
THE FOCAL POINT

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The Newsletter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club

December 1990

CLUB CALENDAR

Next Meeting: December 14, 1990, 8:00 P.M. at Bradley Observatory located on the Agnes Scott campus.

Program: This month's program is hosted by Bill Snell and Rich Jakiel. They will (attempt to) teach the members how to sketch what is seen at the telescope. Since participation is practice, bring the following supplies: white, unlined paper, several pencils and something firm to write on.

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.

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VIDEO ASTRONOMY, GEMINID METEORS AND TELESCOPES ON THE CHEAP

by William Snell

Charge Coupled Device (CCD) used at Villa Rica! At the November observing session Bud Rosser brought his camcorder and obtained images of both Saturn and Mars by simply holding the camera up to the eyepiece of the twenty inch telescope. He says that the planets were almost too bright, but using a tripod and working at a higher magnification he should be able to improve the images. He is encouraged by his early success and hopes to attempt some of the brighter deep sky objects very soon. Though a camcorder is not quite the same as a CCD system specifically designed for astronomy, aiming one at the sky is a very exciting idea.

Deep sky sights for December, in addition to the galaxies in Andromeda and Triangulum and the clusters in the winter Milky Way, include several well-known and not so well-known emission nebulae in Orion and Monoceros. NGC 2024, the nebulosity near the easternmost star in Orion's belt, is easy to find and very detailed; the Horsehead, a dark nebula in front of the emission nebula IC 434 (south of the star), is much more difficult. The Rosette Nebula, surrounding open cluster NGC 2244 in Monoceros, is a spectacular object that spans more than two eyepiece fields in the twenty inch and is well placed by late evening. It appears in the upper left hand corner of the photograph on page 111 of the January '91 *Sky & Telescope*. Look on page 113 of the same issue for club member David Riddle's photo of the Specter of the Brocken. December skies are often crystal clear and emission nebulae will really stand out in the UltraBlock filter!

Mars still appears large well into December and during November the seeing was often very good. Observing with my ten inch Newtonian telescope on the Wednesday morning before Thanksgiving, I saw an incredible amount of detail in Meridiani Sinus (also called the "Pipe") and the complex area to its west was just coming into view. The seeing was improving by the minute, but at 3:30 A.M. I reluctantly put away the scope so that I could get a few hours of sleep. The seeing was not as good the following night, and I regret not having stayed out longer on Wednesday. I have heard many reports of excellent seeing from club members so keep watching Mars!

Weather permitting, a special observing session for the

Geminid meteor shower will be held at the observatory on the morning of December 14. The hourly rate of this shower drops off rapidly after the peak so the regular observing session is two days too late. The Geminid shower is strong but is expected to diminish in the coming decades. When deciding how much cold weather gear to bring pretend that Villa Rica is really in Alaska and you will probably bring enough!

Saturday observing sessions for January, February and March 1991 have been scheduled for January 12 (19th alternate), February 9 (16th alternate), March 16 (no alternate). The alternates will likely be used even if the primary dates are clear, though there will be more moonlight interfering. Remember that the observatory is available on any night; just ask a club officer for the lock combinations. The March session is a good time for members to try the Messier Marathon (more details next month).

Progress has been made on the focusers of the twenty inch telescope. After finding out that the focal point of the twenty inch telescope lies only five and one half inches from the side of the tube, I had to reconsider the prospect of replacing the spiral focuser on the western eyepiece station with a new rack and pinion. This focuser would be great for visual use, but its height, when combined with the depth of a typical 35mm camera and the thickness of the Easy Guider, would have made prime focus guided photography impossible. Fortunately, the old focuser now works, the main problem having been that a nylon screw had slipped out of its channel. I still have a few adjustments to make but at least observing in the Zone of Inaccessibility, that area somewhat west of the meridian, is now possible.

I have plans ready for Dobsonian telescopes in the six to ten inch range that can be built for a few hundred dollars using only electric hand tools. However, if you want some practice building a telescope before you try to build your own, a six inch mirror, finder and focuser that were donated to the club are available. Recently, I did a quick test of the mirror by putting it into the tube of my old six inch telescope; it seems to work well. I envision these parts being used in a club telescope that beginners could "check out" to use at home for a few weeks at a time. I can provide a diagonal mirror, tube and a few other parts; but I don't have any spare eyepieces. If you are interested in building your own telescope or this six inch telescope, please call.

Finally, the warm-up shed needs some cleaning and refurbishment but I haven't had the time to do much about it. If you would like to help or have ideas for improvements to the shed please let me know. By the way, don't forget to write articles!

FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Okay, I messed up. I panicked. I don't do it often, so you can forget catching me doing it again.

I received a letter from Sky Publishing Corp. a short while ago announcing that the subscription rates for *Sky & Telescope* magazine will be increasing from \$16.00 to \$18.00 as of January 1st. Considering the budget (as I always do), I went ahead and announced at the November meeting that our dues will correspondingly be increased to \$37.00 a year (it would remain at \$25.00 for students).

Never mind the fact that I didn't talk to the Board of Directors, as Steve says I'm supposed to do. Never mind that our bank account balance has been doing rather well in recent months, and that our membership is growing. But now I see the error of my ways, and after consulting with the treasurer for the final word, I can say that for the '90-'91 year at least, our dues can remain at \$35.00.

For those ever faithful who did contribute the extra \$2 for membership, you can either deduct it off your taxes as additional contributions (what a great idea!), or see Jackie for a refund.

As far as *Sky & Telescope* magazine is concerned, we will be investigating the possibility of separating out the cost of the magazine from the standard dues structure in the near future.



It is with sincere regret that I must announce the passing of one of the more familiar faces of our club. T. Julian Crusselle passed away November 1 while on vacation in Mexico. Julian and fellow AAC member Toni Douglas had just spent five days in the Baja area checking out eclipse viewing sites for next year. Toni and Julian, whom I have rarely seen apart, have been friends since they were teenagers. She assures me that Julian lived well, and that his death came at the end of a happy and fortunate life. I hope that all club members will continue to think of Julian.

REPORT ON NOVEMBER'S MEETING

by Hal Crawford

The November meeting proved to be one of the most fascinating of the year when Program Chairman Steve Gilbreath called on several members to bring in their telescopes

for a "show and tell/buyers guide." The stage in the Bradley Observatory classroom was covered with telescopes, and members shared stories about how they were obtained and how they work.

Rich Jakiel brought in his refractor, and explained how he uses it to make drawings of his observations; Lee Wilson and Jackie Cochran brought their Astroscan (or "Cherry-bomb" or "Astro-gourd," depending on what you want to call them) scopes. Jackie had built a special tripod to support her telescope during observing runs.

Jim Stephens brought in his Questar, which he bought from a doctor from across the country. He believes that the best scope buy is from a doctor — because "someone in the medical profession would know how to be careful with a scientific instrument, yet may not know much about astronomy." He said he found his scope when the previous owner explained to him, "It works great on the moon and planets, but it doesn't magnify the stars." With this statement he knew he'd found his telescope.

Steve presented his 8" Meade which he bought from a friend, and Tom Buchanon demonstrated his telescope — a gorgeous 6" refractor.

Bill Snell concluded the program with his two telescopes — both of which he built himself out of odds and ends.

All in all it was a interesting evening. Club members showed off their telescopes, talked about their experiences, and presented pros and con's of their scopes.

For Sale

Odyssey II, 17.5" reflector telescope, includes solar filter (Thousand Oaks Optics), 27 mm eyepiece (73X), 8 x 50 mm finder scope, transporting platform with 3" wheels, for \$1200. Save \$250 in shipping from California. It is in excellent condition. Too much for me, want to go smaller.

Danny Pickens, 226 Sedgfield Rd., Centerville, GA 31028, 912-953-4809

DISCOUNT MAGAZINE SUBSCRIPTIONS

Since our offer of low cost subscriptions to several astronomical magazines appeared in the October Focal Point, some of our members have asked about converting their

regular subscriptions to discount club subscriptions when they come up for renewal. We are now able to offer this service, even if your renewal date is midyear. The magazines available and their discount prices are:

<i>Astronomy</i>	\$14.00	<i>Deep Sky</i>	\$8.00
<i>Telescope Making</i>	\$8.00	<i>Odyssey</i>	\$12.50

Astronomy and *Odyssey* are monthly publications while *Deep Sky* and *Telescope Making* are quarterly magazines.

If you are interested in saving 33 per cent on subscriptions to those magazines, send your renewal notice, along with a check to the AAC for the proper amount, to Treasurer Jackie Cochran (see address next to mailing label) or bring a check to the next meeting. If you are a new subscriber, just send in a check to Jackie and indicate that it is for a new subscription. If you have any questions, call Jackie at 955-0145.

FINANCIAL REPORT

Atlanta Astronomy Club
Statement of Receipts & Disbursements
September - November 1990

Beginning cash balance — 9/1 \$96.38

RECEIPTS:

Dues	\$1,057.00
Sale of publications	103.00
Contributions	5.00
Interest	2.69
	1,169.69

DISBURSEMENTS:

Sky & Telescope subscriptions	548.00
Newsletter	200.00
Cost of pubs. for sale	166.00 *
Observatory expense	72.63
Office expenses	10.00
	(996.63)

Cash balance 11/30/90 ** \$267.44

*Includes purchase of Ottewell calendars not yet sold

** Also owe \$60 to Steve Gilbreath for newsletter expense not yet reimbursed.

CAN WE TALK?

We are pleased to announce that one of our members, Richard Jakiel, has had several articles accepted for publication by two major astronomical magazines. *Deep Sky* will publish "Bright Spirals of Ursa Major" and "Observing the Heart of the Virgo Cluster," and *Astronomy* will publish "Observing Giant HII Regions and OB Associations in Galaxies." Look for these articles to appear in these publications in the near future.

Congratulations also go to new member David Riddle, whose photograph of a "Specter of the Brocken" appears in the Gallery section of the January 1991 *Sky and Telescope*.

The Club has purchased a supply of Ottewell's *Astronomical Calendar 1991* which we expect to have available at the December meeting. Cost is \$15.00 each for this classic annual publication.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

We would like to welcome the following new members who have joined the Club recently:

Clair Porter, William Kassler, Doris Lotz, David Riddle, Jim Stephens, Bill Trimboli, Derek Schop, Jill Whitesell, Michael Bono

Please take a moment to welcome these new members when you see them at our meetings or at our observing sessions.

Seasons Greetings



THE FOCAL POINT

First Class Delivery

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