steady even with my oversized rear end on it, and it's fully adjustable right to the ground. (*The chair, that is, not Steve's bottom. -Ed.*) The maximum seat height is just higher than I need in order to observe at the zenith; in fact, my only problem has been watching where I place the chair to avoid hitting the base of my 'scope when I turn it in azimuth if the object I'm looking for is too close to the zenith and I'm sitting too close to the telescope.

The plans for the Denver observing chair can be had at <http://members.tripod.com/denverastro/seat.html>; they're very clear and easy to follow.

Be sure to check out my chair at the next club observing you attend, and give some thought to making your own Denver chair at tremendous savings over the factory-built model. It's amazing how much easier and more fun observing is now that I don't have to get in all those strange and uncomfortable positions.

Author's Note: This was the first in a series of astrotech articles by Larry Fallin and me. If you have questions or problems regarding any kind of astrotechnical matters, we'll be happy to study the problem or product, find answers and report on it here.

Editor's Note: Are you having trouble organizing your monthly searches for objects in the night sky? If so, Larry Fallin offers a monthly guide to which Messiers, Caldwell's, Herschel 400s and Double Stars are up. His January installment appears below.

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Constellations of the Month - January

	Messiers	Caldwells	Double Stars	Herschel 400
Auriga	M36 M37 M38	C31 IC 405	Theta Aurigae	NGC 1664 NGC 1857 NGC 1907 NGC 1931 NGC 2126 NGC 2281
Lepus	M79	none	Gamma Leporis	NGC 1964
Orion	M42 M43 M78	none	Beta Orionis Delta Orionis Iota Orionis Lamda Orionis Sigma Orionis Struve 747 Theta 1 Orionis Theta 2 Orionis Zeta Orionis	NGC 1788 NGC 1980 NGC 1999 NGC 2022 NGC 2024 NGC 2169 NGC 2186 NGC 2194
Taurus	M1 M45	C41	118 Tauri Chi Tauri	NGC 1647 NGC 1817