

The Focal Point

The Atlanta Astronomy Club

Established 1947

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Editor: Peter Macumber

PSSG'00 & The LoN...S

It's hard to believe that another PSSG has come and gone, leaving us with fond memories & piles of dirty laundry.

I arrived at 5:00 p.m. on Thursday (I had some nasty dental work done that morning & couldn't get there any sooner) driving from Windy Hill & Cobb with my "check engine" light on, 30 dozen eggs and a cooler full of sausage patties. All I worried about was breaking down with 30 dozen eggs warming up in the trunk!

By the time I arrived, Chrissie Mondell, Joanne Cirincione & Julie Moore already had the toilet paper & soap distributed and the coffeepot perking, proving that I am not as necessary as I thought.

Viewing was great on Thursday night, keeping the coffeepot busy (and I got my last Messier on the 24", which is doing it in style) and started on my double star list (got 18 doubles).

On Friday & Saturday afternoon, Julie, Karen Simmons and I cooked up burgers & dogs on the grill and everyone appreciated having the convenience of fresh, hot food without leaving the site.

The cold & wind that swept through on Friday night & Saturday drove many people home, but we served breakfast to over 130 people on Saturday morning. John Lentini, our "Scouter" who has seen many a mass cookout, gave his "thumbs-up" to our efforts. We are consulting some chemists as to why our eggs turn green on the steam table. Smitty Smith thinks we should consider serving ham next year & just pretend we MEANT them to be green!

As usual, we had so many people volunteer to help us with the breakfast that we had to shoo them out of the kitchen to make room for the chefs. I want to thank everyone who helped, but especially, the LoN...S regulars, "Flipper" Smitty Smith, Peter "the Egg Man" Macumber, Julie "Grits" Moore, Alex "Juice Man" Langoussis, John "the Dishwasher Man" Ritger, our "Front-End Girls": Anna Banning & Tammy Brown, and our servers - David Macumber, Rich "Grit Slopper" Jakiel, and Smitty's son & niece. Also a thank you to Tom & Lynn Crowley, who handled the cash boxes for us, Scott Shy and Charles Hinley. If I missed anyone, it was not that your help was not appreciated but only that my poor memory fails me.

We went through a LOT of coffee, especially on Saturday night when the temperature dipped to the 30's but the viewing was fantastic. On Saturday afternoon, the power failed & we were planning to brew coffee using a generator & to keep it warm on the gas stove in the kitchen. Thankfully, Georgia Power pulled through after a little prodding & this wasn't necessary.

Saturday evening, we lit some charcoal on the big grill and everyone who didn't go to Bruckner's cooked up their meat, pooled our side dishes and had an old-fashioned potluck supper. We should make this an annual tradition.

Final clean-up on Sunday, which includes sweeping out the bunkhouses, cleaning the kitchen, mopping the dining hall and "Butt & Garbage" patrol of the grounds (even Mrs. Rukl was helping Joanne do "Butt Patrol"!!) saw us ready to leave at 2:00 p.m. Some of us stopped at The Fresh Air B-B-Q to fortify ourselves for the trip home & the unpacking.

I think we did very well on our breakfast & pancake proceeds. This money is used by the LoN...S to purchase the unbudgeted extras the AAC can use. The profits from our last 2 breakfasts (plus money from soap basket sales and Geoff Powers, who raffled off an astrophotograph) bought the toilet and building, the microwave and a new coffee pot out at VR.; and the banner & signs we had at the PSSG This year we plan to purchase a slide projector, screen and some slide sets to create public programs for our POHO and sidewalk events. (Anyone know where we can get a good one, cheap??)

Thank you to everyone who volunteered to help at this years PSSG -Unless we hire people, which would raise the costs considerably, having our members help out for an hour or two is the only way we can handle the needs of the 200-250 people who are on site. The PSSG is a PR coup as well as an educational & fun event for our Club -We have to dedicate ourselves to make it work, especially as it's reputation spreads. Many people came up to praise the event the speakers, the book sales, and us— they plan to put it on their list of 'must attend' star parties. (And these are people to regularly go to Chiefland and the Texas Star Party). Let's continue to pitch in to make every year better!!
Sharon Carruthers

May Deep Sky Event

The first annual AAC/VBAS star party last year brought out 35 folks. This year we hope to have 50 people come.

The star party will take place west of Ft Payne, Alabama. We are doing this event with the folks of the Von Braun Astronomical Society. It will take place on Saturday May 6. Michael Smith has graciously invited us back to use his land again. The place is dark and isolated. It is located on top of Lookout Mountain. Drive distance is about 2 hours or the same as the drive to Woodruff Boy Scout Camp north of Blue Ridge. The skies are as good as the skies at Woodruff. Call Keith Burns at 770-427-1475 for information or email him at Keith_B@bellsouth.net.

Elections

Elections for the Atlanta Astronomy Club officers and the board of directors will be held on Friday, May 19th, at the last General Meeting of the current term. Positions to be filled are president, 1st vice president (program chairman), 2nd vice president (observatory chairman), corresponding secretary, recording secretary, treasurer, and three openings on the board of directors. To submit your name or nominate someone else that you think will serve the club capably, contact the AAC electoral committee:

> Mark Banks, 404-257-2766, bank4@mindspring.com

> Rich Blackburn, 770-801-9759, rblackburn@mindspring.com

> Joanne Cirincione, 770-473-7196, starrynights@mindspring.com



By Geoff Powers

Greeting everyone! With the Star Gaze and Banquet rapidly approaching, this month I'll be very brief.

Our "Eyepiece Sketching with Rich" was a hit! Turnout was good, and the crowd was different from my film imaging sessions. I suppose we should cover this material more often, maybe something ongoing.

I'm thinking "Field Trip!!" This would be in June. I want to involve as many of our experienced members as possible, and cover CCD and through-the-scope time exposures on film. I'll iron out more details and fill in some blanks next month! See Ya at Peach State!

CEWMA

By Phil Sacco

These activities are specifically geared to foster new membership in the Mansfield, Social Circle, Conyers area as potential members in this area are not likely to participate at the other functions of the AAC. All members of the AAC are welcome to attend.

April 22nd, Saturday. PLEASE NOTE: This is a date change. The April 29th session is canceled and rescheduled for the 22nd. Possible seasonal time change to be announced for meeting at the Visitor Center CEWMA. We will attempt to map a few Lyrids tonight. Guest speaker- author, instructor and observer extraordinaire- Rich Jakiel "Viewing Galaxies". Training will conclude the "Universe Sampler" sections on the Sun and Moon. Viewing will follow the training. First Astro Image contest on any astronomical subject, to be held. Come enjoy the new endeavors! Constellations of the month: Leo, Hydra and the Cup. Chapter membership roles checked and consideration of chapter name, and by-laws.

May 6th, Saturday. Visitor Center. We shall begin the 'Universe Sampler' again, and check on everyone's progress. Planned subject- The Astronomical Leagues Observing Programs. Celestial Mythology this month: Ursa Major, Corvus, Virgo, Asterion Et Chara, Thisbe's Veil.

June 24th, Saturday. Visitor Center. Part two of the 'Universe Sampler'. Hand in those programs completed by participants. Subject and speaker to be announced. Constellations of the month: Bootes, Ursa Minor, Libra.

Woodruff Dark Sky Event, May 27

By John J. Lentini, johnlentini@yahoo.com

The Scouts would like to invite the Atlanta Astronomy Club to come and see the Dark Skies of Woodruff on May 27. So far, no AAC member who has been to Woodruff has failed to be impressed. This is your chance to find out why, and to do some observing under really dark skies.

We will be setting up on the Bee Field, the future home of the Woodruff Observatory. AAC members are invited to bring their tents and camp there. We will have some other; more developed camping facilities available, as well (picnic pavilions, latrines, running water), but those are a short drive away.

A number of Scout leaders, and possibly some Scouts will also be present for the observing session.

Woodruff is located between Blue Ridge and Blairsville. It is 100 miles from the intersection of I-75 and I-285. I can e-mail you detailed driving directions. Please contact John Lentini if you plan to attend.

Interview with AAC members

By Richard Blackburn

Welcome to the next installment in my interview with AAC members. This interview is with Tom Faber. If you have someone, you would like me to interview, email me at rblackburn@mindspring.com, or call me at 770-815-7387.

RB: What first got you interested in Astronomy?

TF: Watching TV coverage of spaceflights.

RB: When was that?

TF: Mid '60s

RB: When did you first get involved with the Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc.?

TF: I was a member of the old ASA club for about 5 years and knew many AAC members. When the ASA folded, I joined the AAC in 1996.

RB: What was your first telescope?

TF: A 2.4-inch refractor that I got for my 9th birthday.

RB: What is your favorite telescope?

TF: A homemade equatorial mounted 8-inch f/6 Newtonian.

RB: Why do you prefer this scope?

TF: Because I built it myself and it's currently my largest scope.

RB: What would be your ultimate telescope?

TF: Probably two scopes: A DOB in the 18-inch range that would be rather easily transported to dark sites (which I plan to get soon), and a permanently mounted equatorial scope, at least 12 inches, for CCD work.

RB: What is your favorite object in the sky?

TF: M42.

RB: What is so special about it?

TF: It's bright, easy to see, and there are tons of features even for small scopes.

RB: What is your least favorite object in the sky?

TF: Not one object, but a class of objects - Double Stars.

RB: What about it do you not like?

TF: Unless they have a nice color combination like Albireo or Gamma Leonis, they're kinda dull. Just two points of light.

RB: What do you consider the most challenging object you have observed?

TF: The Horsehead.

RB: What do you do to preserve your observations?

TF: For visual observing of deep-sky objects I make notes in a small notepad then later transfer them to index cards so I can keep them sorted by catalog and number. For photography, I keep notes in a notebook.

RB: Any thoughts on where Amateur Astronomy is heading in the future?

TF: Computers are causing a revolution in amateur astronomy. Not just for CCD work, but rapid information access and exchange via the Internet. Nowadays an amateur can do calculations and simulations at home that 20 years ago required a multi-million dollar mainframe. The down side of this is that some people think "virtual" observing is just as good as the real thing. In addition, too many people are obsessed with equipment. If you look at sci.astro.amateur, probably 80% of the posts are about equipment. Astronomy is about observing; equipment is engineering.

THE THREE STOOGES AND THE AURORA THIRTEEN

By Keith Burns writer/ Charles Painter editor

DAY ONE:

Our trip to Chiefland started out about 9:15AM on Thursday morning. It was Chuck Painter and myself. We had his car packed full of equipment with no room to spare. My scope of choice was the Aurora thirteen. Chuck brought his eight-inch Meade LX-50 SCT. While I did all of the navigation, Chuck did all of the driving. We pulled into the Chiefland astronomy village just before three in the afternoon. This was my second trip to this place.

Tom and Lynn Crowley had extended an invitation for us to come on down and observe with them. They would be coming down to Chiefland later in the week. There were only a few people set up on the field but the company was none the less interesting. Next to us was Dick. I can't remember his last name. He had just driven down from Lancaster, Pennsylvania. He had a 20-inch obsession setup and ready to go. Dick was set up next to the covered picnic table area. Near the southern of the field were two trailers. On the side of one of the trailers were the words, "Three Stooges Astronomy." The stooges were nowhere to be found at that point. This would call for an investigation later on.

Chiefland is a wonderful site with very dark skies (better than CEWMA in all directions other than a small light dome to the North). The facilities are first class with \$5/night providing access to an immense observing field, hot showers, a refrigerator, microwave and AC power.

Even though it was early, we wanted to get set up and relax for a while. All our equipment came out of the vehicle in a hurry. I couldn't believe how much stuff we had packed in that car. The scopes were setup first and then the tents. My philosophy is that the scope is first and everything else is second. This was the first time my aurora scope had been to Chiefland. This scope was under reconstruction last time I went to Chiefland. Now the final improvements had been finished with the primary mirror sporting a new reflective coating. Tonight would be the night this scope would see first light.

We went to town to get some supper and a few things from Wally World (a.k.a. Wal-mart). Supper consisted of a gourmet dinner at Burger King. The Wal-mart was a super Wal-mart. You could buy just about everything there except telescopes. We asked about telescopes just to make sure. It was more of a curiosity than anything else. The yellow ball was nearing the horizon as we returned to the village.

The three stooges made an appearance on the scene. Actually it was two stooges. We found out that the other stooge was absent because he had to work. Even Stooges have a job. The stooges were three guys from Virginia. They were into CCD imaging big time. Each had a trailer setup like Doug Chesser. Each had an 8-inch sct. telescope. The two guys were Larry and Darrell. It makes you wonder when one of them is named Larry. So who was missing? Was it Curly or Moe? They were nice guys and they had lots of equipment to. Each ran his scope and CCD camera with lap top computer. Each had a direct television satellite hookup with television and stereo system. This is the kind of stuff that Ralph (the dome maker) or Doug Chesser would have. I found out later that Larry, myself, and Billy was diabetic.

Darkness soon fell upon the scene. About this time I actually started to look at the sky. It was time to test the aurora scope. Off to the west we could see the Zodiacal light (or was that the "pillar of light"). It lined up perfectly with the ecliptic of the plane. Mars was near the horizon. Above Mars was Jupiter, Saturn, and Aldebaran. The pillar of light ended just above the star Aldebaran. Chuck and I warmed up by viewing various Messier objects in our scopes. I

pointed the aurora 13 at the Orion Nebula and was disappointed by the views it provided. No nebula was visible and the stars looked like birds. Lots of birds were visible. The birds looked more like Seagulls. Perhaps we were closer to the ocean than I thought. How can one see birds at night? It must be something else I'm seeing. The scope must be out of collimation, I thought. A quick check proved me correct. The collimation was so far out it was in the next county. Thanks to the Catseye system, we were able to repair the damage quickly. Now I looked at the Orion nebula again. Yes! , That's more like it. The nebula looked as good as it does when I use an o-III nebula filter. At this point I didn't care what happens the rest of the night. I was happy with the results of the new mirror coating. Out came the Herschel list from the observing logbook. I looked for a few open clusters in Canis Major. Of course this proved to be a bad night to try this search. After some failures, I went to work looking for NGC 2207 in Canis Major. This was a recent picture taken by the Hubble Space Telescope and I wanted to see the galaxy in my own scope. We had a slight detour at this point. Through Dick's scope, we were able to get an awesome view of Jupiter and then Saturn. For a minute there I thought I was looking at a picture in a magazine. Matter of fact these views were better than the pictures in the magazines. The Cassini Division of Saturn was clear and crisp. No imagination was required to see it either. The Giant Red spot of Jupiter actually looked like a red spot for once. Forget that pink or salmon color everyone else reports. I've never seen the planets look so good before in my life. Steadiness of the sky was outstanding at this point but the transparency was not good.

At about 8:30PM a low layer of clouds began to make their presence known. The sea fog had moved in overhead. It was a layer of clouds about 500 to 1000 feet up in the air. We all spent the next two hours waiting for this layer to clear. So to make the best of it, we pulled out the lawn chairs and we did the standard talk session. In the sky above you could see occasional sucker holes. The skies finally cleared about 10:30PM. We went back to the scopes immediately and worked on some more Herschel objects. I think I spent more time looking through Dick's scope and Chuck's scope than I did look through mine. We lasted til about 2:30 A.M. before the fatigue of the long day finally took its toll. It was time for bed. Dew was a persistent problem. It was more like industrial strength type dew. You get the impression that a heavy thunderstorm had just deposited several inches of water upon everything only minutes earlier. I needed my hair dryer to combat this problem but I didn't have one with me. It had fallen victim to space saving measures during the packing process. I went to sleep. Mother nature won this battle. I would be back for another battle.

DAY TWO:

Friday morning started with a thick layer of dew on everything. The skies were clear. Chuck and I ate breakfast. He did the cooking and I did the cleaning. The rest of the day was filled with a few activities and not much else. We visited with the other astronomers. Larry from the three stooges had his scope pointed at the sun with a solar filter mounted on the front of it. We observed the sun. Sunspots were everywhere to be found. It's not often that you get to meet the three stooges. Chuck managed to get some video shots of the stooges. He even was able to attach his video camera to the scope and take some video of the sunspots.

About 4PM, Chuck, Dick, and I went out to eat at a local seafood restaurant called, "The Lighthouse." Dick was a long time resident of Florida and he told us some stories about the area. Dick is a freelance artist by trade and does art shows all over the eastern US. He makes sculptures out of wood. Besides that he is an amateur astronomer of many years. He knows people who started the Herschel 400 list. As a member of the Ancient City Astronomy Club, he had trained under several of them.

We stopped at Wally World on our way back to the observing grounds. I purchased the only new equipment of the trip. The new dew elimination tool included an extension cord and hair dryer. Great for removing those unwanted moisture deposits from your finest glassware. Of course, you can also use it to

dry your hair. The trip back to the village only took about five minutes

Tom and Lynn Crowley had finally arrived. Chuck and I went on up and helped them unpack. Tom gave us the five-cent tour. We helped him set up his 18-inch scope. He had his telescope pad strategically placed to eliminate the glare from two street lights. Afterward Chuck and I went back to our scopes and did some viewing. The views of Jupiter and Saturn were not as good as they had been the previous night. The skies were clear til about 8:30 P.M.. At this point the sea fog moved in again. This called for a return visit to see Tom and Lynn again. It finally cleared about 10PM. We enjoyed some views through Tom's 18 inch scope. About 11PM, Chuck and I returned to our own telescopes. The dew elimination tool was getting quiet a workout. Every five minutes it was activated. Chuck knocked out a few more Herschel objects. He retired for the night. We moved my telescope to the covered area because it was supposed to rain in the morning. We went to bed after 2AM.

DAY THREE:

Saturday morning I awoke to find partly cloudy skies. The three stooges were leaving to go home. After they left, the skies clouded over. Perhaps our good luck with the weather was about to change. Now that our good luck charm was now gone. The weather was good til he left. Chuck awoke and started to cook breakfast. The skies began to darken and the smell of rain was in the air. The winds began to blow. When it started to rain, we moved our table under the covered area. The rain intensified as did the wind. It was more like a hurricane now. We ate breakfast as the rain and wind blew into the covered area. What is ironic is the fact that the rain stopped just as we finished eating breakfast. The winds also died down. Skies remained cloudy for a couple of hours before clearing. The winds again picked up in speed. By middle afternoon the winds were really strong. My tent finally went airborne and did a flip before landing on the nearby fence. I left the tent down for a couple of hours before trying to put it back up again. Now Chuck's tent did the same thing as it went flying over the car and landed where my tent had been just minutes earlier.

We secured the tents and sat in our chairs enjoying the afternoon sun. About 3:30PM Dick, Chuck, and I left for Cedar Key. The island was not what I thought it to be. Marshes were everywhere and the only beach was not much of a beach. The winds here on the island were blowing constant 20 knots. We walked around downtown for a half an hour before locating. It was an old place located next to the causeway. Betty's was the name of the place and the food was good. The prices were reasonable. The trip back to the astronomy village only took about 20 minutes. We had some new folks come in for a few nights viewing. This is a popular spot for folks from Tampa and Orlando.

Sunset came and went. The skies were clear and the winds light. Our friend, the Zodiacal light was back and very prominent. It looked more like light pollution. I found the planets quickly along with many messier objects. The night was going well and my Herschel hunt was moving along at lightening speed. I moved into the constellation of Leo the lion. It was here that I ran into a brick wall. I tried to find three galaxies and failed miserably. My Herschel hunt quickly came to a stop. Tom and Lynn came by for a visit. They hung around for a while. I started to view Messier objects again in order to regain the momentum I had lost. About 10PM the ground fog rolled in. It was more like a white wall that rolled in along the ground from the east. More like a scary movie then anything else. The layer was only about 20 feet high. The skies above were still clear but the fog started to dew up eyepieces and other glass equipment. The new hair dryer got quiet a workout a.k.a. as the dew elimination tool. Chuck, Dick, and I retreated to our lounge chairs. The sky emerged from a misty, indistinct horizon to stunningly black overhead with dazzling star fields. Omega Centauri was well above the southern horizon and easily naked eye.

After looking through Dick's scope at some more objects, I decided to go to bed. This is something I hated to do on that night but I was way too tired to be of any use. So I went to sleep with the intention of getting up in two hours.

I stirred from my sleep about 4:30 in the morning. Slipping on my shoes and a jacket, I went outside into the nighttime air. A thin layer of fog covered the ground. Everything had a white misty appearance. Dew was so thick that you thought it had rained hard only few minutes earlier.

The skies above were a definite WOW to say the least. Along the southern horizon sat the constellations of Norma and Lupus. On the southwest horizon lay the constellation of Centaurus. Near the southern horizons were the constellations of Norma and Lupus. The milkway followed a path from Centaurus and under the constellation of Lupus. From here it moved up to southern Scorpius. Sagittarius and Scorpius were just above the southeast horizon. The milkway was fully lit there. From eastern Scorpius to western Sagittarius the milky way was ablaze with stars. Even at the horizon you could see all the stars. Dark lanes and rifts in the spiral arm were easy to see. Visible naked objects included the swan nebula, the lagoon nebula (with its reddish nebula), the trifold nebula, m24, NGC 6231, m22, m6, m7, b287, and b92. The river of stars moved on up through the constellations of Scutum, Aquila, Sagitta, and Vulpecula. Even here the pattern of the spiral arm was easy to see. Star fields and dust lanes were everywhere it seemed. You could see the fuzzy patch of the coat hanger (star cluster), m11, and M27. I swore I saw the north American nebula in Cygnus. There were other objects but I couldn't remember them at this point. From Vulpecula the milkway followed a course through Cygnus (the swan), southeastern Cepheus, and dove down to Cassiopeia which lay on the northeast horizon. I can see why someone would think this a river in the sky. It seems to snake its way through the constellations from horizon to horizon.

The western horizon was decorated with Leo and the big bear (Ursa Major) heading for cover. Near the zenith lay Bootes with Hercules to his east and Virgo to his west. Draco (the dragon) was hanging upside down above Bootes and Hercules. I sat down and watched the sky for about another 20 minutes before going back to bed. Its times like these when it is best to just view the sky naked eye. A telescope would not have done it justice. It's amazing how different the sky looks with just a four-degree change in latitude. I headed for bed at this point. It was a picture perfect night and I was happy to witness it for a while.

DAY FOUR:

Sunday morning arrived with a thick layer of dew on everything. So we spent some time drying off all our stuff. Then we packed the car. We left for home about 10:30 A.M.. There was one stop for breakfast/Lunch. We arrived at his place about 4PM. The weekend was fun even though I only bagged eight Herschels. Chuck successfully located 47 Herschel objects. Maybe next time I will do better.

Villa Rica Party - April 22nd

Scheduled for Saturday, this party will consist of all volunteers, who wish to come out and help do our spring cleaning. The brand new PoShed has been built and ready for paint. This 16x20 building looks great, and with a coat of paint, it will outlast most of us members. If you have a paint sprayer, let us borrow it for the day, or better yet, bring it along and show us how to use it.

The Baum Dome, sadly, is in need of some repair and work. The new panneling for the sides is already onsite. It needs to be cut and attached.

Our new grass has gotten of to a wonderful start in some places, but needs some help in other areas. Some raking, straw spreading and maybe some fertilizer may do wonders. Some of the grass around the fences line will probably need a hair cut by the weekend. If you have a gas grass trimmer, come on out.

It may be time to feed the ants, sweep the floors, greases the roof, wash the washroom, de-pollen the 20.

Come out any time during the day from 900am onward, stay for an hour or stay all night, its up to you.

DIRECTIONS TO LITTLE RIVER CANYON

Fort Payne, AL from Atlanta

Take I-75 north from Atlanta. Exit interstate at Ga 20(exit 290) which is the Rome/Canton exit.

Turn left at end of exit ramp. Take Ga 20 west for 2 miles to US 411. Turn left onto US 411. Take VERY FIRST RIGHT onto entrance ramp. You are still on Ga 20/US 411 and now US 41. Proceed on road for 3 miles to another exit ramp. Exit to the right. The road you are on now is Ga 20/US 411. Head west on the road for 17 miles to the Rome city limits. After you enter the city limits of Rome, proceed for another 1 1/2 miles. The road will turn into a limited access highway. Take the SECOND EXIT and exit to the RIGHT. This takes you to Ga 27 north/Ga 20 west and downtown Rome. Continue on US 27/Ga 20 for 3 miles. After traveling for 3 miles, Ga 27 branches off to the north (right) BUT you should CONTINUE WEST (straight) on Ga 20. Take Ga 20 for 17 miles to the Georgia/ Alabama border. Upon crossing the state border, the road changes names to Al 9. Continue heading west on Al 9 for 5 miles to Al 35. Turn right onto Al 35. Proceed on Al 35 for 19 1/2 miles to county 89 (Desoto Parkway/ Scenic Road). NOTE: If you turn left, you will be heading towards the observing site (1). If you turn right, you will be heading towards Desoto (2) State Park. If you go straight, you will be heading towards downtown Fort Payne (3).

(1) To Little River Canyon Observation Site:

From Al. 35 turn left onto county 89(Scenic Road). Proceed south on county 89(Scenic Road) for 7.4 miles to Al 176. This is the second 4 way stop you will come across. Akins Furniture store is on the corner. Continue straight on the road. You are now on Al 176. Take it for 0.5 mile to county 115. Turn left onto 115 and take it for 2.4 miles to county 243. Turn right onto 243 and take it 2.1 miles (Note that 243 crosses into Cherokee County and the road name changes to county 47) to county 43. Turn left onto county 43 and take it for 0.6 mile around a curve and down the hill. There will be a gravel drive on the left. Pull into here. This is the field. If you come to a 3-way intersection, you have gone too far. The road ends here at county 275, which is Canyon Rim Road. The field is back over you left shoulder at the intersection.

NOTE: This is private land and we have been given permission to use it. Treat it with care.

It's primitive camping so be prepared. The location is near a road but the contour of the land prevents car headlights from shining on you.

(2) To Desoto State Park:

From Al 35 turn right onto county 89(Desoto Parkway). Proceed north on county 89(Desoto Pkwy) for 5 miles. At this point, you will enter onto park land. The cottages, motel, and lodge are located along the first road on the right after entering the park. To get to the campgrounds, information center, and country store, continue north on county 89 to county 618. This road is located just past the country store. Turn left onto county 618. Camp registration is done at the country store. County 618 takes you to the campground, which is about 3/4 mile up the road on the left.

(3) To Fort Payne:

Proceed on Al. 35 for 2.4 miles downhill to Gault Avenue (US 11). Turn left onto US 11(Gault Avenue). Take Gault Avenue to Al. 35 split. Turn right onto Al. 35 and proceed to I-59 interchange area. There are many restaurants and stores along the road.



NASA News

Edited by Gil Shillcutt

NEAR:

A successful 22-second engine burn on March 3 put NEAR into a near-circular orbit 200 kilometers above asteroid Eros, where it will stay until April 1. The images and data continue

to stream in. The laser rangefinder (used to measure the distance to the asteroid) has been turned on, and it works better than required. <http://near.jhuapl.edu/>

Scientists with the NEAR mission held a press conference discussing results from the first month in orbit around Eros. Also, the spacecraft has been renamed to honor Dr. Eugene M. Shoemaker, a legendary geologist who influenced decades of research on the role of asteroids and comets in shaping the planets. 1st month story: <http://www.jhuapl.edu/public/pr/000313.htm>

renaming: <http://www.jhuapl.edu/public/pr/000314.htm>

Mars:

MGS has caught dust devils and landslides in the act of changing the surface of Mars. <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/releases/2000/mgsdevils.html>

MGS observations also reveal that Mars' flat northern lowlands may have been the sites of rapid water accumulation, and show evidence for large, buried channels that could have formed from the flow of enormous volumes of water. <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/releases/2000/mgsmola.html>

MGS has also enabled an interesting comparison of Mars' northern and southern polar caps. Story at: <http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/releases/2000/mgscheese.html>

Hubble Space Telescope:

Scientists using Hubble images have rediscovered two tiny moons of Uranus that have not been seen since Voyager 2 passed by the planet in 1986. Story at <http://www.news.cornell.edu/releases/March00/UranusMoons.bpf.html>

Using Hubble, scientists have probed the glowing gas surrounding 27 dying stars, called planetary nebulae, in the Large Magellanic Cloud.

<http://opposite.stsci.edu/pubinfo/pr/2000/09/index.html>

Using Hubble and Voyager observations, a team of astronomers say they have detected the faintly glowing "bow shock" made by our solar system as it plows forward through clouds of interstellar particles.

http://explorezone.com/archives/00_03/15_glowing_discovery.htm

Astronomers Discover Feeding Mechanism for Supermassive Black Holes – HST results at <http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/units/research/archive/starfeed.htm>

Gravitational Lens Helps Chandra Find Rare Type of Black Hole (also using HST data and a telescope on Mauna Kea)

http://chandra.harvard.edu/press/00_releases/press_032000type2.html

A trio of newborn stars is taking part in a complex dance, as revealed by recent Hubble observations. <http://opposite.stsci.edu/pubinfo/pr/2000/05/>

Chandra X-Ray Observatory:

Chandra has imaged a colossal cosmic "weather system" produced by the collision of two giant clusters of galaxies. Forecast: 100 million degrees and starry. <http://chandra.harvard.edu/photo/cycle1/a2142/>

Terrestrial Science:

Detailed measurements of sulfur isotopes in five Martian meteorites have enabled researchers to determine that the abundant sulfur on the surface of Mars is due largely to chemical reactions in the Red Planet's atmosphere. Their conclusions suggest that the variations in sulfur isotopes found on ALH84001, the Martian meteorite thought by some scientists to contain evidence of ancient Martian life,

are not due to biological processes. <http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/newsrel/science/mcsulfur.htm>

The launch of IMAGE was scheduled for March 25. IMAGE is the first satellite mission dedicated to imaging the Earth's magnetosphere. Follow the news at <http://pluto.space.swri.edu/IMAGE/>

Press release: <ftp://ftp.hq.nasa.gov/pub/pao/pressrel/2000/00-040.txt>

An interdisciplinary study by astronomers and climatologists has found a correlation between holes in the outermost layer of the sun—or the corona—and the globally averaged temperature of the Earth. This points to the need for a good understanding of the sun's input, as scientists try to gauge the effects of human activity on global climate.

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2000/03/000315080417.htm>

A new chronology of meteoroid impacts on the moon shows some surprising correlations with major biological events on Earth, including a rise in impacts beginning around the time of the great explosion of life known as the Cambrian. Survival of the fittest, and diversification of the shell-shocked?

http://www.urel.berkeley.edu/urel_1/CampusNews/PressReleases/releases/03-09-2000a.html

Extraterrestrial gases, including helium, are trapped in "buckyball" molecules in a layer of sedimentary clay found in many places on Earth. The buckyballs containing the gases arrived on Earth about 65 million years ago during an asteroid impact that scientists theorize ended the age of the dinosaurs. This discovery provides another tool to study past asteroid impacts. http://george.arc.nasa.gov/dx/basket/pressrelease/00_20AR.html

(I wonder. Have they found any traces of Piner? – Gil)

A meteorite that exploded over a remote area of northwest Canada in January may increase our knowledge of the initial materials that made up the sun and planets. It was a very rare find. (How long before it shows up in Jerry Armstrong's collection? – Gil)

http://spacescience.com/headlines/y2000/ast16mar_1.htm

Solar Science:

Scientists using SOHO have figured out a way to image the far side of the sun, a technique which should help provide additional advance warning of solar storms. Images based on pressure waves! Spooky science at <ftp://ftp.hq.nasa.gov/pub/pao/pressrel/2000/00-033.txt>

images and more at <http://sohowww.nascom.nasa.gov/hotshots/>

High Energy & Cosmology:

NASA announced in March the selection of one flight investigation and four interdisciplinary scientist investigations for the Gamma Ray Large Area Space Telescope (GLAST) mission, planned for launch in 2005. GLAST is intended to explore the most energetic and violent events in the universe. Press release at <ftp://ftp.hq.nasa.gov/pub/pao/pressrel/2000/00-032.txt>

Also, the Gamma-Ray Burst Monitor (GBM) has been selected to fly on the Gamma Ray Large Area Space Telescope (GLAST) mission. Story at <ftp://ftp.hq.nasa.gov/pub/pao/pressrel/2000/00-039.txt>, GLAST page at <http://glast.gsfc.nasa.gov/>

In a story related to the above, amateur astronomers have detected for the first time the faint afterglow from a gamma-ray burst billions of light years away. Nice story at http://science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2000/ast14mar_2m.htm

A new generation of particle detector has dedicated itself for more than a year to the search for exotic particles that, theoretically, make up more than 90 percent of the mass of the universe. The device has yet to find these particles - known as WIMPs, or weakly interacting massive particles. (Did they check Tom Crowley's basement? – Gil)

http://www.urel.berkeley.edu/urel_1/CampusNews/PressReleases/releases/02-29-2000.html

Based on GRO data, astronomers have determined that half the previously unidentified high-energy gamma ray sources in our own galaxy, the Milky Way,

actually comprise a new class of mysterious objects.

<ftp://ftp.hq.nasa.gov/pub/pao/pressrel/2000/00-042.txt>

Solar Systems:

Four contract-winning teams will begin the quest to design Terrestrial Planet Finder, an ambitious mission in NASA's Origins Program that will look for possible life-supporting planets around other stars. Directly imaging an earth-sized planet around another star won't be easy. TPF is expected to launch somewhere around 2012. JPL press release at

<http://www.jpl.nasa.gov/releases/2000/tpfcontracts.html>

The Lighter Side

Camping

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine, they lay down for the night and went to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend. "Watson, look up and tell me what you see."

Watson replied, "I see millions and millions of stars." "What does that tell you?" Watson pondered for a moment. "Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo.

Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Theologically, I can see that God is all-powerful and that we are small and insignificant. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Why what does it tell you?"

Holmes was silent for a moment, and then he finally spoke. "Watson, you're an idiot. Some fool has stolen our tent."

Chattahoochee Nature Center

By John Lentini

On February 18, over 300 folks got to look thru 2 scopes supplied by us. The weather was threatening (so much so that some AAC members thought the event cancelled), and the seeing was pretty awful, what with clouds and light pollution, but we got to look at Jupiter, Saturn and the full moon. I was fortunate to be joined by one other AAC member with a C-8 (whose name I forgot to record). Most of the folks didn't know how awful a night it was for astronomy, so they had a great time.

Here is the thank you note I received from the Chattahoochee Nature Center.

Dear John:

Thank you so very much for coming out to the Chattahoochee Nature Center's Winter Walk and setting up your telescope! It was such a wonderful addition to the evening's events. Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to "look up into the sky"! Who would have thought earlier in the day that you would have been able to set up? Lucky us that opportunity afforded us all! I hope that in the future we can have you and members of the Atlanta Astronomy Club participate in events at CNC.

Again, thank you for your generous contribution of time and talent!

Sincerely,

Karen Menton

Director of Special Events

The Focal Point is available in color online in PDF format. The free Adobe(R) Reader allows you to view, navigate, and print PDF files across all major computing platforms.

Visit **NightSky.Org/aac** on the web. In a private sub-web, the past year of Focal Points can be found. Check it out. If it works for you, send me an e-mail and I will stop sending you a copy snail-mail. It will also save the club a dollar. The Focal-Point web can be entered by using the Username of **AAC** and a password of **mizar**. These names are case sensitive! Type AAC in capitals, type mizar in lower case.

Peter

Club Officers

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Geoff Powers	Astrto Imaging	770-454-6107

April 22 — Quarterly Work Party

9:00am, VR

April 22 -- Viewing Galaxies

5:00pm, CEWMA

April 29 — POHO

5:00pm, VR

May 6 — Dark Sky with VBAS

Little River Canyon, AL.

May 27 — Astro Techniques

6:00pm, VR

June 3 — Dark Sky

CEWMA

June 24 — Training

6:00pm, VR

Focal Point

If you have an interesting story, send it along to me for publication in the Focal Point. I can accept most formats and even handwritten articles. A number of people compliment the articles written by our own club members, whether it be about observations, technique or just plain human interest.

April 30th is the deadline for the April Focal Point

The Atlanta Astronomy Club Inc., the South's largest and oldest astronomical society, meets at 8:00 p.m. on the third Friday of each month at Emory University's White Hall or occasionally at other locations (check the hot line for details). Membership is open to all. Annual dues are \$25 (\$10 for students). Discounted subscriptions to Astronomy, and Sky & Telescope magazines are available.

Hot Line: Timely information on the night sky and astronomy in the Atlanta area is available on a twenty-four hour basis on the

Atlanta Astronomy Club hot line: **770-621-2661**.

Internet Home Page: <http://stlspb.gtri.gatech.edu/astrotxt/atlaastro.html>

Subscribe to the Atlanta Area Astronomers Mailing List!

Send a message to AACList-subscribe@listbot.com

For further information send an e-mail to Lenny Abbey LAbbey@Mindspring.com

Atlanta Astronomy Club
April Meeting
NOTE CHANGE OF MEETING LOCATION AND DATE.

Our April meeting will be held at **Campbell Hall** (the science hall) on the campus of **Agnes Scott College** on **Thursday, April 20 at 8:00 p.m.**

A great treat is in store for us in April. We will jointly host (with Agnes Scott College) **Carolyn Collins Petersen**, Associate Editor of *Sky & Telescope* magazine. Carolyn will speak on **Astronomy in the New Millennium**.

As amateurs and professionals extend their vision into the cosmos the turn of the millennium is a good time to look where we've been, and appreciate the wonders of the cosmos we are privileged to observe. Ms. Collins Petersen's presentation features a look at observatories past and present, and a journey through the mysteries of starbirth and stardeath.

Carolyn Collins Petersen is one of the editors for *Sky & Telescope* magazine. She also serves as the editor of Sky Books & Products as well as the editor-in-chief of *SkyWatch* magazine. She is an award-winning science writer who, since 1980, has written articles for such publications as *Sky & Telescope* and *The Denver Post*. She is first author of *Hubble Vision*, published by Cambridge University Press (co-written with Dr. John C. Brandt).

Carolyn has written more than 20 planetarium programs which have appeared in more than 700 planetariums around the world, including the Einstein Planetarium at the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C., the Gates Planetarium in Denver, the Adler Planetarium in Chicago and the McDonnell Space Theater in St. Louis.

Carolyn is a member of the American Astronomical Society, and its Division of Planetary Sciences. Last, but not least, she is Webmistress of the Henrietta Leavitt Flat Screen Space Theater, an online planetarium show and space image gallery.

How to locate Campbell Hall

From downtown Decatur, proceed south on McDonough Street. After you cross the railroad tracks, look for the Agnes Scott parking deck on the right (about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the town square. Park there for free. Inside the parking deck is a map of the campus, showing Campbell Hall (which is very near the parking deck).

Find out more about Carolyn Collins Petersen at:

<http://www.voicenet.com/~peterscc>

Learn about astronomy at Agnes Scott College at:

http://www.agnesscott.edu/aca/depts_prog/info/physics_astronomy/bradley/



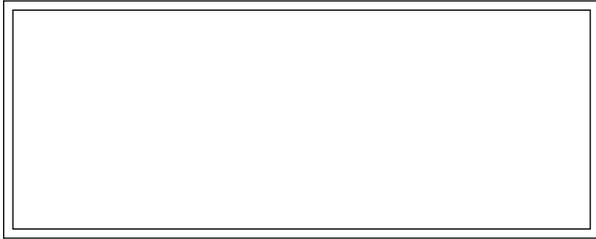
Newsletter of The Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc.

FROM:

Peter Macumber - PMacumber@Nightsky.Org
1057 Trestle Drive
Austell, GA 30106

We're here to help! Here's how to reach us:

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PMB 305
3595 Canton Road A9
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FIRST CLASS