



Mingo Creek Park Observatory

The Guide Star

Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc.

Founded June 9, 1929 by Chester B. Roe and Leo J. Scanlon

Website: 3ap.org



Nicholas E. Wagman Observatory

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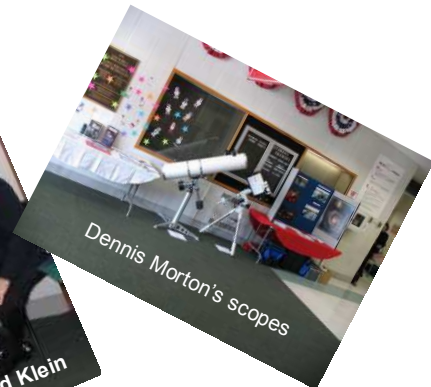
INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

Pittsburgh Philharmonic	1
North Allegheny Star Party	2
Astronomy Day in Scottdale	2
Southwest Astronomy Adventure	3, 4, 5
Astronomy Presentation Request	6
Report on Hidden Hollow Star Party	6
Campout at Mingo in August	7
Election Results	7
Volunteers needed	7
For Sale	7
Important Dates	8
Almost Heaven Star Party	8
Welcome New Members	8
Observations	8, 9

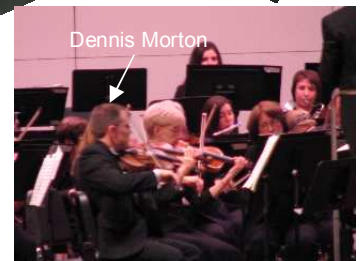
he took of the universe. Dave Smith's photos were proudly displayed and drew much interest. We had no hopes of observing after the concert because of the cloudy conditions. We were surprised to find clearing skies at the conclusion of the show. Dennis and Bill rushed outside with their telescopes to show the crowd the Moon. Fred stayed inside to talk with the guests. There were several other small telescopes that were set up outside by students and North Hills Astronomy Club.



Fred Klein



Dennis Morton's scopes



Dennis Morton



Dennis Morton



Bill Moutz

PITTSBURGH PHILHARMONIC EVENING WITH THE STARS ON MAY 17TH NORTH HILLS JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

The Pittsburgh Philharmonic concert on May 17th was a huge success. Dennis Morton put together an outstanding PowerPoint slide show of the universe while the orchestra played. AAAP members who brought scopes were Dennis Morton, Fred Klein and Maureen and Bill Moutz. There were a few other members who came out for the concert. We met Ken Lippert's mom who played a violin with the orchestra. We handed out lots of flyers and Fred had along with his telescope his tremendous display of photos



Pittsburgh Philharmonic

NORTH ALLEGHENY STAR PARTY

MAY 13, 2008

By Dennis Morton

First, I want to thank Fred Klein and Bill Hayeslip for helping at the North Allegheny Star Party on Tuesday, May 13. It was a clear evening and a fun time for the students and parents at North Allegheny. By the end of the evening, we had over 190 students and parents looking through telescopes. Because of the bright sky, we were able to find the Moon, Saturn, Mars, Mercury and M13. The last student/parent left around 10:00 p.m. See some pictures below. If we do it in the future, I think it would be best to have someone floating around to help the students with their telescopes. Many bring them and they are not lined up so it takes time to go through 15 different telescopes, try to help them align them, show them how to use them plus keep my two telescopes tracking an object. Either way, it was a great night and it was fun to see the enthusiasm from the students. One student that brought his own telescope, Adam Tedeshi, was a member of the AAAP youth and was proudly wearing his AAAP badge.



ASTRONOMY DAY IN SCOTTTDALE, PA

By James Schultheis

Well, the conditions were variable on May 10, 2008. It started off fair then went to poor and gradually improved to excellent by about 1:00 a.m., temperature about 45°. We had about 15 visitors to our little star party of about 30 invitations. Things started off with Luna and observing the 14,000 feet deep crater, Theophilus, and its 4,000 foot high central mountain. I guided our guests to Messier, and Messier A with myself coined "skidder" meteor tracks http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Messier_%28crater%29 then on to show the Altai Scarp. We then observed Saturn, and a range of objects that were bright and interesting. Galaxies were sort of a dud in that they were hard to see due to the conditions. All of the guests were gone by about 12:30 a.m. I then had free range with the 15" f/4.5 and on to NGC 4361, the Planetary in Corvus. I was able to observe a "wreath" look in that there was sort of a clear center, then "fat" ring of nebulosity. The central star was easy to see. We (Sue and I) proceeded to M13 and its associated Galaxy, N6207, and compared views through the different apertures. By this time, the sky conditions were getting GREAT and Luna was sinking below the horizon. Sue said she was going in and warm up, and me like a 5-year-old at play with blue lips stayed out. Then, for some stupid telescope tricks, I decided to prove that it was possible to resolve some stars in the small globular N6229 (Hercules) by using 600+ power with the 15-inch. I failed, only to observe granulation and no resolve of the stars. I then went on to observe N6826, the Blinking Planetary, only to find this object will not blink in 15 inches of aperture. It is only observed as a planetary and does not blink with averted vision. I observed N6826 with 686x to find it has a very interesting ring structure similar to a bulls eye pattern, which I thought was my eyes playing tricks on me; but I confirmed this structure on some Internet pictures. I then finished up the night trying to find NGC 6764, a galaxy in Cygnus, only to be skunked. Well, I am assuming this will close out the new Moon observing window for me.



MY SOUTHWEST ASTRONOMY ADVENTURE

By Doc John Occhuizzo
March 7-19, 2008

Being retired has its perks. An avid amateur astronomer since my teens, observatories and the privileged people who work them have always fascinated me. So it was with great anticipation that I planned an astronomy adventure to the southwestern states of New Mexico and Arizona, which would include visits to many of the notable observatories. This was a special 65th birthday excursion a long time in anticipation.

The odyssey began on Friday, March 7 when I flew out of Latrobe airport with a destination of Phoenix and Sky Harbor airport where I acquired a roomy rental car. As it was late when I arrived, I stayed overnight at my friend Jimmy's place in Phoenix. Jimmy would later join me for a road trip. Saturday morning found me on the road south to a great little town called Green Valley, Arizona, which is about 20 miles south of Tucson. I rented a furnished condo there for a week and it would be my central headquarters. Green Valley is a retiree's haven with an emphasis on providing amenities to the influx of newly retiring baby-boomers. Saturday, March 8 was a good day to walk around the town and learn the layout. Just about everything is within walking distance or at most, a short drive. There is the requisite Super Walmart, a couple of big Safeway supermarkets, a great library and two malls with just about all the franchises and restaurants. Even better were the Wi-Fi internet hot spots which abound at all the coffee shops and the library. Keeping a hand on personal affairs and in touch with home was a snap with the internet and my cell phone, which incidentally, worked just about everywhere I traveled on this vacation. Did I mention my Garmin Novi GPS unit? I highly recommend one of these devices which take the anxiety out of driving in a strange town and no more trying to read a MapQuest page at night on an interstate highway! Every destination was acquired straightforward and navigating was a cinch.



Sunday, March 9 was the trip to Kitt Peak National Observatory. This is an easy target off I-19 south of Tucson. There are three levels of visitation to Kitt Peak. I did the two hour general daylight tour (\$5) and the night observing program (\$35). There is also an

all-night option if one wished to be apprentice to a professional for the evening (\$425 including room and board). There are about two dozen telescopes on Kitt Peak. Most are operated by remote control from their parent university consortiums. There is only one private scope on Kitt Peak and it was up for sale; I believe the owner was only asking \$5 million. Anything sending photons to earth was being observed here. From infrared and microwaves to x-rays and gamma rays; it was all happening here. The community of professionals here is awesome. It's a twelve-mile drive up to the summit, which, surprisingly, was target for serious

cyclists. The altitude is moderate by southwest standards, but a plastic soda bottle emptied on the peak and resealed for later disposal was found crushed by the atmosphere when I returned to the base of the mountain. Kitt Peak is located on an American Indian reservation and I was stopped by border patrol agents on the way home, as they were looking for illegal aliens and drug smugglers. A sign of the times!

Have you heard about Arizona Sky Village? That's an enclave of folks ensconced on restricted deed settlements near the outpost of Portal, Arizona. You are deep into Sonoran desert here and the only way you know where the horizon is located at night is to follow the Milky Way to where the stars stop! If you live here you have agreed to build a house of 1000+ square feet and an observatory of your choosing. Jack Newton and Gene Turner are the imagination machines behind ASV. I rented a house for three days (M-T-W) on South Newton Way and that included the use of the owner's large SCT with a roll-off roof, a big Dobsonian, a neat 6" Celestron, and a great little Coronado personal solar telescope. I was astonished at the transparency and steadiness of the atmosphere here, 135 miles in the middle of nowhere on the desert. Most of my life's observing has been in Western Pennsylvania where zip codes begin with 15xxx, but light pollution and suspended particulate matter ruined that venue years ago. I have had some amazingly clear nights at my personal observatory high on a ridge in West Virginia, but that too is under attack by surface mining and gas drilling. But nothing prepared me for the crystal clarity of the desert! Not just the transparency impressed me (which I have not seen at home since the 70's), but the steadiness of the air was awesome—like pure diamonds on black velvet, contrast so apparent that it seemed three dimensional. At home in Pennsylvania, the rolling hills give rise to temperature gradients and that creates thermal drafts that never seem to end until the wee hours. But at Arizona Sky Village, the air just seemed to freeze and viewing became a near religious experience. Double stars were cleaved with ease. Targets like Castor or the Trapezium took on a whole new clarity. When the Trapezium asterism (using a 6-inch scope) defines into six stars, not the usual four, you are indeed blessed. I don't believe steadiness of this caliber can ever be had in Appalachia. The 6-inch Celestron was having a field day with a four-day-old Moon. Ultra tiny detail popped out of craters that I hadn't seen in decades. I had the satisfaction of knowing it was not my eyesight that had deteriorated over the years, but the quality of the air. BTW, hay fever and allergy sufferers take heart. The air is so clean at ASV (altitude 4000-5000 feet) you can leave the pills and Kleenex at home.

Thursday, March 13 found me back in Green Valley readying for a trip to Mount Hopkins and the Fred Whipple Observatory, which is southwest of Green Valley and only a 45-minute drive. Mount Hopkins' biggest scopes are looking for the tiny flashes of light produced by gamma ray bursts when they strike the upper atmosphere. Tours here are only on M-W-F and by appointment only. They run from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. only. No night tours here, but there is a grand treat for

local amateurs. Mount Hopkins' designers have created a little "parklet" off the road above the reception center and just below the peak. Here you will find parking for about 6-8 cars and footpaths to neat observing spots with private concrete pads upon which to set you scope and a bench for your "stuff". There is no electricity, so you will have to haul in your battery power, but what a great community outreach gift the amateur observing park has become.

Safford, Arizona is 150 miles east central of Tucson and almost in New Mexico. Here is the home of Mount Graham Observatory. This is where I spent Friday, March 14. The EAC campus boasts Discovery Park and a community dedicated to clear skies and the promotion of astronomy. The newly commissioned Big Binocular scope resides here, but getting a tour is difficult since they are rare and seasonal. You gotta remember when you get above 10,000 feet, snow and cold play havoc with comfort and safety. But it is gleeful to see a town and region where there are strictly enforced laws governing light pollution. High desert country is not only conducive to astronomy, it's just outright beautiful with mostly conifers offering the sweet balsamic aroma of "Herbal Essence Shampoo" day and night.

Saturday and off to New Mexico with my pal, Jimmy, on a road trip. We drove a 2,400 mile circle traveling counter-clockwise through the heart of both New Mexico and Arizona, beginning in Green Valley and ending in Phoenix.

Las Cruces, New Mexico has a lot to offer retirees and baby-boomers—clean, safe, and conveniently located to the many gems of southern New Mexico. To the east of Las Cruces lies "New Mexico Skies", another community of amateur astronomers with attitude and altitude! You may have seen their ads for real estate advertised in Sky & Telescope magazine. The nearest quaint town is Mayhill, Arizona, east of Cloudcroft. Here I found the absolute best seeing of the whole vacation. Of course, it's the 7,000 foot + altitude, but also the geology is conducive to transparency and steadiness. You must be sure to "scope out" this part of the USA! Make reservations at a B&B or campground and bring your 'scope or binoculars. You will return!

While in southern New Mexico, we checked out the National Solar Observatory on Sacramento peak in Sunspot, New Mexico. This is an excellent collection of equipment and scientists doing serious research on our nearest star. You are up at 11,000 feet again, but you'll be amazed and the huge but precise telescopes (sub-arc-second pointing accuracy). When you start sniffing around places like this, you don't want to leave. There is something exciting no matter what direction you look! You'll wish you brought your favorite telescope from home and a chance to beg the security folks for permission to camp out the night in the parking lot. If you have a travel trailer and the time to drive it and your telescope to the southwest, be assured there are numerous campgrounds and state parks near these observatories. In fact, most astronomy facilities are in national or state parks or Indian reservations. These lands

will, therefore, never be developed into light-polluting communities. No problem finding accommodations. Google will find what you are looking for and you can shop at home for your destinations.

Continuing north through New Mexico on Sunday, we enjoyed a brief stay at Alamogordo, where the scientists who developed the atomic bomb lived in the WWII era. This is just south of White Sands National monument where sand as white as sugar blows in dunes of eerie beauty. You won't be far from Trinity, the site of the first atomic blast. It is an emotional experience to stand in that place and realize the consequences of that experiment. From here on north, the scenery will blow your minds as you ascent the high desert. By the time you reach Carrizozo, New Mexico, the canyons and valleys and distant snow-capped peaks will have you convinced that there is ethereal beauty in starkness and desolation. Turning west on New Mexico Route 380 takes you to Socorro, New Mexico over the continental divide. Here is ponderosa pine and mesquite in abundance. Most of what you see is either federal military property or national parks. I was enviously impressed by the number of private observatories situated on the peaks of nearby mountains. I fantasized about the lucky astronomers who own these remote but beautiful places to set a telescope. These are all places above 7,000 feet. There are several camping places along the route, most of which are primitive.

The odyssey continued Monday as we motored to the historic town of Santa Fe. It is quite the university town and capitol of the state as well. It's really small as towns go, but filled with an artistic population and it's a scaled down version of Taos, which is further north and east in the high country. Santa Fe is where I experienced my first sandstorm and clocked a tumbleweed going 45 miles per hour! Be sure to remember not to drive in a sandstorm unless you want to repaint your car. We had a delightful lunch of Tex-Mex food (which in no way resembles anything you would find at Taco Bell) that satisfied the hunger and tantalized the taste buds. The Mexican heritage of the southwest is most displayed in the wonderful food, abundant and inexpensive.

We managed to make it back down to Albuquerque and onto Interstate 40 west for our next checkpoint, which was Flagstaff, Arizona and the crown jewel of the astronomy adventure, Lowell observatory. Getting into Flagstaff Monday night was like the end of a ride at Disney World insofar as the scenery between Albuquerque and the Flagstaff experience. Vast open vistas and the jaw-dropping experience of driving above the clouds! Lava pillows and deep canyons abound so that you are constantly reminded of the volcanic history of the place coupled with the glacial sculpting from many ice ages ago. We drove to Meteor Crater, which is only 6 miles off the interstate and worth the diversion. Be sure to remember that it closes at dusk. Tuesday was dedicated to Lowell and the Flagstaff experience.



Lowell Observatory is open to the public and you can see and touch the Clark telescope that Percival Lowell used to discover Pluto. The view from here is spectacular. Did I mention that there was 4 inches of snow on the ground? Contrast that with 75-80 degree temperatures we enjoyed during most of the trip. Lowell's burial mausoleum is located on the grounds and enjoys a grand view if Percival is doing any viewing these days. Flagstaff is a special spot unlike anywhere else since it marks the northern extreme of the Sonoran desert and the beginning of the Colorado plateau. It's hard to believe you are 5 hours from Phoenix but 30 degrees of temperature cooler. Flagstaff is ski country with an average of 15 feet of snow in winter. Historically, it was a pivotal destination for travelers on legendary Route 66.



Clark Telescope
Lowell Observatory

Wednesday morning and the breathtaking ride down the mountain via route 89 with Sedona as the target for the day. No visit to Arizona would be complete without a trip to the red rock country and its postcard vistas. It is best summarized by saying God took out his biggest box of crayons when he painted Sedona. You won't want to leave this stunning town. Yet the ride continues downhill as you descend from 7,000+ feet to 4,000 feet at Cottonwood, Arizona. If you don't like the scenery at any particular place, just wait ten miles and it will be another exquisite view. Masterpiece after masterpiece of mountains, canyons, mesas and plateaus. Fir trees giving way to cactus. Snow giving way to spring flowers. Pine needles yielding to sand.

All good things must come to an end. Sad but fulfilled, we were back in Phoenix Wednesday night and the adventure was vivid memories and a camera filled with pictures. If you have ever thought of a theme road trip, may I suggest an astronomy vacation to the observatories? I booked everything from home on the internet and had very reasonable prices since March is the start of the low season. The entire two-week trek including air travel, car rental, gasoline, and food was about half of what a cruise for a week would cost. Your cell phone will work just about everywhere and wireless internet is easily acquired. Arizona and New Mexico are of a unique beauty found nowhere else on earth. And if stargazing is one way you admire creation, you will be as close to heaven as geology permits. I guess you could say I was dancing with the stars.



Vesto Slipher Bldg
Lowell Observatory



Jack Newton's Place ASV



Kitt Peak Telescopes

ASTRONOMY PRESENTATION REQUEST BRENTWOOD LIBRARY

By Megan Heady

My name is Megan Heady and I work for the Brentwood Library. I'm contacting your club because our library is interested in having some kind of astronomy presentation for our patrons this summer, perhaps an introduction to stargazing or something along those lines. I read on your website that you present programs at bookstores and nature centers, so I wanted to know if it would be possible to set something up at our library. I would really appreciate any information that you might have. Thanks so much for your time. Please contact me at 412-882-5694 or email headym@einetwork.net.

REPORT ON HIDDEN HOLLOW STAR PARTY

May 1 through May 4, 2008

By Larry McHenry

This year, the folks at the Richland Astronomical Society moved up their star party camping convention (Hidden Hollow) from the fall season to the spring, and made it one of the first events out of the gate. I was looking forward to the opportunity of observing the spring galaxies with the RAS's 31" Newtonian at the Warren Rupp Observatory. The weather report for the weekend wasn't very promising, but having already registered in advance, and catching the enthusiasm of some of the Kiski members at the Thursday club meeting, I committed to going regardless of the forecast.

I finished loading up the new camper Friday morning and made the drive to Mansfield, Ohio arriving mid-afternoon. I joined several other Kiski members who were already on site—Bob Novack and Bob Kalan. Here's a few photos of our group site (Bob Novack has the A-frame camper, Bob Kalan has the smaller teardrop, and my camper is the larger teardrop with the tent canopy):

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-01.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-02.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-03.jpg>

Here's a few additional photos of my new camper and 8" LX200. I've installed video equipment, computers, and a small library in the back hatch for easy access:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-04.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-05.jpg>

Unfortunately, for once, the weather forecasters were accurate! (It started raining right after I drove past Akron, and kept raining pretty much the entire weekend. While most of the time the outdoors looked like this:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-07.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-08.jpg>

Indoors, there were various activities including talks, workshops, a Starlab Planetarium, and raffle prizes:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-09.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-10.jpg>

In between activities (and storms), we killed time back at the camp talking astronomy—telescopes and accessories, observing, star parties, and the weather. We also punished each other a few times with bad jokes.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/HH2008-12.jpg>

I actually did get a few minutes of dark sky observing in! Friday night, around 11:00 p.m., it cleared off for about an hour. No one had any scopes setup, but the RAS opened up their observatory, and a few lucky attendees got to look through it before the clouds came flying back in. Late Saturday afternoon, once the last major squall line with straight line wind gusts had blown through, the Sun came out, and it cleared off! I got the 8" LX200 out of the car, set it up, and connected the video and computer. Then more clouds and light rain rolled through, forcing me to cover up. But around 8:30 p.m., after the raffle prizes were given out, it cleared off long enough for me to get in a quick visual observation of the Beehive star cluster through the LX200, and a video observation using my stellacam of globular cluster M3. Then, once again, the wind came up and the clouds quickly filled the sky. After about an hour of waiting to see what the weather was going to do, I finally called it a night, unplugged things and bagged the telescope. (Bob and Bob had, perhaps wisely, packed up and went home before sunset).

The next morning, the few of us who stuck it out were greeted to a nice sunrise! Figures—Sunday, the day the convention ended, was a nice day, and we had great skies later that evening in Pittsburgh! Still, the trip was worth it. It was good to get out with my Kiski friends and enjoy the company of other amateurs from around the region. We kept up the Kiski tradition of winning some of the door prizes—Bob Novack got a Tele-Vue 25mm Plossl, and I won a Meade Series 5000 Super Wide Angle 20 mm eyepiece!

I was also able to test out and learn a few things about my new teardrop camper and 8" LX200 telescope in adverse conditions. That will make Cherry Springs, Mason-Dixon, Black Forest, and other conventions go more smoothly and enjoyable later this Summer.

If you would like to learn more about the Hidden Hollow event, presenters, Rupp Observatory, go to:

<http://www.wro.org/HiddenHollow2008Files/HiddenHollow08.htm>

ASTRONOMY MAGAZINE AND REI CAMPOUT AT MINGO

By Ed Moss

On August 8-10, 2008 there will be a campout/star party at Mingo Creek Park Observatory. Astronomy Magazine and REI, a seller of outdoor and camping equipment, is sponsoring this event.

There will be observing both Friday and Saturday nights until about 4 AM. There will be planetarium shows, night sky tours, and Night Sky Network talks as well on Friday night. Members may camp for free all weekend. Non-members must register through REI.

There will be no food service at this event; however, we have Shelter #10 for our use, along with the cooking grills. There are also other cooking grills along the south end of the observatory field. Several members have offered to give astronomy talks on Saturday. If anyone else is interested in giving a talk, contact Ed Moss or Gene Kulakowski. We will also present some Night Sky Network presentations as well. Schedules for the speakers and other activities will be posted in the July Guide Star.

We could use some volunteers to bring their telescopes and some people to check for registration. REI is handling the registration through their retail stores. We only have to check the names of people showing up with the list REI gives us. Anyone wishing to volunteer, please contact Ed Moss at edward.moss@verizon.net. We hope many of you will come to Mingo Creek Park Observatory that weekend. The 10" refractor is now on the pier formerly used by the 24" Ritchey-Chretien telescope. The 24" Ritchey-Chretien is on a new fork mount installed right after Memorial Day. This would be a good time to see our now completed observatory.

Congratulations to the following officers who were re-elected for another year:

Ed Moss, President
Ann Norman, Vice President
Corresponding Secretary, John Mozer
Membership Secretary, Mark Shomer
Recording Secretary, Dennis Derda
Guide Star Editors: Bill & Maureen Moutz

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED FOR KEYSTONE OAKS HIGH SCHOOL

By Pete Zapadka

Anyone out there interested in working on a planetarium on a volunteer basis or helping some kids get an astronomy club started?

I recently was contacted by the Earth and Space Science teacher at Keystone Oaks High School about getting the planetarium operational and organizing a club for the students, all on an unofficial level (the district apparently has

allotted no money for such things). I visited the school Tuesday and I was appalled at the condition of the planetarium (it's used as a storage area for old computers). I was, however, thrilled to see some of the excellent astronomy books there (a former club member used to be the teacher there).

I've volunteered to help the kids get things started, club-wise, but I am in no way capable of helping with the planetarium. I thought there might be some of you more-talented folks in the AAAP that could help and actually have some fun doing it.

Please drop me an e-mail at pzapadka@3ap.org if you might be able to help these students with the planetarium. I'll organize a meeting with the teacher and some of the students. This sounds like the worthy cause with which so many of us truly like to help!

FOR SALE

Meade Starfinder 8-inch motorized with several upgrades. JMI electric focuser etc., etc.—\$900 or best offer. Phone: 724-457-7048 or email: frankpastin2@verizon.net



Starliner Equatorial mount, pedestal base, 2" shafts, a/c RA motor, manual DEC slow motion, 16" tube rings to fit the sonotube for my 12.5" [I've gone to the Dob side...]

Celestron Comet Catcher w/ original eyepiece & instructions booklet. Gently used, good condition.

Lumicon off-axis guider, 2", Canon 35mm adapter, like new.

Open to reasonable offers. Contact Ed Potosky at: edpotosky@zoominternet.net or 724 822-0256 (eve.)



This announcement regarding a telescope and binoculars for sale was recently posted on the AAAP e-mail Website. Anyone interested should contact the person directly at: rw2012@yahoo.com. As always, the AAAP does not guarantee the quality, condition or value of any of these items that are posted for sale:

I have a basic Meade ETX 90 telescope with tripod, lenses and accessories for sale for \$350.00. I also have Orion Scenix 10x50, 9x63 and Nikon 7x50 binoculars for \$50.00 each. Moving must sell. I live in Maugansville, Maryland. It is a little bit of a drive but I think well worth it. Please email Ross Woodard at above email address.



IMPORTANT DATES

- June 3**—New Moon 3:23 p.m.
Moon at perigee
- June 6-7**—Public star party Mingo and Wagman
- June 7**—Mars 1.1° north of the Moon
- June 9**—Saturn is 3° north of Moon
- June 13**—Member star hopping class hosted by Tom Reiland 8:45 p.m. weather permitting. If you are planning to attend, email: wagmandirector@3ap.org
- June 13**—Private star party Mingo-Canonsburg Girl Scouts
- June 14**—Rain date for private start party at Mingo
- June 13**—Allegheny Observatory Tour/Lecture. Reservations required (412-321-2400)
- June 16**—In 1963 Valentina Tereshkova first woman in space, still the only solo space flight by a woman
- June 17**—Antares 0.2° north of Moon
- June 18**—Full Moon 1:30 p.m.
In 1983 Sally Ride becomes first American woman in space
- June 20**—Allegheny Observatory Tour/Lecture
- June 20**—Summer Solstice
Jupiter 2° north of Moon
Summer Solstice 7:59 p.m.
- June 21**—Keystone State Park Star Party starting at 9 p.m.
- June 23**—Neptune is 0.8° south of the Moon
- June 25**—Uranus 4° south of the Moon
- June 26**—In 1730 Charles Messier born
- June 26-27**—Carnegie Science Center at Mingo. Registration required 4-11 p.m.
- June 27**—Allegheny Observatory Tour/Lecture
- June 28**—Star hopping class at Wagman
- June 28**—Mingo radio field day
- June 28**—Great American Backyard Campout. See www.backyardcampout.org for more information
- June 28**—AAAP picnic at Angler's Grove Deer Lakes Park. Adjourn to members night at Wagman Observatory

ALMOST HEAVEN STAR PARTY

By Dave Smith

Registration is now open for the Almost Heaven Star Party July 31-August 3, 2008 on Spruce Knob, West Virginia's highest point. For more information: <http://www.ahsp.org/>

Here is some more information about the location of the star party at The Mountain Institute: <http://www.mountain.org/work/skmc/>

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Caleb Horner



OBSERVATIONS

James Schultheis: Posted to listserver May 26, 2008: Sue and I were taking bets on how many would be on the field at CSSP on Saturday and we both lost for there were 8 people observing and they were there for the CSSP star party. One guy had a very new 30" Obsession and took up about one-fifth of one of the parsecs with all of his stuff! There was another guy with a GIANT motor home and some good old campers in tents. The conditions were fair to good but with the dark skies, that equates to excellent to Sue and I. It was 37 degrees with absolutely NO dew and good transparency. Seeing was just fair. We observed until about 1:30 when the Moon cooked us out. The first object on my list was PGC 29488 or more commonly known as Leo 1 adjacent to Regulus for which I had no problem locating its location in the star field, but trying to see it is another story. I was using my 24mm Pan, which gave me about 64x mag and a 1 deg. AFOV and after moving back and forth over the suspected area, I could see a brightening and then a granular haze...that was it! After a while of soaking up photons, I started to see it very well. Next, we went over to observe Markarian 205 in some dark skies and man, the thing looked like a star with no averted vision necessary at CSSP. I then went over to observe a remarkable group of galaxies surrounding NGC3158 <http://www.jburnell.com/NGC3158Region.html>, which I could observe about 8 Gals in about a 25' field, nice! Then for the extreme challenge of Shakhbazian 49 a compact group 20' NE from the N3158 cluster but probably out of reach with my 15" (16+ Mag) and I could not see it. I then observed a few Hickson compact galaxy clusters, Hickson 56 in Ursa Major. I was able to observe 56C,D and B as two separate components but A and E eluded me. Hickson 61 http://www.skyhound.com/sh/archive/apr/HCG_61.html "The Box" was very cool to observe and not as hard as H56 or H58. Abell 39, http://www.noao.edu/image_gallery/html/im0636.html in Hercules was my favorite object of the night with its perfect symmetry and large size.

Mike Fisher: Posted to the listserver May 14, 2008: Tuesday night at Wagman the Moon was CPCs alignment star. From there, it found the non-naked eye findable Mercury at about a half phase crescent. Mercury stayed in the EP for over an hour. Up a bit higher in the sky, Mars is still reddish-orange. Up higher, Saturn is the jewel of the trio. I got my Moon bearings starting at the straight wall in the south then following the Terminator northward. I viewed the Moon for an hour or so. Scanning the Terminator was spectacular. Then, just for heck of it, I searched out M64, the Black Eye Galaxy. Finding it near the zenith was a challenge even with a go-to scope. It still looked pretty cool. Two other observers made their way to the hill at Wagman. The first person to show up parked outside the gate and carried in a DOB. They set up down by the gate. I did not talk to them. After dark, Jeff K. showed up with his DOB. I told him I searched out M64 so he tried the

challenge as well. Sometime later, he found it and said it was indeed a tough one. Jeff and I also observed a really bright asteroid through his DOB. The asteroid made up the fourth bright object in a string of stars. It was a very nice formation. I hope I can re-find it the next time I'm out. I wrapped it up around 12:30 a.m. and headed home to Greentree. Jeff said he wasn't far behind. The return trip took under 45 minutes. This was my first observing session since October 26, 2007. Finally, a good night for me. Getting up at 6:00 a.m. this morning was a bit painful but worth it.

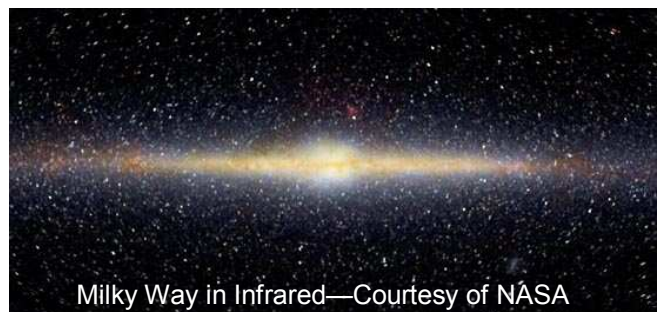
Jim Klueber: Posted to listserver May 5, 2008: I went out a little before 5:00 this morning to see if I could see any Eta Aquarids (none), but the ISS pass was great! As I watched it approach from the west, I would say that it was certainly brighter than Jupiter to the south. As it approached my zenith, it dimmed a little, which didn't surprise me, as I would expect the solar arrays to be pointing toward the east rather than on angle down towards me. Surprisingly, after it had traveled further on to the east and while it was still about 60 degrees up or so in the vicinity of Lacerta, I saw a really bright flash come from it that actually made me squint, like when someone unexpectedly takes a picture of you with a flash. I won't try to give it a magnitude estimate, but it was a lot brighter than Venus ever gets.

Dan Peden: Posted to listserver May 5, 2008: The ISS pass this morning was spectacular! I watched it for a full 5 minutes, unimpeded by clouds and extremely bright through the entire pass. It was predicted to be -2.5 mag, but it easily surpassed that as it descended toward the south. As it passed overhead, I could clearly discern its shape: The primary body was dumbbell-shaped. There was a dimmer section attached on the southern side. I watched it from the West End with very bright lights overhead. I look forward to seeing a repeat from dark surroundings. I work the nightshift this month and am precepting a student from Iceland. He had never seen the ISS and was fascinated. He told of regularly watching satellites fly across the Aurorae from his outdoor hot tub.

Phil Breidenbach: Posted to listserver May 13, 2008: My day was off to a good start when I managed to get the details of this morning's iridium flares before they happened! Usually it is just the opposite, right after they happen. I went out a little before 3:17 to catch the first flare in the southeast sky. It was -5 magnitude and I was able to watch it for awhile before it disappeared. I went in the house to make my lunch and then headed off to work. At work, I took a walk around the building a few times before the next flare was due. I walked off towards the east, leaving the parking lot lights behind me. I was standing in the wet grass when the -2 mag. flare lit up. This was at 4:27 AM. Another quick walk around the parking lot before a double flare at 4:36. This flare, viewed from the same spot as before, gave me two satellites, one just 12 sec-

onds before the other. I could see both of them as the first peaked. It looked as if the first one was dragging the second one behind. The first one was listed at -6 magnitude and the second one at -2, but I felt that the second was brighter. They looked very close to each other in brightness. I was excited, 4 flares in one morning! I needed to go inside and get a cup of coffee...before the last one showed up! A little before 5:17, I headed back out again. The sky was starting to get brighter. Most of the stars that were out before had disappeared and a nice color of blue had replaced the black that was there a mere half hour before. Off in the north, northeast, just as listed, a -3 flare showed up about 10 degrees over the building across the street. Bright and easily seen, easy to follow, it gave my morning an additional kick. Five flares in one morning! I was floating through the morning! Why didn't my co-workers see it the same way as me?

Tom Reiland: Posted to listserver May 26, 2008: I hadn't planned on driving to Wagman Observatory tonight because of the clouds that lingered through sunset. By 9 PM, conditions started to improve. I decided to take my chances and gathered up my logbook, charts and other stuff and loaded them in my car. I arrived a few minutes after 10 PM to find Mike Nizinski as the lone observer on the hilltop. We were the only two members until we left just after 2 AM. First off, I noticed a definite improvement with the Manka scope since Wade and Flac cleaned it. The roof opens and closes somewhat better than before they made some adjustments. These two maintenance projects will make for more enjoyable nights with the 21-inch. Galaxies, especially faint ones, were easier to locate and I picked up two new ones in Canes Venatici for my logbook. I also stumbled across two faint galaxies near M51 that I haven't observed for a long time. M51 was excellent at 212X, as was M106. Many of the brighter galaxies were visible in the 7 X 50 finder scopes. I did my usual galaxy hopping through the Coma-Virgo Galaxy Cluster. Most of my observing was checking for possible supernovae in the 110 galaxies I observed. I did observe Saturn in the evening and Jupiter just after 1 AM. I watched the Moonrise a few minutes later and I finished up with the nice double star, 61 Cygni. Two yellow stars just a mere 11.4 light years from Sol. I saw a Lunar Pillar as I was driving home and the Milky Way was visible before Moonrise and then clouds started to move in.



Milky Way in Infrared—Courtesy of NASA

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