

# THE FOCAL POINT

Vol. III, No. III

The Newsletter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club

November 1990

## CLUB CALENDAR

**Next Meeting:** November 16, 1990, 8:00 P.M. at Bradley Observatory located on the Agnes Scott campus.

**Program:** This month's program is a "Member Show and Tell/Buyer's Guide". Hosted by Bill Snell and Steve Gilbreath, several club members will show their telescopes, eyepieces, filters, etc. and tell us what they've been observing. They will also discuss the pros (and cons) of their equipment so that other members can be better educated for their future purchases.

*Editor:* ..... Dr. Mike Kazmierczak  
*Contributing Editors:* ..... Dr. Ralph Buice, Hal Crawford

The *Focal Point* is published monthly during the academic year by the Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc. The AAC is a non-profit organization dedicated to the advancement of amateur astronomy. Meetings are held on the third Friday of each month (the second Friday in December) at the Bradley Observatory on the Agnes Scott College campus. Dues are \$35 annually and include a subscription to *Sky & Telescope* magazine and use of the observatory in Villa Rica.

**Submissions:** Article submissions are welcome and encouraged. Please deliver to the editor for consideration. Electronic submissions are accepted at [beow!mike@gatech.edu](mailto:beow!mike@gatech.edu).

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## OCTOBER OBSERVING NOTES, TELESCOPE MAKING AND AN NGC MILESTONE

by William Snell

I always look forward to using the twenty-inch telescope at Villa Rica, but seeing and looking through telescopes that club members bring to the observatory is just as exciting. At the October observing session club members brought out a selection that included both large homemade reflectors and modern refractors. The chance to see so many telescopes firsthand (before you buy) is just one of many outstanding benefits of club membership. In addition to this, club members are now developing telescope making projects, informal observing sessions and various workshops. These will provide beginners with hands-on experience while giving experienced members a chance to explore areas they may have overlooked. More than a dozen people were at the observatory site including Hal & Margaret Crawford, David Riddle, Tom Buchanan, Lee Wilson, Jackie Cochran, Judi Helton, Paul Dyches, Rick Clark and Rich Jakiel. Several members learned how to use the twenty-inch telescope and learned other details about the observatory.

The Trifid, Eagle, Dumbbell, Little Dumbbell and Veil Nebulae, and galaxies such as M-33 and NGC 891 were just a few of the objects they observed. With a little practice you can easily see the spiral structure in M-33 using the twenty-inch. NGC 891 is much fainter and smaller but worth tracking down if you have never seen it. Set your telescope on Gamma Andromedae and then sweep about five degrees east to locate its field. Someone remarked that it looks like a picture from the closing credits of the *Outer Limits* television series. As a kid I wondered what those objects were; now I can go to the observatory and see them for real! Congratulations to Rick Clark for observing his 2000th NGC object, NGC 1321, during the session. NGC 1321 is a

14<sup>th</sup> magnitude galaxy located in the northern part of Eridanus, the River, a constellation which extends from the celestial equator south of Taurus to a point below our horizon. Rick has also observed several hundred other deep sky objects (ICs and PKs for example.) Over 2000 NGCs down, 5800 to go; keep up the good work, Rick!

Several members have asked about the possibility of building their own telescopes. Homemade instruments can take many forms, some quite bizarre to say the least, but most of them serve their intended purposes very well. Since I have never heard any astronomer complain that a telescope gathers too much light or that the mount doesn't shake enough, a six- to ten-inch Newtonian reflector on a wooden altazimuth mount (i.e. a Dobsonian) would be a practical, inexpensive choice. For those interested in astrophotography I have not ruled out equatorial mounts. I have ordered catalogs from almost a dozen companies and expect to have designs and cost estimates soon. Trips to Villa Rica are sometimes not practical on weeknights and many perfectly good observing nights are lost. Yet many people live in areas that are so closely surrounded by trees or so brightly lit that they cannot see very much of the sky or any but the brightest objects. This is too bad because many objects are exciting to see even in light polluted areas and if you can learn to find objects from your yard you will have little trouble finding them at a darker site. If you know of an open area or have a good backyard site you are willing to share with fellow members a few nights a month please let one of the club officers know.

The November 17th observing session will be enjoyable since the Cygnus Milky Way is still prominent in the west while Orion, Taurus and Gemini are rising in the east. The Veil and North America Nebulae will be visible, several bright galaxies await, and the spectacular objects of the winter Milky Way are coming into view. The highly detailed Syrtis Major, Hellas and Meridiani Sinus regions of Mars will be facing us, while the region surrounding Mesogaea-Amazonis, a large, relatively bland area often called the Boring Part

of Mars, will be safely hidden from view. Actually, even this area has a good amount of detail and activity but it just seems dull in comparison with so many other areas of the planet. There is much to see and do this month so please call if you have questions. Also, other members really enjoy reading about your observing experiences and your particular astronomical interests so please write about them.

### REPORT ON OCTOBER'S MEETING:

The October meeting was held at Fernbank Science Center. Members were treated to the planetarium show, Birth of the Cosmos, (not narrated by Carl Sagan) which was followed by a brief business meeting in the classroom area upstairs. The evening was concluded with a visit to the Fernbank observatory, featuring the 30-inch refractor. Members reported excellent views of various planets and star clusters, in spite of the urban light pollution.

Birth of the Cosmos, which was written by Fernbank Astronomer Ed Albin, features the details of the not-so-humble beginning of our universe. The show was punctuated with special effects and quotes from many great astronomers and philosophers of the past.

The Atlanta Astronomy Club thanks the Fernbank Science Center for hosting a delightful evening.

### CALENDAR ANNOUNCED FOR 1990-1991!

Please mark the following dates on your calendar, so that you don't miss upcoming events!

#### 1990:

- November 16 AAC meeting
- November 17 Observing Session - Villa Rica
- December 14 AAC meeting
- December 15 Observing Session - Villa Rica

1991:

- January 18 AAC meeting
- February Trip to Huntsville (tent.)
- February 15 AAC meeting
- March 15 AAC meeting
- April 19 AAC meeting
- May 18 AAC meeting/banquet

Meetings for June, July, & August TBA

**REMINDER - LOOK FOR MARS THIS MONTH!**

This month will feature the best views of the planet Mars. The planet will have an apparent diameter of 17 arc seconds all this month, reaching 18.1 arc seconds on November 19. If you're looking for a good excuse to go to Villa Rica, this is it! Remember, this is the best view of Mars you're going to have until the next century!

**For Sale**

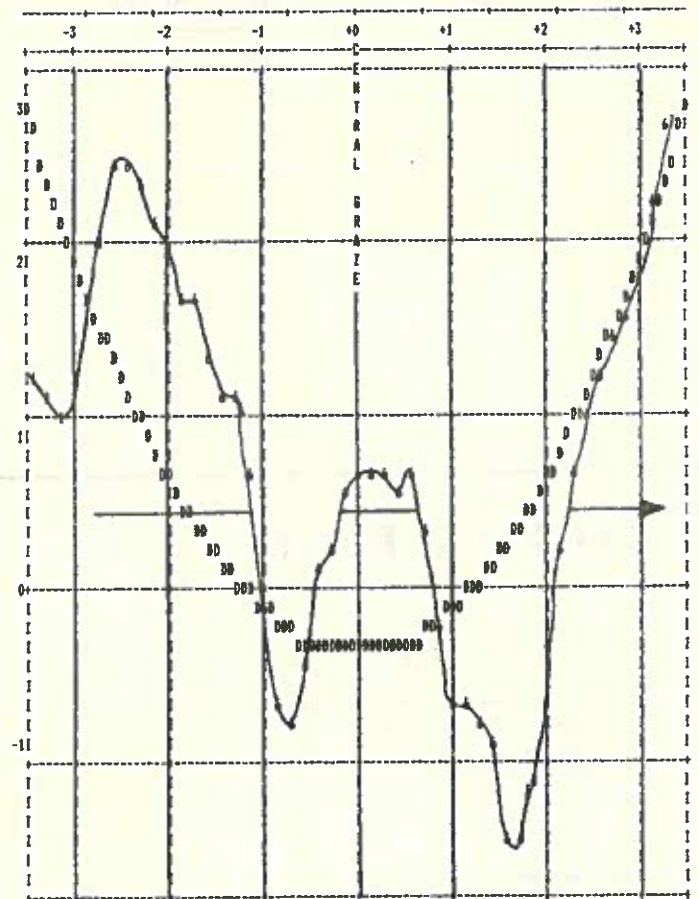
Celestron 8 Powerstar-4. Comes with standard accessories, wedge tripod, hard carrying case, tele-extender, piggyback mount, 2 eyepieces, 8x50 finder. This telescope is in like-new condition. The asking price is \$1200. Offered by Jim Brant - 296-6334.

**RECENT OBSERVATIONS**  
by Mike Kazmierczak

I mentioned several grazes in last month's newsletter. Unfortunately, the grazes in Tifton were obscured by clouds. However, the week before there was a nearby graze. It was only rated marginal, so I expected difficulty. I packed up the equipment, only to realize the shortwave radio batteries were all dead. Mid-graze was only 30 minutes away, so I sped to the graze site.

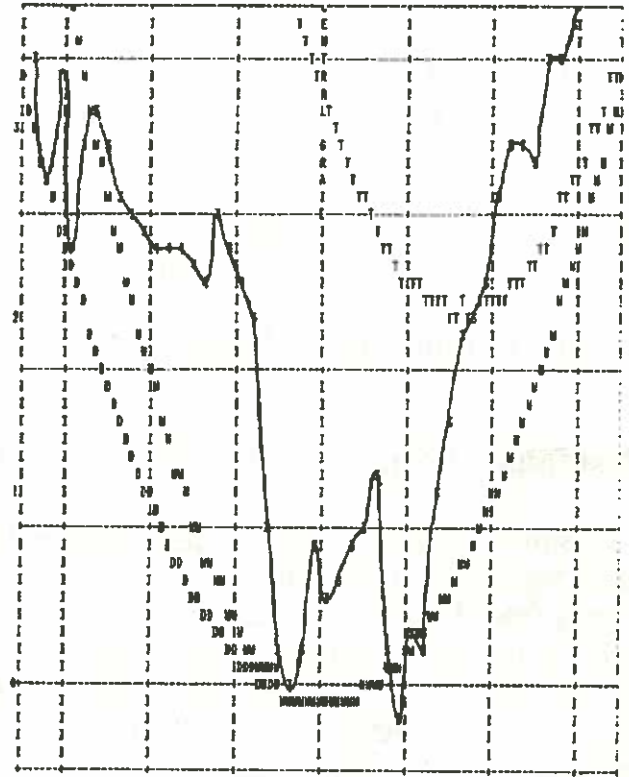
After reaching the graze site at 6:10 (mid-graze was at 6:28), I hurriedly set up the telescope. After gazing at the moon, the star was so plainly visible I couldn't believe it. I have a 10 inch telescope, but I think that a 6 inch telescope would have sufficed for this event. I decided to use my watch to set marks on the tape and synchronize it later. I had the tape recorder in my hand and had just started the tape when the star disappeared. I was rewarded with my haste by three more events.

Below I have displayed the theoretical and actual lunar surfaces. The heavy line across the lunar limb represents the apparent path of the star. Several other observers would have been able to help collect valuable data (not misses, Steve).



The next nearby graze of the year occurs on the evening of Friday, December 28<sup>th</sup> with mid-graze occurring around 10:29 p.m. This graze runs approximately 6 miles north of my house in Conyers. The star is Alcyone, also known as  $\eta$  Tauri (magnitude 3.0). The profile of this graze (seen at right) is extremely rugged, therefore the probability of a lot of events for most or all observers is high.

This is an excellent graze which would be a good first observation. As usual, all interested persons should call Mike Kazmierczak (760-8502) for any additional details on this exciting astronomical event.



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