

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

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

Vol. 12, No. 6 August, 2008

Officers: President, **Bill Warren:** (770)229-6108, warren7804@bellsouth.net; Vice President, **Larry Higgins**; Secretary-Treasurer, **Steve Bentley**.

Board of Directors: **Tom Moore**; **Charles Anstey**; **Tom Danei**; and **Felix Luciano**.

AlCor/Webmaster, **Tom Moore**; Ga. Sky View/Astronomy Day Coordinator, **Steve Knight**; Observing Chairman/Public Observing Coordinator, **Bill Warren**; Program Co-Chairmen: **Larry Higgins** and **Bill Warren**; NASA contact: **Felix Luciano**; Event Photographer, **Tom Danei**; and Newsletter Editor, **Bill Warren**.

Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. Web page: www.flintriverastronomy.org; discussion group at <FRAC@yahogroups.com>.

Please notify **Bill Warren** if you have a change of home address, telephone no. or e-mail address.

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Club Calendar. **Fri.-Sat., July 25-26:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Fri.-Sat., Aug. 1-2:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Mon., Aug. 11:** Perseids meteor shower observing

(Cox Field, at dark); **Thurs., Aug. 14:** FRAC meeting (2nd floor of Stuckey Hall, UGa-Griffin campus, 7:30 p.m.); **Fri., Aug. 29:** Cox Field observing (at dark); **Sat., Aug. 30:** Cox Field cookout/observing (cookout at 5:30 p.m., observing to follow).

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President's Message. They move slowly, painfully, climbing the stairs in irregular, unmeasured cadences. Some of them wincing, some of them occasionally pausing before they finally reach their destination: the landing at the top of the 2nd floor staircase in Stuckey Hall on the UGa-Griffin campus. From there, it's just a few steps to the first classroom on the right, where FRAC holds its monthly meetings.

***Betty Bentley:** recent knee surgery.

***Ken Walburn:** recent hip replacement surgery.

***Joel Simmons:** recent arthroscopic knee surgery.

*And last but certainly not least, **Dan Pillatzki**, who attends our meetings between chemotherapy treatments.

These folks, one and all, are my heroes.

At various times I've asked each of them, "Does it hurt?" – referring, of course, to their trips up and down the stairs in the Stuckey Bldg. Their answers have ranged from "Yes, it does" to "Sometimes." Pain is the price they're paying to be with you for a couple of hours a month. That's how much your friendship means to them.

So yeah, they're my heroes, and I love them.

You should, too. Consider:

Aside from family and the best friends you've ever had, how many people in your life are or have been willing to endure physical pain in order to spend time with you?

That's why I've always said that FRAC is more than just another astronomy club, it's a group of people who genuinely care about each other. And that's more than just words or an idle boast. It's a **fact**, as the commitment of members such as Betty, Ken, Joel and Dan so readily attests. But there's another side to that coin:

You're pretty darned special, too. After all, those folks aren't climbing those stairs to study the wallpaper or light fixtures.

I often try to tell you in these pages how much your presence at our meetings and observings means to us – but the unexpected presence of Dan, Ken, Betty, Joel, and others like them (e.g., **Aimee Mann**, recent eye surgery) says it far better than anything I could ever say.

I hope you'll recall this message if you ever consider skipping a meeting because the weather is bad, the price of gas is high, you're tired from a long, hard workday, or you just don't think you're all that important to us.

To paraphrase **Ben Franklin**, *In this world, nothing is certain but the joy we get from your presence at FRAC activities.*

If you don't believe me, just ask Joel, Ken, Dan, Betty or Aimee.

-Bill Warren

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. On Fri., July 7th, **Mr. Cox** stopped by to chat for awhile prior to our scheduled observing, which was attended by **Charles Turner, Joel Simmons, Dwight, Laura & Elizabeth Harness** and their guest **Tyler Yolander, Kevin Murdock, Tom Moore, Mike Stuart** and **yr. editor**. The following evening was clouded out, and rainstorms forced cancellation of our late-July observings.

Twenty-one members, including **Curt & Irene Cole, Tom Moore, Carlos Flores, Brit & Tom Danei, Joel Simmons, Steve & Betty Bentley, Charles, Lisa, Erica & Jeffrey Anstey, Steve Knight, Jerry & Beverly Williams, Ken Walburn, Felix Luciano, Dr. Richard Schmude Jr., yr. addle-pated speaker and newsletter editor** and visitor **Patsy Lwowski**, attended our July club meeting. The members present selected an official club logo from among many attractive designs prepared by Ken Walburn, our massively talented artist.

Steve Knight reported good news on two fronts re **Ga. Sky View 2009**: he got the dates he wanted (April 23rd-26th, 2009, it'll be a 4-day, 3-night affair this time); and the rental rates for Camp McIntosh won't rise in '09 but will remain at \$500 per night.

Then there was our addle-pated speaker, who, in discussing the A. L.'s Universe Sampler Club observing program, got mixed up in describing the Bayer nomenclature of **Betelgeuse** and **Rigel** in *Orion*. (For the record, Betelgeuse is Alpha Orionis and Rigel is Beta, although Rigel is the brighter of the two and should be Alpha. He knew that, of course, but saying it correctly was an

adventure in stammering and stuttering that his presentation could have done without.)

Four days after the meeting, **yr. president** and his wife **Louise** visited the **Coxses** and presented them with the \$100 Visa Gift Card that the club authorized at the June meeting and **Steve Bentley** purchased shortly thereafter.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. We'll finish up July with Cox Field observings on **Fri.-Sat., July 25th-26th**, and then turn around and begin August with Cox Field observings on **Fri.-Sat., Aug. 1st-2nd**.

On **Mon. evening, Aug. 11th**, anyone interested in joining us at Cox Field for a Perseids meteor shower observing should bring reclining lounge chairs and mosquito repellent – but *not* your telescope, since meteors tend to be little zips across the sky that vanish almost as quickly as you see them.

Last year, we staged a Perseids Party because the peak was on a weekend. This year, however, the combination of a **Moon** three days past First Quarter on a weeknight likely will discourage some members from attending. If you *do* decide to come – and we hope you will – a fun way to spice up the evening is to bring along the family, a few slices of pizza and soft drinks.

If Monday evening is cloudy, we'll try again on **Tuesday, Aug. 12th**.

Our club meeting will be held at **7:30 p.m.** on **Thurs., Aug. 14th**, in the Stuckey Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus. **Larry Higgins** and **yrs. truly** will talk on “Basic Observing Techniques.”

Many of our newer members are also new to astronomy and stargazing. Programs such as this one and July's “Universe Sampler Club” presentation can help beginners in developing an organized approach to learning what they need to know about the night sky and observing.

Finally, we'll end up the month with Cox Field observings on **Fri.-Sat., Aug. 29th-30th**. On the latter date – Sat., Aug. 30th -- we'll try again to have the rain-delayed combination cookout and observing that was planned for July 5th. **Steve Knight** is coordinating the event.

In case you've forgotten, here's what Steve had to say in last month's *Observer*:

“I'll pull my camper out there, bring the grill, charcoal and some chairs. We'll have a cookout, music, A/C, DVD player, cold fridge and full kitchen. There's also a bathroom in there. If you need to warm stuff or keep it cold I've got you covered. There's a microwave too.

“Bring your favorite picnic fixins, I'll have some stuff, probably some burgers, macaroni salad, spinach dip.

“Reply with what you're bringing so we can have all the bases covered. I have cups, utensils, and I think plates from GSV.

“Start time will be around 5:30 sharp. That will give us plenty of time to cook, eat, hang out, and the sun to set.”

You can contact Steve at (770)616-2672 or saknight1@comcast.net to tell him what you're bringing.

The speaker at our Sept. meeting will be **Dr. Richard Schmude**, his topic the Wetumpka (Ala.) Meteor Crater. It will be an exciting preview of our October club trip to Wetumpka to explore the site first-hand.

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The Perseids Meteor Shower

(Editor's Note: The following first appeared in the Aug., 2001 issue of The Observer.)

They're called the Perseids because, as the Italian astronomer **Ken Walburnini** -- no, actually it was **Giovanni Schiaparelli** -- noted in 1866, the Perseids meteors appear to be coming from the constellation *Perseus*. They share a common point of origin (called the *radiant*) because the meteors are debris from the periodic comet **Swift-Tuttle**. While S-T has an orbital period of something like 120 years, its fragments share a much smaller orbit, returning every year during a 2-week period around Aug. 12th. Those that stray too close to the Earth are captured by our planet's gravitational tug and produce fireworks as they streak through our atmosphere at speeds of up to 25,000 mph.

FYI: a **meteoroid** is a space rock of any size; a **meteor** is a meteoroid that reaches Earth's atmosphere and produces light as it burns; a **bolide**, or **fireball**, is a very bright meteor that sparkles or blazes; and a **meteorite** is a meteor that reaches the ground.

Most of the meteors we see zipping across the sky are in fact no larger than grains of sand. Although our planet has absorbed many meteorite blasts in the past, the largest single meteorite ever discovered or recovered was found in 1920 in South West Africa (now Namibia). It measures 9 ft. x 8 ft. and weighs an estimated 65 tons.

When done properly, meteor observing is the easiest kind of astronomical observing.

Besides a comfortable reclining chair (to keep you from getting a crick in your neck the next day from tilting your head back to look at the sky), all you need to enjoy the Perseids is a sweater, light jacket or thin blanket if you plan to stay long enough for the air to cool down; insect repellent; a thermos of iced tea; and maybe even some binoculars if you want to see what those Cox Field mosquitos look like up close.

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A Visit With Professor Stargazer

If you're new to FRAC, you may not be familiar with **Prof. Theophilus Stargazer**, who recently received a Pullet Surprise for his ground-breaking astronomy book, *MINOR PLANETS: Should They Be Allowed to Purchase Alcoholic Beverages?*

Recently, a group of FRAC members caught up with the busy professor on his way out of a local bank. He agreed to answer a few brief interview questions if the armed gentlemen accompanying him would loosen his handcuffs.

Mike Stuart: Professor, you're often described as "the world's most brilliant cosmologist." What exactly is cosmology?

Prof. Stargazer: Simply put, Mike, cosmology is the scientific study of astronomy questions that don't have answers.

Joe Auriemma: You mean questions like "What is dark energy?"

Prof. Stargazer: Oh no, Joe, we already know what dark energy is.

Alan Bolton: Really? What is it?

Prof. Stargazer: Dark energy is the energy produced by eating chili dogs, onion rings and greasy fries at The Varsity in Atlanta. Don't even think of asking what dark matter is, unless you want your newsletter to lose its PG rating.

Joel Simmons: Well, can you give us an example of a cosmological question?

Prof. Stargazer: Certainly, Joel, I'll give you two:

“How do clouds know when you've purchased a new telescope or equipment and want to try it out?”

“If it's true that nothing – not even light – can escape a black hole, how do we know it's black?”

Steven Mann: Prof. Stargazer, if the Big Bang started everything, what was there before it?

Prof. Stargazer: Probably a Wal-Mart Superstore.

Jerry Williams: Is gravity the most powerful force in the universe?

Prof. Stargazer: No, Jerry, that distinction goes to whatever bleach **Linda Higgins** uses with **Larry's** underwear.

If Larry is ever involved in an auto accident, the police won't have any trouble measuring the skid marks.

Steve Bentley: I'm sure you've been asked this question before, Professor, but can anything exceed the speed of light?

Prof. Stargazer: Actually, Steve, many things move faster than the speed of light. Gossip, for instance. The rising cost of gas. And **Larry Higgins** after a meal at La Cucaracha Restaurant.

Dwight Harness: Have you written any new books, Professor?

Prof. Stargazer: Yes, I just finished a biography of FRAC members **Tom Moore**, **Dan Pillatzki** and **Bill Warren**. It's called *Three Asteroids in Search of a Belt*.

(Editor's Note: At this point, the professor paused to glare angrily at the uniformed men surrounding him before continuing.)

Prof. Stargazer: I'm presently considering two other projects.

One is an article on handcuffs entitled “Where Is Harry Houdini When You Need Him?”

And soon I expect to begin a research study of satellite imagery of a 24-mile-wide, 150 million year old impact crater site located beneath the Barent Sea. My research of the well-known crater will be titled “*“Thor's Hammer' As Seen From the Slammer.”*”

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