

# The Focal Point

The Atlanta Astronomy Club  
Established 1947  
September 2007

Vol. 20 No. 4

Editor: Kat Sarbell

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## September General Meeting

By Peter Macumber, President and Keith "Kosmic Kow" Burns, Retired AAC Program Chair

The next general meeting of the Atlanta Astronomy Club will be on Friday, September 21st, at 8 P.M. at Emory University at White Hall. The meeting will take place in room 207. This is the first room on the left after entering into the building through the double doors. We will have refreshments just outside of the room before the meeting. A small donation in the "kitty" box is requested but not required. Directions to White Hall and new parking info are on page 7.

The meeting starts at 8 PM sharp. We will have our business meeting first. This includes any announcements and other things of astronomical interest. Anyone who wishes to make any announcements please notify Peter Macumber at [president@atlantaastronomy.org](mailto:president@atlantaastronomy.org) and also email me at

[Keith\\_B@Bellsouth.net](mailto:Keith_B@Bellsouth.net). That way Peter knows who is speaking ahead of time and he can schedule the time required. I need to know so I can put your information on a Power Point presentation slideshow that will run before and during the beginning of the business meeting. Please have the announcement info to me by no later than Tuesday September 18th.

Our featured lecture for the evening will be the Star Party Program. We will have two or three presenters who will talk about the star parties that they have attended, including the Winter Star Party, the Texas Star Party, and the Riverside Telescope Makers' Convention. We will adjourn the meeting and head off to a local restaurant for supper, dessert, or a drink.

## Get ready for the Peach State Star Gaze!

by Peter Macumber - PSSG Chair, and Joanne Cirincione - PSSG Co-Chair

The AAC's Peach State Star Gaze (PSSG), is back in Georgia! We will be moving to a permanent home at the Deerlick Astronomy Village (DAV) in Sharon, Georgia. It is east of Atlanta and 50+ miles west of Augusta, GA. It has some of the darkest skies in Georgia. Below is a photo of Grier's Field, the main observing area.

The Peach State for this year will take place October 7 - 14. We will have speakers, vendors and workshops.

Please visit us at [AtlantaAstronomy.org/pssg/](http://AtlantaAstronomy.org/pssg/). You can also email us at [pssg@atlantaastronomy.org](mailto:pssg@atlantaastronomy.org). Please also visit the Deerlick Astronomy Village's site at [Deerlickgroup.com](http://Deerlickgroup.com).

You can now register via links on the PSSG site, AAC site or the DAV site. Just download the forms and either mail to Peter or give to one of the PSSG Staff at the meetings. On-line registration is also available. The pre-registration deadline is September 21st. Afterwards walk-in rates will apply.

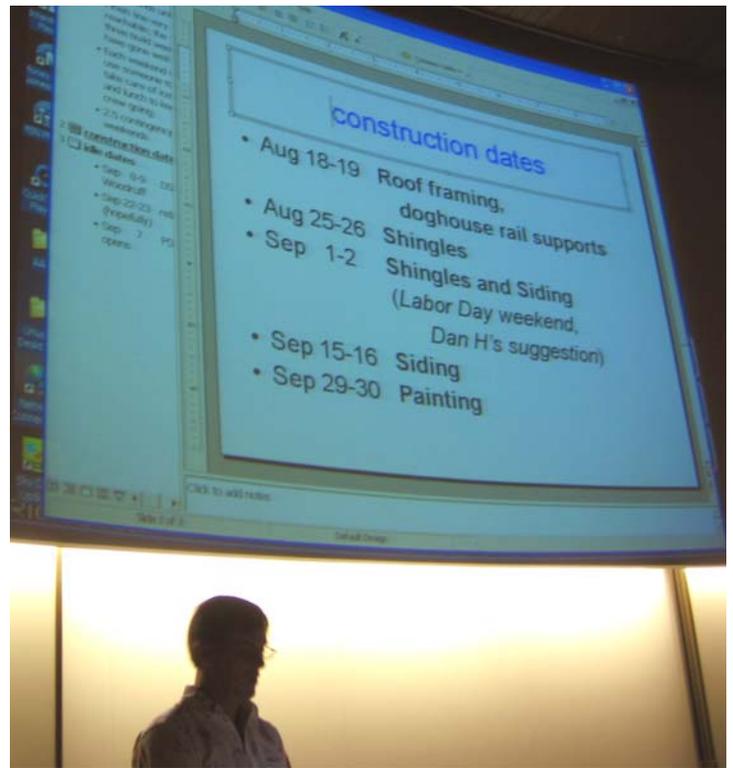
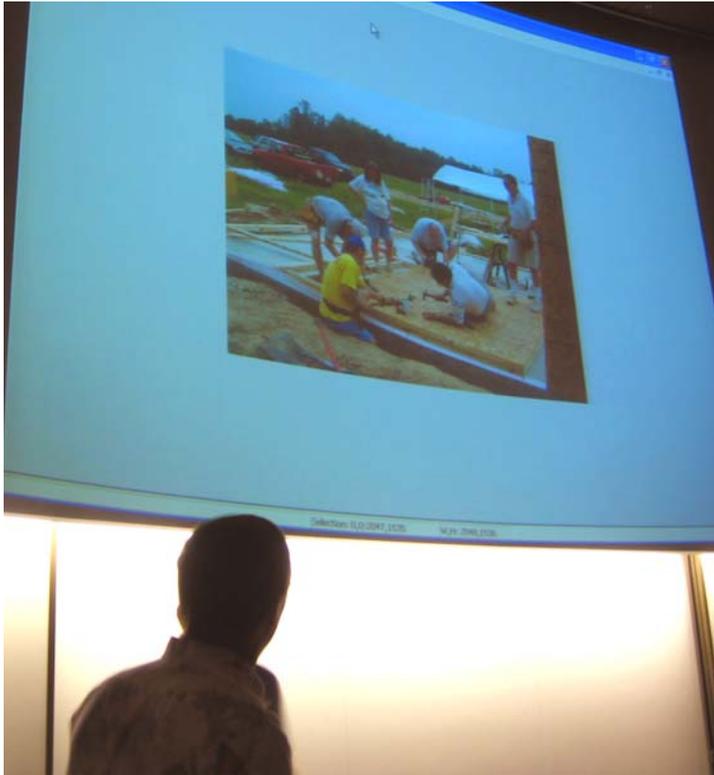
If you would like to volunteer and be a part of this, send an email to [pssg@atlantaastronomy.org](mailto:pssg@atlantaastronomy.org) and let us know. We need volunteers to help us with the new venue.



# July & August AAC Meeting Minutes

By Richard Jakiel

Both July 20th and August 18th general meetings were lightly attended (30 to 35 members and guests) with AAC president Peter Macumber presiding. The business portions for each meeting were kept brief.



*Above and above right: Larry Wallace presents a slide show of the work being done on the AAC's property at the new Deer Lick Astronomy Village.*

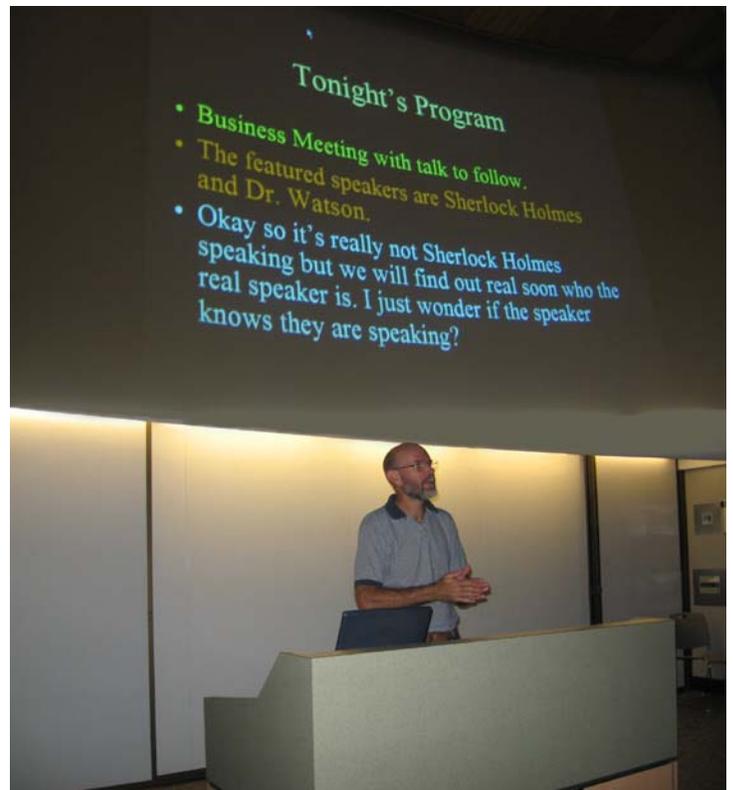
Key points brought up during the interval was the PSSG registration at the DAV site (Oct 7 - 14th, 2007) was now online and the progress of the build-out at the club's new DAV site. At this moment, the walls and the framework for the roof of the 18' x 32' building was up, and the grounds were well-worked by the tractor-driving president. Other than Deep Sky Observing events (DSO's), scheduling activities at VR and other locations have been kept to a minimum until most of the build-out is completed.

## Program Summaries

On July 20th, Dr. Richard Schmude gave an informative and entertaining presentation on the ever changing appearance of the planet Jupiter. Much of the South Equatorial Belt (SEB) has faded, plus large scale disturbances have been recorded here and in other areas of the Jovian disk. Also of note was the reactivation of the "circulating current" located near the oval BA (or the "Little Red Spot").

On August 18th, the membership was treated to an entertaining DVD of John Dobson - telescope maker, sidewalk astronomer, philosopher and "Mad Monk" of cosmology. Though well into his 80's, he is remarkably witty, informed, outspoken and a tad bit weird making for a most amusing/interesting 90 minutes.

*Right: Club president Peter Macumber speaks at the opening of the August meeting. Club photos by Tom Faber.*



## The DAV Build-Out Day

Volunteers arrived at the Deer Lick Astronomy Village the weekend of August 25th and 26th to construct the AAC warm-up shed. Despite the heat and mugginess, these diligent members got a lot of work accomplished. Peter Macumber, Keith Burns, Daniel Herron, Larry Wallace, Dave Lumpkin, Eric Benner, and Larry Newman all deserve our thanks. Photos by Daniel Herron unless noted.

Right: First the warm-up shed was wrapped in a liner before the siding was installed.

Below left: Then the siding was installed on the building.

Below, center of page: That day Peter Macumber (L) and Keith Burns started shingling the roof.

Below right: It was so hot that weekend that the warm-up shed was renamed "The AAC Sauna". (This photo was taken by Peter Macumber.)

Bottom of page: How were they able to get so much work done? They had three "Kows" there - Keith Burns, the "Kozmic Kow".



## Charlie Elliott Chapter Meeting Minutes

by Clevis Jones, CE Recording Secretary

*(These minutes have been edited for space constraints.)*

Attendance: Twenty-three guests and members attended the August 18 CE meeting.

Business: Director Larry Owens gave a complete review of the Byer's mount/16" truss tube project. He covered upcoming events including a Scout Troop request for September 15, and a Girl Scout Troop (120 of them at Stone Mountain) request for October 15. Volunteers are needed for both! Please contact Larry Owens at Director@CEastronomy.org if you can help.

Programs Scheduled: September meeting: Fred Bulls on Super Bright Super Nova – LOCATION CHANGE to Perimeter College (directions on the CE Web-site). October: Patrick Durusau (and back to the CE visitor's center). November: Dr. Richard Schmude on Mars (Mars close approach is in December). December: Pot Luck and Larry Owens Planetary Imaging Workshop. The 2007 remaining schedule for the CE Meetings is: September 15, October 6 (note: Peach State 7th - 14th), November 3 (back to 3 p.m. for the winter), December 15.

Feature Presentation: Toga Party – Philip Sacco presented "Birds of a Feather – The Lover's Triangle". He gave (in his toga) a fact & legend filled program on mythology and why the Summer Triangle ISN'T just Deneb, Altair, and Vega.

What's Up Tonight: Steve Bieger covered upcoming events, including the August 28th Total Lunar eclipse.

Current Events: Clevis Jones covered Shuttle Endeavour & STS-118 (including Angela Poore's images), the SAO \$20,000 awards, Comet Linear VZ13, Mars dust and the poor Rovers, our Solar System moons, "A Whale of a Tale about a Whale of a Tail in the Tail of the Whale" including appropriate music, and Deborah & Clevis' new observatory with the roll off tower (yeah, RIGHT!).

Observing Session: Some souls braved the damp ground and cloudy skies, hoping for a peek at the stars.

## Charlie Elliot Future Meetings

by Clevis Jones, CE Recording Secretary

Meeting Dates and Programs: September 15, at 5:00 p.m. – CHANGE OF LOCATION to Perimeter College (I-20 East, take Exit 98, turn south) See www.CEastronomy.org for details and map.

Feature Presentation: "Supernova 2006GY: A Super-Duper nova" by Perimeter College instructor, Fred Bulls: Supernova 2006GY, which took place in NGC 1260, a spiral galaxy that's 238 million light years away, is the most luminous supernova ever observed, peaking out at about 100 times a typical supernova luminosity. It's thought to have been a "pair instability supernova." This is a type of thermonuclear supernova that theorists for decades have claimed should end the lives of very heavy stars, and SN2006GY is the first compelling candidate.

What are the theorists talking about? We'll see. The deaths of low and high mass stars will be discussed, concentrating on the heavy ones, and we'll look at the significance of this recent supernova.

October Meeting: October 6, 5:00 p.m. Feature Presentation – Patrick Durusau (and back to the CE visitor's center).

For updates & directions & live broadcasts, please check the CEastronomy website for the most current meeting information at <http://www.CEastronomy.org>

## Observing Events for 2007

by Daniel Herron, Observing Chair

Here are some dates in 2007 for Observing events (all dates subject to change). I am sure some will be added or changed during the course of the year but I will try and stick to them if possible. I will update the locations and times later as well as add them to the AAC web site and the Yahoo Astro Atlanta List.

**DSO Dates (locations noted if known/decided)** September 8th, October @ DAV (PSSG), November 10th, December 8th

**GASP Events** November 3rd - Red Top Mtn State Park.

**New member Orientation/Open Houses (all at Villa Rica for now unless noted)** October 20 (New member Orientation), December 15th (Open House - New member Orientation).

## August DSO Report

by Daniel Herron, Observing Chair

Well we had a great night last night at Brasstown Bald. I arrived around 6PM and was happy the outside temp was in the mid 70's with a slight breeze. More people started to show up about an hour before dark and a few just after dark. Keith showed up just after dark with Lilly (a/k/a the Applelady). This was Lilly's first DSO, and as a peace offering she bought us chopped apples and was nicknamed "Applelady" almost immediately. As it was getting dark and we were setting up, Jupiter popped out and I aimed my scope in its direction. Cloud bands were clear and fine and all four moons were visible. The moons were roughly aligned as so . O . . but just about 30 mins later we noticed that Io (closest to Jupiter) was getting closer. A few minutes later it moved in front of the massive planet and across one of the dark cloud bands and the moon was visible as a small white circle in the dark band. About an hour or so later the shadow of Io appeared and started moving across the planet. About 2 or 3 hours later around 12:00 or so Io popped out of the other side of Jupiter so that the moons were arranged as this . O . . It was amazing to see something out there actually move in a relatively short time period. We had a couple of families that happened by to join us for a couple of hours and they were amazed as well.

Throughout the night we took in observations of M57, M101, M8, M13, Alberio, the Veil Nebula, the North America Nebula, the Cat's Eye, M51, M7 & M6 and many more. I also kept count and throughout the night we saw about 20 or so Perseids. Some were really bright and long; others were short and dim. The best was one where the ion trail lasted many seconds afterwards - long enough for even those who did not see the meteor to look in the direction and see the trail.

The Cat's Eye is one of my favorite objects. It can be hard to find as it is very small and compact. But once you find it you'll notice that as you look directly at it you can see that it appears green, and as you use averted vision the color disappears and the contrast increases. Looking at the *Cat's Eye* is a good example of how the *human eye* works.

We had noticed flashes in the sky throughout the night here and there from lightning in a far off storm. Around 1AM there were almost constant flashes as the storm was getting closer. The sky was still clear but the flashes were getting in the way of meteor observing. A little while later we noticed fewer and fewer stars in the sky as thin clouds started moving in and out as the storm got closer. It also got very windy and around 2AM the two of us who were still up and at it decided to call it a night and head home. I got home around 4AM and quickly went to sleep.

Thanks for all those that came out! We had a great time and hope to see you at the next DSO!

## Bradley Observatory Fall Open Houses

Speakers are to be announced - the theme for this year is amateur astronomy!

September 21 - The Fall Equinox Concert, which is "Stars and Jazz" and features Dr. De Pree and Dr. Winzenburg from the Agnes Scott music faculty.

The rest of the Fall lectures will take place on October 12, November 9 and December 14. Doors open at 7:30 PM, lectures begin at 8 PM.

## Message from the Editor

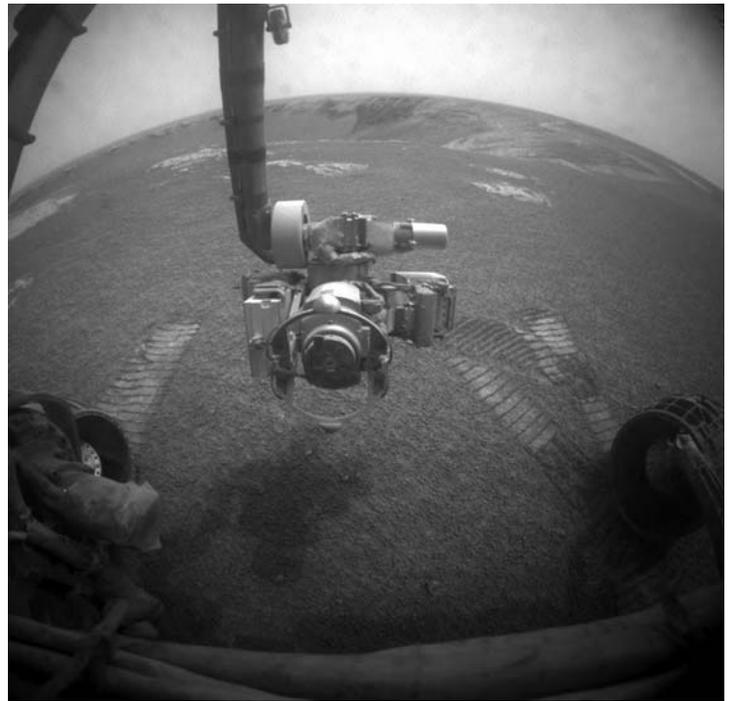
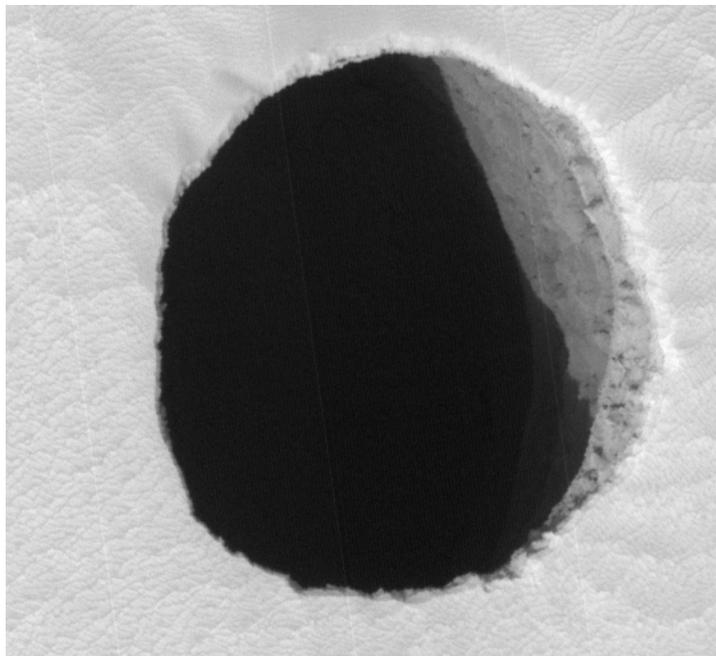
Most of the images in the Focal Point are in color, but you won't see that if you are getting the mailed version. You can download the full color version from the AAC web site each month. By receiving the Focal Point over the Internet instead of having it mailed, you can save the club about \$12 a year in printing and mailing costs. It may not sound like much, but the more people that use the Internet to receive the Focal Point, the more money the club will have to support its other activities. Just send an email to Kat Sarbell (FocalPoint@AtlantaAstronomy.Org) requesting that your name be removed from the Focal Point mailing list.

## New View of Dark Pit on Arsia Mons

HiRISE Operations Center image release - 29 August 2007

Credit: NASA/JPL/University of Arizona

Dark pits on some of the Martian volcanoes have been speculated to be entrances into caves. A previous HiRISE image, looking essentially straight down, saw only darkness in this pit. This time the pit was imaged from the west. Since the picture was taken at about 2:30 p.m. local (Mars) time, the sun was also shining from the west. We can now see the eastern wall of the pit catching the sunlight. This confirms that this pit is essentially a vertical shaft cut through the lava flows on the flank of the volcano. Such pits form on similar volcanoes in Hawaii and are called "pit craters." They generally do not connect to long open caverns but are the result of deep underground collapse. From the shadow of the rim cast onto the wall of the pit we can calculate that the pit is at least 78 meters deep. The pit is 150 x 157 meters across.



*Opportunity used its front hazard-identification camera to obtain this image at the end of a drive on the rover's 1,271st sol. Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech*

## NASA's Twin Mars Rovers Resume Driving After Storms

NASA/JPL NEWS RELEASE - August 26, 2007

After six weeks of hunkering down during raging dust storms that limited solar power, both of NASA's Mars Exploration Rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, have resumed driving.

Opportunity advanced 13.38 meters (44 feet) toward the edge of Victoria Crater on Aug. 21. Mission controllers were taking advantage of gradual clearing of dust from the sky while also taking precautions against buildup of dust settling onto the rover.

"Weather and power conditions continue to improve, although very slowly for both rovers," said John Callas of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif, project manager for the rovers. With the improved energy supplies, both rovers are back on schedule to communicate daily. Opportunity had previously been conserving energy by going three or four days between communications.

No new storms have been lifting dust into the air near either solar-powered rover in the past two weeks. Skies are gradually brightening above both Spirit and Opportunity. "The clearing could take months," said rover Project Scientist Bruce Banerdt. "There is a lot of very fine material suspended high in the atmosphere."

As that material does settle out of the air, the powdery dust is accumulating on surfaces such as the rovers' solar panels and instruments. More dust on the solar panels lessens the panels' capacity for converting sunlight to electricity, even while more sunlight is getting through the clearer atmosphere.

Opportunity's daily supply of electricity from its solar panels reached nearly 300 watt-hours on Aug. 23. That is more than twice as much as five weeks ago, but still less than half as much as two months ago. It is enough to run a 100-watt bulb for three hours.

*Continued on next page*

One reason the rover team chose to drive Opportunity closer to the crater rim was to be prepared, if the pace of dust accumulation on the solar panels increases, to drive onto the inner slope of the crater. This would give the rover a sun-facing tilt to maximize daily energy supplies. The drive was also designed to check performance of the rover's mobility system, so it included a turn in place and a short drive backwards.

The next day, a favorable wind removed some dust from Opportunity's solar panels, providing a boost of about 10 percent in electric output. This forestalled the need to hurry to a sun-facing slope. The team is still excited to get Opportunity inside Victoria Crater to examine science targets on the inner slope that were identified in June, shortly before dust storms curtailed rover activities.

An estimate of how soon Opportunity will enter the crater will depend on assessments in coming days of how dust may be affecting the instruments and of how much energy will be available.

On Spirit, dust on the lens of the microscopic imager has slightly reduced image quality for that instrument, although image calibration can compensate for most of the contamination effects. The team is experimenting with ways to try dislodging the dust on the lens. Spirit's solar arrays are producing about 300 watt hours per day as dust accumulation on them offsets clearing skies.

Spirit drove 42 centimeters (17 inches) backwards on Aug. 23 to get in position for taking images of a rock that it had examined with its Moessbauer spectrometer. The rover team is planning additional drives for Spirit to climb onto a platform informally named "Home Plate."

## Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter Camera Concern Resolved

NASA/JPL NEWS RELEASE

Posted: August 26, 2007

Diagnostic tests and months of stable, successful operation have resolved concerns raised early this year about long-term prospects for the powerful telescopic camera on NASA's Mars Reconnaissance Orbiter.

The High Resolution Imaging Science Experiment (HiRISE) camera on the orbiter has now taken more than 3,000 images of Mars, resolving features as small as a desk in targeted areas covering thousands of square miles of the Martian surface. Already, this is the largest Mars data set ever acquired by a single experiment. The camera is one of six instruments on the orbiter.

During the first three months after the orbiter's primary science phase began in November, researchers saw an increase in noise and pixel dropouts in data from seven of the camera's 14 detectors. The effects on image quality were small in all but two detectors, but the trend raised concerns noted in a Feb. 7 news release.

Tests have yielded an explanation for the earlier pattern, and the camera's performance record shows the noise stopped getting worse after about three to four months of the science phase.

A team at Ball Aerospace & Technologies Corp., Boulder, Colo., designer and builder of the instrument, has used an engineering model of the camera's focal-plane system to successfully duplicate the problem. This has helped in understanding causes and in testing a procedure for warming the focal-plane electronics prior to each image.

One cause is that an electrical interface lacked extra capability beyond minimum requirements. Another cause is an unexpected change in performance of another electronic component over the course of the first thousand or so large images.

With pre-warming, the camera acquires good data from all detectors, though minor noise remains an issue in data from one of two channels of one detector collecting infrared imagery.

## Spitzer Marks Anniversary with Celestial Fireworks

NASA/JPL NEWS RELEASE - August 26, 2007

A newly expanded image of the Helix nebula lends a festive touch to the fourth anniversary of the launch of NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope. This spectacular object, a dying star unraveling into space, is a favorite of amateur and professional astronomers alike. Spitzer has mapped the expansive outer structure of the six-light-year-wide nebula, and probed the inner region around the central dead star to reveal what appears to be a planetary system that survived the star's chaotic death throes.

Spitzer launched from Cape Canaveral, Fla., on August 25, 2003. In its four years of operations, Spitzer has provided unprecedented infrared views of objects as diverse as asteroids in our own solar system to galaxies at the edge of the observable universe. Recent discoveries include the first detection of water vapor on a planet orbiting another star and a titanic galactic collision five billion light-years away.

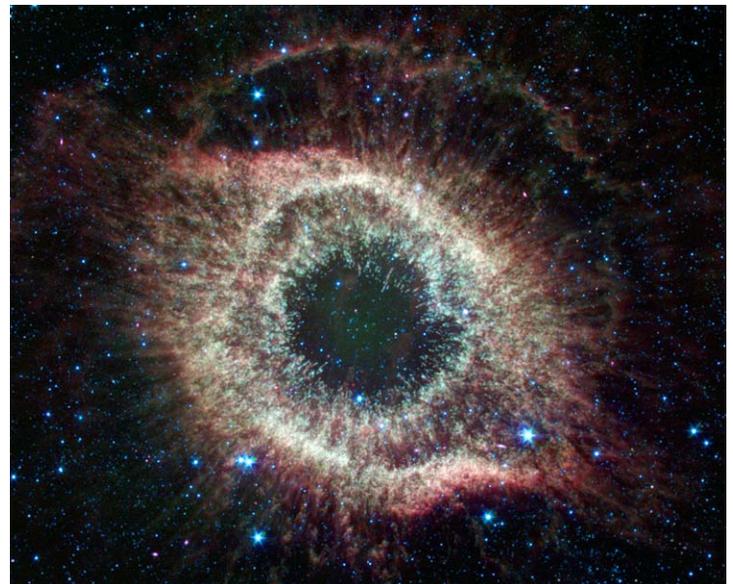
"With Spitzer, we have achieved scientific discoveries far beyond our wildest expectations," said Michael Werner, project scientist for Spitzer at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Pasadena, Calif. "A large part of our success is due to the smooth and efficient operations of the spacecraft."

Another cause for celebration is Spitzer's excellent technical performance. Spitzer is the first infrared space telescope to use an Earth-trailing orbit and passive cooling techniques, such as a sun shield, to obtain the low temperatures required for an infrared observatory. The design allowed for a much smaller tank of liquid-helium coolant, or cryogen, to chill the telescope, thereby slashing mission costs.

The minimum expected lifetime of Spitzer was only two-and-one-half years. Now, Spitzer's cryogen is expected to last much longer, giving the mission a lifetime of more than five-and-one-half years.

"I think it's safe to say that the...design has been validated," said Werner. "We've broken all records for the longest lifetime using the smallest amount of cryogen, and we still have another year and a half to go."

JPL is responsible for the operations of the Spitzer spacecraft, while science operations are conducted at the Spitzer Science Center at the California Institute of Technology, Pasadena, Calif. Spacecraft engineering is carried out by Lockheed Martin, Denver, Colo., with help from Ball Aerospace Corporation, Boulder, Colo.



Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech/Harvard-Smithsonian CfA

## Directions to White Hall at Emory

Our meetings are generally held in a classroom in White Hall. To get to White Hall, turn onto Dowman Drive from North Decatur Road at the five way intersection (across from Everybody's Pizza).

White Hall is located across from the new Science & Math building. Parking is available along Dowman Drive on both sides of the road. **The parking lot on the left behind the Admissions Building may be closed.** Additional parking is available in two parking decks near White Hall.

For maps to the decks see <http://map.emory.edu>. For more detailed directions to Emory University, visit [www.atlantaastronomy.org](http://www.atlantaastronomy.org) or go to the Emory web site.

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## Georgia Astronomy in State Parks (GASP) Events

There is one more scheduled GASP event for 2007:

**November 3rd** - Red Top Mountain State Park

For more information about these events, contact Joanne Cirincione at [Starrynights@AtlantaAstronomy.org](mailto:Starrynights@AtlantaAstronomy.org).



*The GASP volunteers at FDR State Park on Labor Day weekend 2004 - From left to right: Joanne Cirincione, Keith Burns, Harold and Claudia Champ with Ginger, Peter Macumber, Sharon Carruthers, Tom Faber, Kat Sarbell, and Holly and John Ritger. Photo by Holly Ritger.*

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 or times. Membership is open to all. Membership fees are **\$30** for a family or single person membership. College Students membership fee is **\$15**. These fees are for a one year membership.

Magazine subscriptions to *Sky & Telescope* or *Astronomy* can be purchased through the club for a reduced rate. The fees are **\$33** for Sky & Telescope and **\$34** for Astronomy. Renewal forms will be sent to you by the magazines. Send the renewal form along with your check to the Atlanta Astronomy Club treasurer.

**The Club address:** Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc., P.O. Box 76155, Atlanta, GA 30358-1155.

AAC Web Page: <http://www.AtlantaAstronomy.Org>

Send suggestions, comments, or ideas about the website to [webmaster@AtlantaAstronomy.org](mailto:webmaster@AtlantaAstronomy.org). Also send information on upcoming observing events, meetings, and other events to the webmaster.

## AAC Officers and Contacts

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## Atlanta Astronomy Club Website

While this newsletter is the official information source for the Atlanta Astronomy Club, it is only up to date the day it is printed. So if you want more up to date information, go to our club's website. The website contains pictures, directions, membership applications, events updates (when available) and other information. <http://www.atlantaastronomy.org>

## Calendar by Tom Faber (All times EDT unless noted)

- September 1st, Saturday: Saturn near Regulus.  
September 2nd, Sunday: Moon near M45.  
September 3rd, Monday: Moon Last Quarter.  
September 8th, Saturday: **DSO at location TBA - Contact Daniel Herron for details.** Uranus at Opposition.  
September 9th, Sunday: Moon between Venus and Saturn.  
September 11th, Tuesday: New Moon.  
September 15th, Saturday: **CEC Meeting - See pg.4 for details.**  
September 19th, Wednesday: Moon First Quarter.  
September 21st, Friday: **AAC Meeting, White Hall, 8PM, Emory University.** Mercury near Spica.  
September 23rd, Sunday: Equinox at 5:51 AM EDT  
September 26th, Wednesday: Full Moon.  
September 29th, Saturday: Mercury Greatest Eastern Elongation.  
October 3rd, Wednesday: Moon Last Quarter. Mars near M35.  
October 5th, Friday: Moon near M44.  
October 7th, Sunday: Moon near Venus and Saturn.  
**October 7th - 14th: Peach State Star Gaze at DAV - See pg.1 for details.**  
October 11th, Thursday: New Moon.  
October 12th, Friday: Bradley Observatory Open House, Agnes Scott College, 8PM, lecture TBA.  
October 19th, Friday: Moon First Quarter.  
October 21st, Sunday: Orionid Meteors.  
October 25th, Thursday: Full Moon.  
October 27th, Saturday: Moon near M45.  
November 1st, Thursday: Moon Last Quarter.  
November 3rd, Saturday: **GASP at Red Top Mountain State Park - See pg.7.**

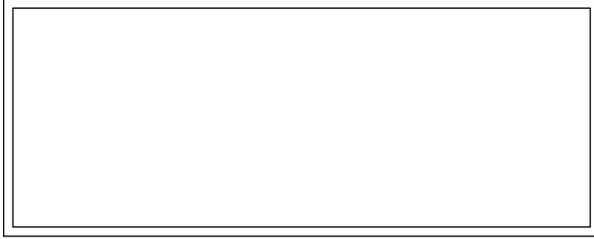
## Atlanta Astronomy Club Listserve

Subscribe to the Atlanta Astronomy Club Mailing List: The name of the list is: AstroAtlanta. The address for messages is: AstroAtlanta@yahoogroups.com . To add a subscription, send a message to: AstroAtlanta-subscribe@yahoogroups.com . This list is owned by Lenny Abbey.

## Focal Point Deadline and Submission Information

Please send articles, pictures, and drawings in electronic format on anything astronomy related to Kat Sarbell at focalpoint@atlantaastronomy.org. Please send images separate from articles, not embedded in them. Articles are preferred as plain text files but Word documents are okay. You can submit articles anytime up and including the deadline date. **The deadline for October is Thursday, September 27th at 4:00 PM ... Submissions will no longer be accepted after the dead-**

## FIRST CLASS



Newsletter of The Atlanta Astronomy Club, Inc.

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

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