
The FOCAL POINT

Newsletter of the Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc.
Volume V, Number III November 1992

PROGRAM NOTES

The upcoming meeting of the Atlanta Astronomy Club will be held at 8:00 p.m., Friday, November 20th, at the Bradley Observatory of Agnes Scott College.

Astronomer David Dundee of Fernbank Science Center will speak in greater depth on "*Astronomy in the Time of Columbus*", a topic first presented during last month's meeting at the planetarium.

Don't miss this timely and informative program!

A SENSE OF DISCOVERY

"Can you see anything?"

This hushed inquiry was answered slowly. "Yes, wonderful things."

Howard Carter, an English archaeologist, mutters his reply to an impatient Lord Carnarvon as he first gazed into the dimly lit antechamber of the newly uncovered Royal Tomb of Tutankhamen. The year was 1922.

This typically British understatement has passed through my mind more than once while I use a telescope to explore the night sky. The sky is indeed full of 'wonderful things.' Surely if Tutankhamen could have seen some of the sights familiar to today's amateur astronomers he would have thought them to be the abodes of the ancient Egyptian gods.

Today's amateur astronomers have available to them equipment and star atlases that would have been the envy of professional astronomers of Carter's time. To the curious, the sky offers the sense of exploration and discovery that would have appealed to the minds of people like Howard Carter.

If you would like to experience first hand the adventure of discovering the universe, plan to visit the Villa Rica Observatory on the evening of Saturday, November 21. The universe awaits you.

David Riddle
438-7818

OBSERVING PROTOCOL?

by William Snell, Editor

In an average year there are roughly one thousand dark, moonless and reasonably clear hours available for amateurs to observe. Therefore, each of member of the club could, in theory, use the club observatory for about ten hours per year! This is quite a deal considering our reasonable dues structure. What is surprising is that so many members rarely, if ever, use the observatory and that it remains unused during many clear, dark nights.

Perhaps this is due to unfamiliarity with the equipment, a feeling that perhaps one is not "a serious observer," or that on so many of the best nights the observatory seems too crowded. In fact, the telescopes are easy to use and are

available to all club members of all levels of experience.

The current system of "first-come, first-served" for use of the equipment works very well most of the time, especially when members cooperate and respect other members' rights. However, it has been suggested that an "observing protocol" be established for determining who uses the telescopes and when. These fall into two major categories, that for want of better terms, can be called "rotation" and "scheduling."

A rotation protocol would allow each person present to use the telescope for thirty minutes before turning it over to the next person. This will not allow new or infrequent users to observe very many objects. In addition, it does not seem fair for someone who arrives at a late hour to be able to make the same claim to the telescope as those who arrived at dark. The first persons to arrive could find themselves waiting many hours for another turn if several more people arrive later.

A scheduling protocol, while not ideal, at least will allow everyone fair use and larger blocks of time. A possible method of implementing this would be for all those interested in using the telescope during an upcoming month to participate in a "lottery." Those drawing the lowest numbers would get first choice of nights and/or hours to use the observatory. Nightly, weekly and/or monthly limits could be imposed if needed. Because this protocol depends in part on the luck of the draw, swapping and sharing of time blocks with other members would be

restricted. Other rules and restrictions need to be determined.

"First-come, first served" remains the most practical method of allocating telescope time and, in the absence of a comprehensive plan for another protocol, should remain in effect. The rotation protocol could have use on busy nights but members should be able to know ahead of time when it will be in use. Scheduling would be less flexible but would give members an opportunity to plan projects such as photography or to spend a reasonable amount using the equipment. Perhaps some carefully constructed combination of the protocols could be implemented.

Any suggestions or comments on this topic would be greatly appreciated. The observatory is our Club's greatest asset and should be used more often and by more members!

AT THE EYEPIECE

by Bud Rosser, President

I've just finished reading Arthur C. Clarke's latest novel, *The Gardens of Rama*. In his 24th century world, where a group of colonizers has an opportunity to form a micro-utopia, they are beset by their own humanity and succumb to a population that has good and evil, smokers and non-smokers, (lucky for me, eh?), self-indulgently generated air pollution, racism, greed and even a mysterious disease that is sexually transmitted and causes death. All of this is on board a vast spaceship speeding at half light speed toward Sirius. It seems

that the more progress humankind makes, the more it remains the same.

So do we feel bounded by our humanity at times. We also take comfort in the familiar purrings and roars of the days of our mortal lives and are accustomed to our place on this world. Yet we dream...of things to come, of future civilizations, of solutions to problems that seem beyond our reach.

We, who feel such attraction to those mysterious things beyond our world, are perhaps the master dreamers. We have the keys to peek beyond the mundane and glimpse the unfathomable. I believe that we who share the love of astronomy will live the most satisfying lives and will never truly become overburdened by the press of the mundane, because we can all experience that "quiet" place under darkened skies where each of us is just as significant as the other.

We meet. We observe. We enjoy. We share our knowledge and experiences with each other. That's what we do in the AAC. That's why we're here, that's why we come. Isn't it?

We should all remember that as gatekeepers to the wonders of the universe we have a responsibility to all who wish to see and to know. Especially to the children, and the child in all of us.

TRIVIA:

This month's trivia question: Who was the first person to go into space more than once? The answer will appear in the December Focal Point.

The trivia question from October was too easy! Gordon Cooper, who flew in both the Mercury and Gemini Projects, was the first person to make a second orbital flight.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

David P. Schultz
Rich Snyder

Please make these new members feel welcome when you see them at a meeting or at an observing session.

FREE SOFTWARE TONIGHT

The Club has an extensive collection of shareware and freeware programs available to members. For example:

TONIT.EXE

A program that calculates the positions of the Sun and Moon, time of sunrise and sunset, twilight times, moonrise, moonset and other interesting things. Good for 19th through 23rd Centuries. Configure for any location in the world. Accurate to a fraction of a minute. For IBM and clones. DOS 2.11 or higher required.
By Lenny Abbey.

JUPE.EXE

A compendium of information for the observer of Jupiter. Shows satellites, location of Red Spot, and central meridian for any given date. Includes diagrams showing location and appearance of most named features. Detailed help and information screens. Requires IBM or clone with 256K, and EGA or VGA. This program is unique.
Version 2.0 by Lenny Abbey.

If you would like to have a copy, just call the treasurer at 634-1222, and your disk will be delivered at the next meeting, or sent via mail. There is a charge of \$2.00 per disk to cover handling, postage (if any) and reproduction charges. Any profits will be added to the Club treasury.

Get ready now for the December 9th Lunar Eclipse!

Next Month: AAC Membership List

The *Focal Point* is published monthly 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 of Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia.

Membership: \$20 annually for families and \$10 for students. Membership includes a subscription to the Astronomical League's *Reflector* and use of the Club's observatory in Villa Rica, Georgia. An optional subscription to *Sky and Telescope* is available for \$20 per year and to *Astronomy Magazine* for \$16 per year.

For up-to-date information on Club programs and activities please call the AAC's telephone hot-line at 621-2661.

Article submissions are strongly encouraged; please deliver to the editor for consideration. The submission deadline for the December 1992 issue of the *Focal Point* is November 30th. Permission is granted to duplicate and redistribute in a non-profit manner, in part or whole, provided credit is given to the authors, the Club and this publication.

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