THE
FLINT RIVER
OBSERVER

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FLINT RIVER ASTRONOMY CLUB

January, 2002

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web page: <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. Thurs., Jan. 10: FRAC
meeting (Beaverbrook, 7:30); Fri.-Sat., Jan.
11-12 and Fri.-Sat., Jan. 18-19: Cox Field
observings (at dark).

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President's Message. FIFTY. That's a good,
round number. It represents half a century, half
a dollar, and the number of memberships we
currently have. Yep, believe it or not, we have
fifty members now, our most ever. I'm happy
to have all of you with us; it's a sign that FRAC
is growing stronger every day.

I want to thank everyone who came to the
Christmas party at Milano's. We had a great
time, enjoying some really good food, and we
got to spend some regular time together
without worrying about things like programs,
what to do next, etc. It was great seeing so
many spouses and children present. I think we
need to do that more often as a change of pace
from what we normally do, so I'm going to
throw down a challenge right here:
How about us having another "dinner on
the grounds for the Caxxes -- say, this spring,
in April or thereabouts? I'll put it together like
I did last time if necessary -- but I'd like to see
someone else step up and organize it this time.
In doing so you'll find out, as I did, why our
club is so very special.

Dawn and I are going back to Chiefland
next March for the Messier Marathon; if the
Marathon can be done anywhere, it's there.
Three or four members have said they want to
go, and so can you. It costs just $5 a night to
camp there, slightly more if you use things that
take a lot of power such as heaters, griddles,
etc. I'll check on the Messier Marathon
Challenge that Sky & Tel ran a few years ago
and will enter us if they are doing it again; if
not, we'll give our own certificates.

We have some neat things in the works, and
this is going to be our best year ever. Don't
forget, at the Jan. meeting we'll discuss the
need to improve our involvement with
Beaverbrook. We'll entertain any and all ideas
on the subject.

Thanks for hanging in there with us during
the last few months of transition. Things are
going more smoothly now and will only get
better.

-Steve Knight

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Last Month's Meeting/Activities. We had 30
members and guests in attendance at our
December dinner meeting at Milano's, an
all-time high for any FRAC function or
activity. In a disgusting (to the rest of us)
display of good fortune, Rod Dougherty and
members of his family won three of our five
special door prizes, including the featured
Tim Astin received his Universe Sampler pin and certificate, Larry Fallin received a Zombie certificate for staying up all night at Chiefland, and Steve Knight earned a Katie’s Club certificate for finding the highly elusive but hauntingly beautiful Horsehead Nebula (IC 434), also at Chiefland. (You need an H Beta filter to see it.) Steve reported that it looks like -- well, a horse’s head. Yr. editor would be the last person in the world to suggest that the other end of the horse was at the eyepiece.

Also at that Dec. meeting, Steve prepared wonderful packets of astronomical handouts for everyone present, including free $10 Moon filters courtesy of Hands On Optics, Inc.

Seven members attended our Dec. 15th Cox Field observing: Jerry Williams, Steve & Dawn Knight, David Ward, Larry Fallin, Yr. editor and Dr. Richard Schmude, who encouraged those of us in FRAC to chart Jupiter’s central meridian transit times. Jerry found 18 Messiers, bringing his total to 77. (He also gave all of us filter squares that had been used by the post office and were being discarded.) Steve’s most important find of the night was cobwebs in David’s telescope tube. Dr. Schmude’s GPS reported Cox Field’s coordinates as 33°9’ N latitude and 84°26’ W longitude.

Seriously, though, David, Larry & Steve -- let’s call them “the Three Amigos,” not “the Three Stooges” or “Three Blind Mice” -- did some nifty observing of their own that night, tracking down the eight faint galaxies around the 6th-mag. star l Ari. The search, suggested by Ken Hewitt-White in “Checking Off the Galaxies at 1 Arietis” (Sky & Tel, Dec., 2001, pp. 113-114), involved galaxies ranging from mag. 11.4 (NGC 691) to 15.5 (IC 1730).

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Membership Renewals Due in January:
None.

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This ‘n That. The A.L. presently boasts 256 affiliate astronomy clubs and more than 18,000 members; it says a lot about the quality of our club that FRAC members own 1/7th -- four -- of the 28 Universe Sampler pins ever issued by the A.L. Besides Tim Astin, FRAC’s other pin holders are Dawn Knight, Phil Sacco and Yr. editor. Cory Dukes, just turned 14 yrs. old, is close to completing his Universe Sampler requirements.

*Smitty* reports that the cashier at Milano’s told him they were very happy to have had so many astrologers meeting at their establishment.

* * *
Upcoming Meetings/Activities. Our club meeting will be at Beaverbrook at 7:30 on Thurs., Jan. 10th; we’ll discuss ways to develop an interest in astronomy among BB students, our previous, half-hearted efforts in the past having proved ineffective.

Our club observations at Cox Field will be held on Fri.-Sat., Jan. 11th-12th (the new moon falls on the 13th), and Fri.-Sat., Jan. 18th-19th.

* * *
The Sky in January. Mercury will be 15°-20° above the W horizon 45 min. after sunset between Jan. 14-18. Mars will still be up in the SW during the early evening hours of the month, but smaller and fainter than it has been in recent months. Saturn will be up all night all month (as will Jupiter, which, at 47° in dia., is about as big as it gets.)

The Jan. issue of Sky & Tel highlights the Alpha (Δ) Persei Association (Mel 20), a large -- 3° -- and lovely group of bright stars at the junction of the main arms of stars that form the Atlanta Braves "A" shape of Perseus. In The Deep Sky: An Introduction (Sky Publishing, 1997), Phil Harrington points out that "The age of Melotte 20 is only about 51 million years, younger than many diamonds found here on earth." (p. 173) Mel 20 is a Deep-Sky Binocular Club object.

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The Lap of Luxury: The Denver Observing Chair

article by Steve Knight
The subject of observer's chairs came up recently on one of the web groups of which I'm a member. Several people recommended the Denver observing chair from the Denver Astronomical Society. Their on-line plans (see below) can be downloaded, and are simple and give exact figures regarding the materials needed, right down to how many nuts, bolts and screws the task requires. It can be built in a weekend, the only tools necessary being a circular saw, drill, and palm sander. My chair cost about $30 to build, and when I add upholstery for the seat the total still won't exceed $40.

Orion sells the same chair for $169. (A photo appears on p. 94 of their Holiday catalog.)

The Denver chair is very steady even with my oversized rear end on it, and it's fully adjustable right to the ground. (The chair, that is, not Steve's bottom. -Ed.) The maximum seat height is just higher than I need in order to observe at the zenith; in fact, my only problem has been watching where I place the chair to avoid hitting the base of my 'scope when I turn it in azimuth if the object I'm looking for is too close to the zenith and I'm sitting too close to the telescope.

The plans for the Denver observing chair can be had at <http://members.tripod.com/denverastro/seat.html>; they're very clear and easy to follow.

Be sure to check out my chair at the next club observing you attend, and give some thought to making your own Denver chair at tremendous savings over the factory-built model. It's amazing how much easier and more fun observing is now that I don't have to get in all those strange and uncomfortable positions.

Author's Note: This was the first in a series of astrotech articles by Larry Fallin and me. If you have questions or problems regarding any kind of astrotechnical matters, we'll be happy to study the problem or product, find answers and report on it here.

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Editor's Note: Are you having trouble organizing your monthly searches for objects in the night sky? If so, Larry Fallin offers a monthly guide to which Messiers, Caldwell's, Herschel 400s and Double Stars are up. His January installment appears below.

### Constellations of the Month - January

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