

THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

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

Vol. 12, No. 3

June, 2008

Officers: President/Newsletter Editor, **Bill Warren**; Vice President/Observing Chairman: **Larry Higgins**; Secretary-Treasurer: **Steve Bentley**; Board of Directors: **Felix Luciano, Tom Danei, Tom Moore** and **Charles Anstey**.

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

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

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Club Calendar. Fri.-Sat., May 30-31: Cox Field observings (at dark); **Fri.-Sat., June 6-7:** Cox Field observings (at dark); **Thurs.,**

June 12: FRAC meeting (7:30, Stuckey Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus); **Fri.-Sat., June 26-27:** Cox Field observings (at dark).

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President's Message. On Fri., May 2nd, **Larry Higgins, David Mitchusson** and I went out to Cox Field on an iffy observing evening that turned out to be surprisingly clear. We had a great time, and we wished that you were there to enjoy it with us.

FRAC hasn't had much in the way of good observing conditions since February, but on this particular evening, after peeking outside to see what the clouds were doing, we decided to give it a shot, and this time it paid off.

For those of you who are new to astronomy and stargazing: if you want to learn how to handle your GoTo telescope or navigate the night sky manually to find things, you aren't gonna do it in your house watching TV. You need to get out and practice the skills that will permit you to find things in the night sky, if that's important to you.

Of course, with gas prices rising higher with every passing week, it's understandable that you're leery about going to Cox Field on nights of questionable observing conditions. But remember this: *you don't have to come out to The Cox to observe unless you need help, or if you simply want to interact socially with your friends in FRAC.* **Felix Luciano** often sets up his 'scope in his driveway in Jonesboro for a quick run-through of things he wants to see. He doesn't wait for weekends or nights around the New Moon; he goes out on weeknights, too.

Waiting for perfectly clear skies isn't the answer, either. **Steve Bentley** has an 18-in.

Obsession Dob, so it's hardly surprising that he might not want to go out and set up that big 'scope every time he sees a pothole in the clouds. But, like Felix, Steve often sets up one of his smaller 'scopes in his front yard. They realize that, even under less than ideal conditions, the sky is often willing to reveal marvels of beauty and wonder that most people never get to see.

A few months ago, **Heather Sherbourne** told me that, whenever she goes outside at night, whether to observe or to simply take out the garbage or walk the dog, she always gives the sky a quick scan. That's why, on Dec. 10, 2007, on her way to her car to attend her daughter's choral production, Heather spotted an unusual, eerily beautiful comet-like "bright patch of sky almost directly above me" that she later found out was the out-gassing of a Centaur rocket stage. But she wouldn't have seen it if she had stayed inside -- or if, having stepped outside, she hadn't been curious as to what might be going on in the night sky.

In stargazing, things are always looking up -- but only if you're out there to look up and see them.

C'mon out to Cox Field and join us for any or all of our *three* observing weekends in the next five weeks! To paraphrase the Motel 6 guy on TV, "We'll leave a light off for you."

-Bill Warren

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. On April 25th, **Larry Higgins, Tom Moore** and **yr. editor** were the only ones at Cox Field; in a departure from our usual nonsense, we spent 2

hrs. exploring what the sky had to offer in the way of binocular viewing. The answer: *a lot*.

Best, of course, was **M42** in the west, but even under less-than-perfect skies open clusters such as **M37, M36, M38** and especially **M44** (the Beehive) stood out, too, along with occasional galaxies such as **M81** and **M82**.

The next day, **Larry** almost single-handedly held down the fort at the Great Griffin Mayfling arts & crafts festival. (*See also p. 5. -Ed.*) **Steve & Aimee Mann** dropped by to say Hi, and **Alan & Sally Bolton** came by and stayed for a couple of hours.

On Sunday, Larry and **yrs. truly** stayed all day, despite heavy morning rain and no **Sun** to show the passersby. With diminished crowds due to the weather, yr. editor tried to brighten Larry's day with an endless string of off-color jokes.

Despite less than ideal observing conditions, **Larry, Tom Moore** and **yrs. truly** showed two dependable and highly popular objects to a large crowd of walkers at the Spalding Co. "Relay For Life" walkathon on May 17th. We seldom could see more than 4-5 stars at a time, but in the Grand Old Tradition of "Do the best you can with what you have," we kept our 'scopes aimed at the **Moon** and **Saturn** for several hours. Clouds were abundant but generally fast-moving and thin, so the Moon was almost constantly visible and Saturn visible about half the time.

Fifteen members attended our May meeting, including speaker **Carlos Flores** and his wife **Olga, Steve Bentley, Curt & Irene Cole, Dwight & Laura Harness, Dan Pillatzki, Charles Anstey, Joel Simmons, Larry Higgins, Felix Luciano, Joe**

Auriemma, Jessie Dasher and Tom Moore. Larry presided, and Carlos's excellent presentation had everyone wishing they could attend a Northeast Astronomy Forum and/or purchase some of the equipment therein displayed. Thanks, Carlos, for a fine show – and thanks, too, to **Kevin Murdock** for making Carlos's power point presentation possible.

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This 'n That. This, courtesy of **Felix Luciano**: “Chiefland Astronomy Village will once again host a Fall Star Party for members and nonmembers (of CAV) alike. The 2008 Star Party will be from Oct. 24th to Nov. 2nd. As always, come early, stay late.

“This year's Star Party is hosted by **Tom & Lynn Crowley, John & Pattie Novak** and the residents of the Chiefland Astronomy Village. The star party will be held on the new “back field” with over ten acres of available setup area (Crowley and Novak's property.) If you want to stay on other residents' property, please gain their permission prior to the star party.

“Registration details can be found at www.chiefland.org.”

Chiefland, long known as one of the darkest sites in the southeastern U. S., has held appeal for FRAC members for a number of years. Several of our members used to make twice-annual pilgrimages to CAV for camping, observing and socializing, until they cancelled the weekend spring picnic and week-long fall star party in favor of making the site available to CAV members only, come whenever you want to.

Well, the fall star party is back, open to members as well as non-members as before. It's a long drive, especially at today's gas prices, but if you've ever observed at CAV you just might consider it worth your time and money.

***And That...**that the world has come to this: we're reduced to telling blonde jokes in the *Observer*. Here's your June installment:

Two blondes living in Oklahoma are sitting outside under a Full Moon one evening. One of them asks, “Which do you think is farther away, Florida or the Moon?”

The other blonde points at the Moon and says, “Hellooooo? Can you see Florida?”

***Katie Moore** is now working as Astronomy Educator for the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D. C.

In early April, Katie wrote to her father **Tom**, “If you like www.astrocast.tv now, just wait till next month's (May) offering. They asked me to be their night sky reporter because I know what's going on in the sky.

“It's funny, I read about it over the weekend at www.astronomy.com, and I was immediately jealous of the people in the D. C. area who came up with it. Then I heard from them just a few days later.”

What she heard was a request that she do a radio broadcast on the Astrocast program, telling folks what was up in May. Well, she did it, talking about **Saturn's** location near **Regulus** in *Leo* -- and, as you might have expected, Katie's performance was first-rate. Last we heard, she was preparing for a possible June broadcast and hoping that her

segment would become a regular part of the show.

If you'd like to watch the show, or at least listen to Katie's segment, go to <http://www.astrocast.tv/>, and when you get to the website click on the "Play" button at the bottom half of the TV-looking screen. Katie's portion of the program occurs during the last half of the show.

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Upcoming Meetings/Activities. Although it was overlooked in our May issue of the *Observer*, the weekend of **Fri.-Sat., May 30th-31st** looks to be excellent for Cox Field observings, occurring as it does just 4-5 days before the New Moon.

On the following weekend, our **Fri.-Sat., June 6th-7th** Cox Field observings will be 3-4 days, respectively, after the New Moon.

Charles Anstey will be the speaker at our June club meeting, his topic "The Why's of the Solar System." We'll meet as usual at 7:30 p.m. in one of the 2nd floor rooms of the Stuckey Bldg. on the UGa-Griffin campus.

Our second Cox Field observing weekend will be on **Fri.-Sat., June 26th-27th**.

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The Sky in June. **Mars** and **Saturn** will both still be up in June, in the W sky, both of them near **Regulus** in *Leo*. **Jupiter** will rise in the E shortly after sunset, and will be up all night. **Mercury**, **Neptune** and **Pluto** will be morning targets before sunrise.

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THE OUTREACH OBSERVING CLUB

report by **Bill Warren**

When **Curt Cole** recently qualified to receive an A. L. Outreach Club Award certificate and pin, it reminded me that I had promised to compile a list of FRAC candidates for that new A. L. observing club award. It is, after all, the easiest and most enjoyable of all A. L. pins to achieve, requiring only that you participate in five of FRAC's public observings or other outreach activities (e.g., Astronomy Day, Great Griffin Mayfling, Relay For Life walkathon observing, etc.).

All events must be of at least two hours duration, and to qualify for a pin you must have participated in at least five outreach activities since Jan. 1, 2006, the earliest acceptable date for which Outreach Club activities can be counted.

To compile a FRAC outreach participation list, I went through past issues of the *Observer* and listed what events were held and who attended them. Here's what I found:

*Thirty currently enrolled FRAC members have participated in at least one of FRAC's 25 outreach activities in the past 2-1/2 years.

*Besides Curt (whose eligibility for a certificate and pin was verified by the A. L. in Nov. '07), nine other FRAC members – **Felix Luciano, Smitty, Steve Bentley, Betty Bentley, Steve Knight, Joel Simmons, Tom Moore, Larry Higgins** and I – have already qualified for the basic Outreach Award certificate and pin. Those certificates and pins have been ordered. (Don't get your hopes up,

though: Curt still hasn't received his certificate and pin, although his name was listed as a recipient in the March '08 issue of the *Reflector*. When asked about the delay, Outreach Club coordinator **Dr. Mike Reynolds** wrote back, "I had a heart attack a little over two months ago. I am doing okay now, but scrambling to catch up.")

*And here is a breakdown of outreach events attended by each FRAC participant:

Bill Warren, 17 events; **Larry Higgins** (12); **Curt Cole** (11); **Steve Bentley** (9); **Betty Bentley** and **Tom Moore** (7 each); **Joel Simmons** (6); **Smitty, Charles Anstey** and **Steve Knight** (5 each); **Tom Danei** (4); **John Wallace, Doug Maxwell** and **Irene Cole** (3 each); **David, Sara & Brendon O'Keeffe, Joe Auriemma, Alan & Sally Bolton, Steve Mann** and **Charles Turner** (2 each); and **Lee & Sarah Russell, Dwight & Laura Harness, Mike Stuart, Dr, Richard Schmude** and **Aimee Mann** (1 each).

For those who want to continue their involvement in FRAC's public outreach activities beyond the basic requirements, the Outreach Club also offers a Stellar Outreach Award certificate (50 additional hours) and a Master Outreach Award certificate for 100 additional hours beyond the Stellar Outreach Award. There are a couple of other requirements for those awards; you can find them in the Observing Clubs link on the A. L.'s website.

Once you get past the basic Outreach Award certificate and pin, the quick and easy way to chalk up a bunch of hours in a hurry is to do it **Larry Higgins's** way. Of Larry's 47 hrs. beyond the basic pin requirement, **36** of

them have come from just *three* events: two Griffin Mayflings (14 hrs. each) and one Bluebirds & Bluegrass arts & crafts festival at Dauset Trail (8 hrs.).

*Here's how many hours beyond the basic Outreach Award requirement FRAC members have logged toward earning a Stellar Outreach Award: **Larry Higgins**, 47 hrs.; **Bill Warren**, 43 hrs.; **Steve Bentley** and **Curt Cole**, 20 hrs. each; **Betty Bentley**, 16 hrs.; **Tom Moore**, 11 hrs.; and **Joel Simmons**, 8 hrs.

Whenever possible, I've saved the events with longer hours for your Stellar and Master Observer Awards pursuits, since for the basic Outreach Award a 2-hr. observing counts the same as an 8-hr., all-day Mayfling session.

I'm keeping a running tally of outreach events and hours logged by each of you. When you receive your copy of the list (which will be sent out in the next few days), please check it for accuracy and let me know promptly if I've overlooked any outreach activities you've participated in since 1/1/06.

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