

THE FOCAL POINT

Vol. III, No. IX

The Newsletter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club

May 1991

CLUB CALENDAR

Next Meeting: Our next meeting is 7:00 p.m., Saturday, May 18, 1991 at the Northlake Steak & Ale Restaurant. Directions are in the newsletter.

Program: This will be the annual AAC banquet. Further details are also in the newsletter.

Observing Sessions: The next scheduled sessions at Villa Rica are Friday, June 7 and Saturday, June 8.

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 mike%beow.uucp@gatech.edu. The submission deadline for the next issue is *June 6*.

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FAMOUS CLUB MEMBERS

by William Snell

Clouds and rain have continued to plague the observing sessions but March was noteworthy anyway. During the past month club members visited Roper Mountain Science Center and looked through the historic 23" refractor, several members observed a spectacular Pleiades occultation, the response to the membership survey far exceeded expectations but, most exciting of all, two club members had their work published in major astronomy magazines!

Rich Jakiel's article, "Galaxy Hunting in the Great Bear", appears in the May 1991 issue of *Astronomy*. Included are descriptions of many lesser known, but quite impressive objects in the region south of the Big Dipper. Rich points out that many of the most pleasing deep sky objects are those that are somewhat faint and obscure, rather than the brightest objects. Rich has also recently observed his 3500th deep sky object! Doesn't someone give out awards for this sort of thing?

Paul Dyches' star trail photo appears on page 560 of the May 1991 issue of *Sky & Telescope*. His use of a slow film brought out the colors of the stars very well and the inclusion of a lighted house in the wide angle view really emphasizes the darkness of the night sky. Be sure to congratulate both Rich and Paul for their accomplishments at the next meeting. Remember too, that Dave Riddle also recently had a photo published in *Sky & Telescope*; perhaps the index to back issues should include a new heading called "Astrophotos Made by AAC Members."

Thirteen club members recently visited the Charles E. Daniel Observatory at the Roper Mountain Science Center in Greenville, S.C.

and had good views of both the moon and Jupiter through the 23" refractor despite thin clouds. This large refractor provides an unbeatable combination of light-gathering power and contrast for both visual and photographic use; members of the Roper Mountain Astronomers use the telescope to obtain photos of Jupiter that are among the best. Just looking through the refractor is a rewarding experience. I will never forget the excitement of seeing Jupiter through a telescope whose 110 year old objective lens was thirty feet above my head! This telescope represents the height of 19th century optical craftsmanship.

We also heard an interesting talk about the use of CCDs in the study of upper-atmosphere barium cloud releases and were treated to a demonstration of the Digistar projector at the planetarium. The club will return to Roper Mountain in the near future; however, you can also attend any of the Friday night observing sessions by calling RMSC at (803) 281-1188 and ordering tickets (\$2 children/seniors, \$4 adults) at least ten days in advance. The RMSC is very easy to find and definitely worth the trip.

Recently, Tom Buchanan, Bud Rosser and I set up our telescopes for the students, parents and teachers of the Crabapple Middle School in northern Fulton County. The first night we observed from the parking lot of the school and despite the bright lights were able to show the students excellent views of the Moon, Jupiter and some of the brighter deep sky objects. Then, a week later their teacher arranged for us to set up in a dark, open field a few miles north of the school. The students were amazed at the views they saw of deep sky objects. The galaxies M-81 and M-82 and globular cluster M-3 made quite an impression. Students rarely get to see such unusual objects under dark conditions and everyone agreed that this program was a success. Tom tries to present similar programs from time to time and if you would like to participate please let him know.

Observing sessions at the Villa Rica

Observatory will be held on Friday, June 7th and Saturday, June 8th. Adventurous deep sky observers seeking to chalk up a few Messier objects will want to venture into the galaxy fields of Virgo, Coma Berenices, Ursa Major and Canes Venatici. Believe me, these areas are not so bad once you get used to them. Two objects in Canes Venatici that you shouldn't miss are M-51 (its spiral arms are easy to see in the 20 inch telescope) and M-3, a large, bright and colorful globular cluster. Also keep an eye out for ω Centauri (a globular cluster with a Greek letter designation!) and the galaxy NGC 5128 low in the southern sky around 10 p.m. If you stay out past midnight you can even get a running start on the summer Milky Way.

If you don't have a telescope, can't get out to the observatory very often or just want a new challenge then look into the Astronomical League's new Binocular Messier Club. This involves observing fifty Messier objects with any pair of binoculars. The May 1991 issue of the Reflector gives details and an address to write for more information.

Also watch the conjunction of Jupiter, Mars and Venus in the evening sky during the second and third weeks of June. All three planets will fit into a two degree circle on June 17th and Mars will be very close to Venus on the 23rd. A tripod-mounted camera could be used to make a series of photographs showing the movements of these planets over a span of several weeks. See the Celestial Calendar in the June issue of Sky and Telescope for complete information.

Have you sent in your survey sheet? Dozens of club members have and as good as the response has been the stack still isn't thick enough, so please send in your sheet or bring it to a meeting. This survey will be an ongoing project so don't assume there will be a deadline for returning them. This is a good chance for you to give opinions, make suggestions, etc., even if you can't attend meetings. And your answers are fun to read!

ATLANTA ASTRONOMY CLUB BANQUET

This month's meeting of the Atlanta Astronomy Club will actually be the annual banquet. It will be held on **Saturday, May 18, at 7:00 p.m.** at the Northlake Steak & Ale Restaurant. The Steak & Ale is located just outside I-285 off the LaVista Road exit. A large dining area has been set aside for our use. Members are free to order what they would like off of the menu (entrees start around \$7.49). A 15% gratuity will be added to your order.

This meeting will feature the elections of the 1991-92 officers and conclude with an astrophotography slide show by our Newsletter Editor, Mike Kazmierczak.

All members are encouraged to attend this annual event. Some extra seating has been made available for late-comers, but if you plan to attend please let Hal Crawford know in advance by calling him at 320-9156.

ASTRONOMY DAY A SUCCESS

by Hal Crawford

On April 20, Astronomy Day took place all over North America. For their part, Atlanta Astronomy Club members took over the lower exhibit hall at Fernbank Science Center that Saturday afternoon. The tables were set up to overflowing with books, magazines, telescope accessories, and computers. Numerous telescopes were scattered about, while even the trademark stegosaurus had his own refractor to look through!

About 20 members answered questions and demonstrated telescopes to interested observers. Descriptive posters and pamphlets illustrated the Atlanta Astronomy Club and its activities, particularly in the efforts of fighting light pollution. The 80386 compatible and Apple Macintosh computers were a hit with the public as children and adults alike tried their hand at using the *Dance of the Planets* and *Voyager* software. Over 100 people attended this event, in spite of minimal advance notice.

The Atlanta Astronomy Club would like to recognize and thank Fernbank Astronomer Ed Albin for all his assistance with making sure that we were comfortable in the exhibit hall. AAC member Ralph Buice has also provided much appreciated assistance in coordinating the event. This is certainly an event we will have to repeat next year!

MAJOR OBSERVING PARTY!!!

The Atlanta Astronomy Club has been invited by Laura and John Loveless up to their home in Mount Airy, Georgia on June 8. Mount Airy is just north of Cornelia, about 70 miles from Atlanta. Their home, a bed and breakfast residence, lies on 100 acres on top of a mountain with a beautiful view of the stars.

Overnight stay is available but completely optional. Overnight guests can get the full bed and breakfast treatment for just \$15 a person! Pool and Tennis facilities are also available for those who wish to make a mini-vacation out of it. Interested members should let Hal Crawford know by May 31. Directions will be available at the May banquet.

APRIL MEETING REPORT

Those of you who were unable to attend the April meeting missed an excellent lecture by AAC Member Jim Brant. Jim presented a videotape of his trips to numerous star parties over the past few years. His in-depth knowledge and appreciation for telescopes was made clear to us as he described the many instruments he encountered on those trips. If anyone would like to know anything about any telescope that's been made, Jim is the man to ask!

JUNE MEETING ANNOUNCED

The June meeting of the Atlanta Astronomy Club will be held at Fernbank Science Center at 8:00 p.m. The featured speaker will be Roger Venable, president of the August Astronomy Club. The Fernbank Observatory will be open that evening if weather permits.

Recent Observations

On March 20, Rich Jakiel, Rick Clark and I set up our telescopes on the wooden deck of Rick and Rich's apartment. We were determined to see the last of the current series of Pleiades occultations visible from the U.S. This was a fine place to observe except that whenever anyone walked on the deck the images would bounce around for several seconds! We had all seen several disappearances when suddenly Rick lost sight of a star due to be occulted within two minutes. The moon and star had been "occulted" by an adjacent building! The vibrations caused by Rick dragging his scope back a few feet to clear the building died out in time for all of us to see the star disappear. Soon we all had to abandon the deck completely, trading earthquakes on the deck for streetlights in the parking lot. By setting up between cars we blocked most of

the light. We saw most of the events and even showed the moon to several passersby. Not bad considering how marginal the weather had seemed earlier. - *Bill Snell*

On a recent evening in April (the first clear one since as long as we could remember), four desperate AAC members who had given up all hope for a clear weekend night ventured out on a Wednesday evening to Villa Rica.

Bill Snell, David Riddle, Shelby Emory and myself gave up sleep, but found some fairly decent viewing conditions: I added a few Messier objects towards my Messier Club certificate. I was most pleased to finally locate M-51 with my Astroscan telescope after many earlier tries. Bill assisted Shelby in learning to 'star hop' with the 10 inch telescope, while David was delighted to have the 20 inch telescope mostly to himself.

A little after midnight, the murkiness of the sky increased, so we packed it up and headed home. We were pleased that we had taken advantage of this rare stargazing opportunity. - *Jackie Cochran*



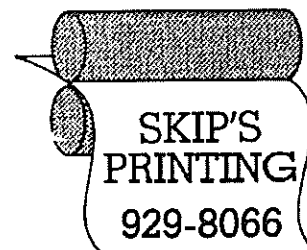
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AAC membership renewals to:
Jackie Cochran, Treasurer
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June 1991

CLUB CALENDAR

Next Meeting: Our next meeting is 8:00 p.m., Friday, June 21, 1991 at Fernbank Science Center.

Program: The featured speaker will be Roger Venable, president of the Augusta Astronomy Club. The Fernbank Observatory will be open that evening if weather permits.

Observing Session: The next observing session is scheduled for July 5th. **Note:** Moonrise is about 1:15 a.m.

Editor: Dr. Mike Kazmierczak
Contributing Editors: Hal Crawford

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HOW "NOT" TO SEE THE 1991 ECLIPSE

by Hal Crawford

This may not be an article you will have to read this month. If you are going to the July 11th eclipse in Baja or Hawaii (or thereabouts), this article is not for you, and you can skip it and move on. However, if you are like "the rest of us," who can't afford paradise (at least, not yet) and just aren't able to jet around the world whenever an eclipse chooses to strike, then this article is for you.

Let's face it, there is nothing more mystical, more fascinating than a solar eclipse. Day literally turns into night for a few minutes. In ancient Chinese times, emperors would have their archers shoot arrows skyward to chase away the dragon that was apparently trying to eat the sun. In the movie *Ladyhawke*, it was an eclipse that finally brought the lovers back together. When an eclipse of the sun occurs, millions of people from around the world flock to see it. To put it bluntly, to miss a solar eclipse is to miss a rare and beautiful event.

Well, guess what? I'm going to miss the eclipse! And since you are reading this, you're probably going to miss it too! But here are some guidelines to help keep your wits about you so you can anticipate the tales that all of your friends will tell about the eclipse they saw — and you didn't:

Keep your perspective: Sure, eclipses are nice. But let's face it, it's going to cost over a thousand bucks to sit in a cramped airplane for eight+ hours, endure customs (if you are not going to Hawaii), deal with massive traffic and lodging problems, getting your 80 pounds of telescope, camera and camcorder equipment set up, for a measly 7 minutes of solar totality? Surely you can come up with something better to do with your money and time!

Find something more important: *Is there anything more important? Sure there is. Those tomato plants in the backyard which would perish without you. And it's never too early to consider Christmas shopping. "Say Hal, what did you think of the eclipse?" "Gosh darn, I missed it. I was busy talking to the President, and he wouldn't let me off the phone."*

Dash your friends' hopes: Yeah, you'll hear about the eclipse for hours, nay, months on end. It's going to drive you crazy, because you're not one of them. If you're not reading countless pages about the eclipse in *Sky & Telescope* or *Astronomy* magazines, you will be during slide shows at the meetings. So do the easy thing. Pray for rain. *[It had better not rain! — Ed.]*

Start packing for the next one: Okay, so you're missing it. Despite what the ancients have told you, an eclipse is not the

end of the world. While there are plenty of solar eclipses that will occur over the next decade, you have to see a total, not an annular eclipse. For the uninitiated, an annular eclipse occurs when the moon doesn't quite cover the sun, leaving a thin ring of light around the edges. In this case the *umbra*, or darkest part of the moon's shadow does not actually contact the earth, making for a nice, but not as spectacular, eclipse. You also want an eclipse that has a duration of more than just a few seconds.

So you will have to wait a little while. Eighteen years, to be exact. The next total solar eclipse worth looking at will be on July 22, 2009. And it's not even close to us (you will have to wait until 2045 for a geographically convenient eclipse, something only the very youngest of us are probably prepared to do). This eclipse will travel over India and China, so start saving your pennies now. I bet if you set aside \$50 a month, starting now, you will have more than enough to travel in opulent leisure to the land where emperors shot arrows at the sun to chase the dragon away.

MAY BANQUET REPORT

Those of you who missed the Annual AAC Banquet on May 18 missed a great time at the Steak and Ale. There were over 30 members and guests in attendance, including several new members who made the event their first meeting! Mike Kazmierczak presented the evening program. His work in astrophotography and advice helped assure many of us that getting out the camera and pointing it skyward can produce some terrific pictures.

Elections of the 1991-92 officers were also held, and the following members were elected:

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| President: | Hal Crawford |
| Vice President: | Bud Rosser |
| Treasurer: | Jackie Cochran |
| Rec. Secretary: | Rich Jackiel |
| Corr. Secretary/Editor: | Mike Kazmierczak |
| Observing Chair: | Bill Snell |

The following members were elected to the Board of Directors for two-year terms: Ralph Buice, David Coffey, Sharone Franklin, Don Hall and David Riddle.

These members (except those already in office) will take their positions in September.

MOUNT AIRY ATTRACTS MEMBERS

On June 8, several members went to the home of John and Laura Loveless to observe the heavens and take advantage of their "bed and breakfast" offer. Members who took part included the Becks, the Brants, the Closes, the Crawfords, the Fiederleins, Gene and Judy Powell, and Jim and Emily Wert. Although it was a fairly dark night, the sky played peek-a-boo with the clouds until about 11:00 pm, when the night turned especially clear for some decent seeing. Many thanks to the Loveless' for permitting us to share their beautiful home and for providing us with a nice dark site.

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