THE FLINT RIVER OBSERVER

Vol. 4, No. 1  FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB  March, 2000

**Officers:** President, Steven (Smitty) Smith (583-2200) -- or, if you prefer e-mail: starship-saratoga@dellnet.com; Vice President/newsletter editor, Bill Warren (229-6108; warren1212@mindspring.com); Secretary-Treasurer, Ken Walburn (P. O. Box 1179, McDonough, GA 30253 / 954-9442; Alcor, Neal Wellons, and Web Site Coordinator, Cody Wellons (946-5039); Librarians, Tom and Katie Moore (228-6447); Telephone/Hospitality Committee Chairman: Dan Pillatzki (707-0270). Club mailing address: 1212 Everee Inn Road, Griffin, GA 30224. All of these phone numbers have 770 area code prefixes. FRAC web page address: http://welcome.to/frac.

Please notify Bill Warren promptly if you have a change of address or e-mail.

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**Club Calendar.** Fri.-Sat., Mar 3-4: Cox Field observations, at dark; Thurs., Mar. 16: FRAC meeting (Beaverbrook media center, 7:30); Fri., Mar. 17: BB observing (behind the school, at dark); Tues., Mar. 21: Hampton Elementary School observing (at dark); Fri.-Sat., Mar. 31-Apr. 1: Cox Field observations, at dark.

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**President's Message.** First, let me welcome back Lee Russell; way back in 1997, Lee was our first Hospitality Chairman. We haven't gotten older since then, Lee, we've gotten better.

I've taken the liberty of enrolling all of our members in the Sky & Tel Messier Marathon contest. To qualify for a chance to win a free copy of Steven James O'Meara's *The Messier Objects*, all you have to do is send your name in to *S&T* -- and I've already done that -- and find one or more Messier objects in a single evening before the reporting deadline of Apr. 15th. You can do your Messier hunting at Cox Field on either of our upcoming observing weekends, Mar. 3-4 or Mar. 31-Apr. 1, or at the Peach State Star Gaze on Apr. 6-9. Let me know what you've observed by Mon., Apr. 10th, and I'll notify *S&T* of your participation in the drawing.

Speaking of PSSG, it's that time of year again for you to prepare for one of the southeast's major star parties. While this event is not a FRAC activity, I strongly urge you to attend if you can. Last year, FRAC had a strong showing of members attending the event, so you won't have to worry about showing up and not knowing anyone. This year, they're bringing in Antonin Rukl, author of *Atlas of the Moon*, all the way from eastern Europe. If you have his book, you can have it autographed while he's there; I'll be bringing my copy along. Count on it. This is about as close to a once-in-a-lifetime chance to meet an internationally famous astronomical author as you can get. It's the first -- and only time that Rukl has ever addressed an amateur astronomy group.

There are usually other people giving talks on different subjects, workshops on things like star-hopping, mirror washing and drawing at the eyepiece, and non-astronomical events such as the Sat. morning Pancake Breakfast (*with, we might add, pancakes lovingly crafted by FRAC's own Steven "Flapjack Smitty" Smith. -Ed.*) And the best part is a field full of different kinds of telescopes. There are more 'scopes around than you can shake Bill
Warren's cigar at.
If you're interested in attending, I urge you

to fill out the registration form at the back of
this newsletter and send it in today with your
check. This event is attended by about the
maximum number of people that the site will
hold, and you don't want to miss the PSSG
because you sent in your registration too late.
Anyway, it costs an additional $5 if you wait
till you get to Camp McIntosh to register and
there's still an opening when you get there.

Hope to see you there!
-Saratoga Smitty

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Odds & Ends. You'll want to check out Rich
Jakiel's latest offering in S&T's ongoing
Deep-Sky Notebook series. Entitled "Behind
the Veil: Exploring the IC 342 Galaxy
Group," his article and accompanying drawings
and photos appear on pp. 126-7 of the March
issue.

We don't see nearly as much of Rich -- or
fellow AAC/FRAC members Dr. Richard
Schmude, Joanne Cirincione, Art Russell or
Alex Langoussis -- as we'd like, but we're
proud and happy to have them in our club.

*From the fertile (as in fertilizer) mind of
Tom Moore comes this latest gem: "Instead
of using red flashlights in the dark at Cox
Field, why don't we all use regular flashlights
and wear red goggles?"

If you were to ask Tom, "How many Cox
Field observers does it take to screw in a
lightbulb?," he'd probably tell you that it
depends on the color of the bulb. (The correct
answer is, It would take Tom Moore -- and
someone else to tell him how to screw it in.)

*From our "Lo, How the Mighty Have
Frozen" Dept." comes the following icy
adventure narrated by Steven "Frozen Toes
Smitty" Smith: "When the recent lunar
eclipse started, I didn't realize how cold it had
become. I donned my sweatshirt and hat
before heading outside to glimpse the start, but
that first trip lasted only a couple of minutes
because I had thoughtlessly walked out the
door wearing only flip-flops on my feet! It was
a real attention getter -- and I'm not just talking
about the Moon, either!"

*Incidentally, Smitty informs us that
Orion's online catalog is having a safety
recall on some models of Orion's AC
(110-volt) Dew Zappers. You can get more
information about it at Orion's website.

*After all the negative comments we made
recently about Orion Telescopes, Inc., in the
interest of fairness to Orion we should note two
things: (1) when Dan Pillatzki's order of a
Shorty Barlow and beginners' filters set got lost
in the mail and bounced across the U. S. a few
times, Orion sent Dan a free advanced set of
color filters for his trouble. It was a classy
thing for them to do; and (2) the old 10" and
12-1/2" Orion DSE Dobsonians aren't gone
forever as we assumed; instead, they're merely
being sold now under a new name by a new
company, i.e., Discovery Telescopes -- the
company that made Orion's telescopes in the
first place -- and with a few improvements, to
boot.

*Speaking of Dan P., ol' Danny boy is
scheduled to undergo knee surgery on Mar.
7th; you can send him a get-well card at home
c/o Dan Pillatzki, 13 Emory St., Hampton, GA
30228. He'll appreciate it, if he survives the
surgery. (Personal aside to Dan: We make
no bones about being gravely concerned for
you; surgery is always a risky undertaking --
but if you don't make it can we ruffle off your
telescope and give away your equipment and
books as door prizes at future meetings?)

It's the caring touch that makes our club so
special. Right, Frank? I mean, Dan?

*Personal Aside #2 (to Katie M): So it's
"details, details, details," is it? Remember
what Albert Einstein said about it: "God is in
the details."

*It's nice to have Lee Russell back in
FRAC after too long an absence. Lee is a
really nice guy despite the fact that he looks
exactly like horror writer Stephen King.
The phrase "Back in FRAC" fits Lee nicely; why, only the other day we overheard someone in the club muttering, "Lee Russell? That dirty backinfrac!..." Or something like that.

See what you've been missing, Lee?

*Ken Wilson* wants us to know that his new website, [www.clearnights.com](http://www.clearnights.com), contains some of his astrophotos "and other helpful information about how to get started in astrophotography. I would like to put up pictures and articles from other FRAC members as well." We've been to his site; it's very nicely done, and well worth your investigating, whether you're interested in taking up astrophotography or merely in taking a leisurely, lovely trip through Ken's universe.

Give it a look-see.

(It was Ken and Chuck Beckham who made the four beautiful framed astrophotos you've seen on the walls of the BB media center.)

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Observing the universe involves a built-in paradox: we look forward in space to see backward in time.

-Bill Warren

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**Last Month's Meetings/Activities.** Nineteen members showed up for Neal Wellons's splendid presentation on the telescopes of Mauna Kea. Prior to Neal's talk, Ken Walburn thought an interferometer was the little box you put on the dashboard of your car to detect the presence of radar.

Only eight hardy souls braved February's wintry chill to venture out to our Cox Field observings: Ken Walburn, Raymond Hughes, Tom & Katie Moore, Ken Wilson, Joe Auriemma and yr. humble reporter (both nights). On the other hand, a large group of students and parents turned out for our BB observing. Showing them the sky were: Mike & Danielle Stuart, Katie Moore, Dan Pilatzki and yrs. truly. Lee Russell also came by for awhile. A first quarter moon and hazy sky didn't produce good viewing except for the Moon, planets, Orion Nebula and a few Messier open clusters, but our visitors were excited at what we were able to show them.

And we thought Lee R. only came out during the full moon...

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**Membership Renewals Due in March:** Tim & Celia Astin; Chuck Beckham; Steven Byous; Keith & Denise Cox; Rich Jakiel; Steven Smith; Ken & Doris Walburn; and John Wallace. Send your $10 check to Ken Walburn at the address listed on p. 1.

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**Upcoming Meetings and Activities.** Variations in the new moon are playing havoc with our Cox Field observings. This month, we'll be chasing Messiers at Cox Field twice this month - first, on Fri.-Sat., Mar. 3rd-4th, and again on Fri.-Sat., Mar. 31st-Apr. 1st. (This isn't an April Fool's trick; it's for real.)

Other problems have forced us to move our club meeting at Beaverbrook to Thurs., Mar. 16th. (The meeting time, 7:30, will remain the same.) Although we won't have a formal program, just cake and soft drinks to celebrate FRAC's 3rd anniversary, you won't want to miss the chance to win our door prizes, which include: a small laminated planisphere; a year's free membership in FRAC; a 1,000-piece celestial planisphere jigsaw puzzle; a Messier Objects poster; and an unbound field version of *Sky Atlas 2000.0* (2nd ed.).

On Tues., Mar. 21st, we'll try again to conduct an observing for students at Hampton Elementary School. (Our last attempt was clouded out.) To get to Hampton Park where the observing will be held, go N on Hwy. 19/41 from Griffin, and when you reach the light-polluting electronic billboard at the raceway in Hampton, turn rt. at the road directly across from the billboard. Follow that road for 1.2 mi. and turn left at the 4-way stop sign at Central Avenue. The park will be down the block on the right, across from the school.

With AAC's *Peach State Star Gaze* star
party coming up on the weekend of Thurs., Apr. 6th-Sun., Apr. 9th, we're enclosing a registration form in this issue of the Observer to give you plenty of time to register and get ready. (Next month we'll provide a checklist to remind you what to take along -- but we won't include another registration form.)

In addition to offering a "Peach Fuzzies" observing competition -- which isn't really a competition but a fun activity in which you can earn an observing certificate for finding all of the deep-sky targets on the list -- PSSG also gives door prizes (Tom Moore won a nice eyepiece last year) and has outstanding guest speakers (this year including Antonin Ruku, author of the highly renowned Atlas of the Moon). The PSSG gives you the chance to meet all kinds of observers from beginners to world-class, and you'll see 'scopes of the sort that the rest of us only dream about owning. You can camp out onsite for a nominal fee, or bed down in one of their bunkhouses (complete with running water, flush toilets, electricity and heat).

The PSSG is held at Camp McIntosh, a group camp adjacent to and operated by Indian Springs State Park near Jackson, Ga. The camp has its own gated entrance, and your equipment will be perfectly safe while you camp. (I wouldn't want to leave my wallet, keys or an expensive eyepiece lying on my cot in the bunkhouse while I was outside observing, though.) The registration fee is $25 ($10 for children under 12, and children under 5 free). Camping costs $10/night and bunkhouse space (bunkbed with locker) costs $15/night. A $2 parking fee is extra. Bring your own camping gear and/or bed sheets, covers, pillows and towels, and bath items. (Leave the rubber ducky home, Dan, they have showers, not tubs.)

In a more serious vein, AAC president and PSSG organizer Ken Posheidy advises us that there will no longer be $10 day passes issued for those who want to observe but not camp out, you'll have to pay the full $25 registration fee whether you stay overnight or not. (Frankly, considering last year's huge crowd and the problems they had in trying to keep up with who paid how much to stay for how long,

we can't really blame them. This is AAC's big annual money-maker, and their expenses are enormous; for instance, it's costing them upwards of $2,000 to bring Mr. Ruku and his wife over here from Prague, in the Czech Republic, so AAC needs all the $25s they can get.

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The Sky in March. Jupiter, Saturn & Mars are continuing to move closer together; at the beginning of the month they'll be 28° apart, Saturn 10° E of Jupiter and Mars 18° to the W of Jupiter. By month's end, the trio will be a scant 9° apart -- Saturn 6° away from Jupiter, Mars only 3°. On March 7th-10th, the crescent Moon will join them.

Moving steadily westward, Jupiter, Saturn & Mars will be progressively lower in the sky as March wears on. We'll lose them completely -- but thankfully not forever -- in April.

Venus will be lower in the E than in previous months. Shortly before sunrise on Mar. 15th, Mercury will lie a mere 2° W of Venus.

The March issue of Sky & Tel (pp. 108-110) shows where to find the bright asteroids 2 Pallas (mag. 7.4), 7 Iris (mag. 8.1), 1 Ceres (mag. 6.9) and 4 Vesta (mag. 5.4, a naked-eye target). March would be a very good time for you to start working toward your Asteroid Club certificate and pin.

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Atlanta Astronomy Club

Peach State Star Gaze
April 6-9, 2000
REGISTRATION

For more information:
Phone 770-979-9842
E-mail – ken.poshedly@mindspring.com

PLEASE PRINT CLEARLY! Late fee after March 31, 2000.

Arrival Date ___________ Departure Date ___________

Name ____________________________________________
Street address _____________________________________
City __________________________ State ____ ZIP code ______

Additional names on this registration (for nametags) ________________________________
______________________________________________________________________________

Home phone __________________ Work phone __________________

E-mail __________________________ Fax phone __________________

A directory will be published of all registrations received by March 31. It will include your name, address, phone and e-mail unless you state otherwise: _____ No phone number _____ No e-mail _____ Do not list me in the directory

Registration

______ x $25 per adult; age 13 and up
______ x $10 per child; ages 5 thru 12
______ free age 4 and under

Late registration fee (REQUIRED after March 31) $5

Teesshirt (optional; indicate how many of which size; adult sizes listed; order by March 23 to guarantee delivery)
XXL _____ XL _____ L _____
M _____ S _____ Other (call for details) x $12 each

Parking fee (REQUIRED) ________ x $2 per car

Lodging (indicate how many)
Camping ________ x $10 per person per night
Bunkhouse ________ x $15 per person per night
Semiprivate room ________ x $20 per person per bed per night

TOTAL $ ___________________