



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...

January Meeting Speaker	1
Report from a Newbie Star-Geezer	1, 2, 3
2009 Wagman Volunteers	3
2009 Mingo Volunteers	4
VP Column	4
2009 Award Winners	4
Wagman Winterfest 2010	5
2009 Holiday Photos	5
Creating a Twitter Account	6
Welcome New Members	7
For Sale—For Free	7
Wagman Gate Combination	7
Sharing the Universe Videos	7
2010 Public Star Party Schedules	7
2010 Carnegie Science Meeting Dates	8
2001 Leonid Report	8, 9

JANUARY MEETING SPEAKER TOPIC REASON VS. REVELATION— CAN SCIENCE AND THEOLOGY BE PARTNERS

By Craig Lang

Holiday pace burning you out? Itching to get your astronomy fix? Stop by the Carnegie Science Center on **Friday, January 8th at 7:30 PM** and experience a different sort of topic: "Reason vs. Revelation - Can Science and Theology Be Partners" presented by AAAP member Bill Roemer.

"Both Science and Theology seek ultimate truth. Each has much to offer the other. We will consider what has fostered the division between the two, and reflect upon some ways in which that gap might be closed."

Bill Roemer earned a Bachelor's in mathematics at Youngstown State and a Master of Divinity at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary.

REPORT FROM A NEWBIE STAR-GEEZER

By Wallace Watson



Wallace with Bill Moutz at Cherry Springs

Well, old dogs can learn new tricks.

During the 50-something years I spent as an English professor and university administrator, father/husband, and occasional community activist, I sometimes looked appreciatively at the night sky. But I had little idea what I was seeing. The imaginative and mostly romanticized astronomical references by poets and playwrights whose works I was teaching—important as they are to readers of literature—hadn't provided much factual information.

About two and a half years ago, I attended a fascinating pair of lectures, "Thank God for Evolution," at a local Unitarian church. The presenters were a former Christian fundamentalist, now Unitarian pastor, and his atheist-scientist wife who, I later learned, are major players in a contemporary movement calling itself the "New Cosmology." With near-religious fervor, Michael Dowd and Connie Barlow projected hand-drawn charts and telescopic images, celebrating the continuing creativity of the physical universe since the Big Bang and repeating, almost as a mantra, "We are made of star-stuff!"

While I was and remain a bit skeptical about the breathless, “new-age” enthusiasm of the New Cosmology, I do appreciate the literal importance of that central fact: the chemicals that make up our bodies have evolved through the 14 or so billion years since that initial event in the history of our universe.

As I looked at the images of stars, fantastically shaped nebulae, and galaxies, I decided that it was time I peered further into these matters—even at the ripe old age of 71. I was further drawn to this by the often inky skies above the cottage my wife and I visit each summer in the 1000 Islands of the St. Lawrence River.

I had the good fortune to be sold a copy of Terence Dickinson’s *Nightwatch* when I first inquired about astronomy at the Carnegie Science Center—where I was advised to join the club, as I soon did. The clerk recommended a \$400 5-inch Celestron “go-to” Newtonian reflector telescope, and I bit. I spent a good part of the next year figuring out how to operate it, mostly by trial and error, with occasional advice from club members. Perhaps more important in my learning process has been the 10x50 Pentax binocular I bought after a few months (for about \$170), with which I have spent many a fruitful hour, at many sites, guided by Dickinson’s book—most memorably two nights lying in a (cushioned) canoe in a bay near our cottage, pointing the glasses as the spirit (and slight breeze) moved me.

Early on, I purchased a Zhumell 20x80 binocular at a bargain price (about \$70), after reading upbeat reports on the club list serve, which proved to be true for me. However, I found that no “heavy-duty” tripod I could find was strong enough to hold the instrument. So I invested about three times what I had paid for the binoculars in a parallelogram tripod/holder. I have found this rig particularly useful for family viewing (including a fine evening spent with a daughter and her family on a beach near Charleston, S.C.) and for star parties.

But I was hungry for more deep-sky detail and so, earlier this past summer, I jumped at the chance to purchase an almost-new 8-inch Dobsonian reflector from a club member at a sizable price reduction. This was a good step for me. I’ve learned much more about the celestial map pushing this scope by hand, and have seen objects in considerably more detail, than with the 5-inch reflector.

But I’m still having only limited success with nebulas, faint clusters, and galaxies beyond Andromeda. I’m anxious to learn more about what I could accomplish with other telescopes. As time and resources allow, I hope to pick up a reasonably priced refractor that takes up less space in my Honda Civic than the Dob and Celestron 5-incher, after selling the big binocular and rig (enough is enough).

Early on, I began an informal viewing log which, two years later, runs to 50 pages. Looking back over that record helps me recall the excitement of many of my personal discoveries. To name just a few: learning from Dickinson’s book, after one of my earliest binocular viewings at the island, that the bright star and cluster I had seen emerge over the trees to the northeast were the well-known Cappella and the Pleiades; pointing out to family members on a frigid post-Christmas night in Massachusetts Orion’s sword/nebula and bright Mars; my first sight of both the rings of Saturn and the ISS at the 2008 Wagman Winterfest; the fascinating Coma Berenices cluster, to which I return virtually every night it is visible; showing the Andromeda Galaxy to many awed friends and family members (finally spotting from our island dock last summer its companions M31, M110, and M33); and my first (and I hope not last) Black Forest Star Party this past September, including Terence Dickinson’s signing of my copy of *Nightwatch* and our brief chat about his upcoming talks at locations not far from our summer cottage.

I was largely inspired to begin this “hobby” (an inadequate name, surely) by a program blending astronomical images with philosophical and even theological speculations. My continuing interest in stargazing is driven, on the one hand, by curiosity about the physical cosmos, both stimulated and partly satisfied by reading of the monthly issues of *Astronomy* magazine (which I believe I am now ready to supplement with *Sky and Telescope*) and such books as Timothy Ferris’s *Coming of Age in the Milky Way*, as well as by a few sky charts and handbooks I have picked up along the way. Beyond those modest scientific efforts, I believe I will be inspired to keep up my late-developing interest in cosmic matters by the broader and deeper questions and ideas it raises. This new pursuit certainly engenders in me a wide range of feelings: awe, humility, and appreciation for the variety of viewpoints from which “reality” can be approached, among others. Perhaps most important, for this former seminary student, is the heightened sense I feel of the immense responsibility that we humans have, possibly alone in the cosmos, to carry out creatively and responsibly our role as the universe contemplating itself and creating and living humane values—before the atoms of which we are composed are recycled back into the cosmos.

Finally, to come back down to earth: Sometime next summer, my wife and I expect to move to an intergenerational, low-energy-footprint “co-housing” project, EcoVillage, outside Ithaca, NY. (Its website is easily googled, in case you are curious.) Among other attractions: a 360-degree view of a relatively dark sky (enhanced by low-level outside lighting); the rich astronomical resources of Cornell University (Carl Sagan’s former hang-out); and a local astronomy club run by a science teacher in a high school north of Ithaca that puts on a monthly series of public programs and offers the use of much better telescopes than I own.

Between EcoVillage Ithaca and our island in the St. Lawrence River (where I have two viewing platforms on opposite ends, out from under the trees) I expect to take my new interests a good bit further in the coming years. I will remain a member of AAAP and keep reading and occasionally contributing to the club list-serve. I am grateful to many members for their help and advice up to now—I would mention particularly Bill M., John M., Flacc, Tom, Kathy, and Fred. I hope to see some of you at Cherry Springs State Park, which is only three hours from Ithaca. Meanwhile, I look forward to spending some dark nights with fellow club members during the coming late fall, winter, and spring.



WAGMAN OBSERVATORY VOLUNTEERS FOR 2009

By Tom Reiland

There were 17 scheduled Public Star Parties and 6 private events. Seven of these nights were clouded out. There were 14 observable nights and two cloudy nights with public attendance for a total of 16 out of 23. There were 58 members who volunteered at a total of 227 times. Nine qualified for their choice of a hat or a patch and nine qualified for a patch. I would like to thank all who gave generously of their valuable time and I know that the 1,420 visitors, as well as all the members of the AAAP, greatly appreciated your efforts this year. Here's to an even better 2010.

One (*) is for a patch and two (**) is for either a hat or a patch. Members with 5 to 9 star parties earn patches, plus Roy Lahet for collecting aluminum. Members with 10 or more events earn either a hat or a patch.

Vince Aluise	2	Tim Manka	4
Phil Briedenbach	2	Mathew Maskas	4
Anne Beswick	3	Joe McCafferty	1
Bob Cannon	2	Ed Moss	1
John Cheng	1	Bill Moutz	9*
Jack Ciciarelli	1	John Mozer	1
Tim Colbert	1	Mike Nizinski	10**
Dan Cousineau	5*	Ann Norman	3
Kathy DeSantis	1	Sherry O'Neill	1
Mary De Vaughn	10**	Joyce Osborne-Fischer	12**
John Diller	1	Frank Pastin	7*
Jeanette Eastman	1	Rowen Poole	3
Eric Fischer	12**	Ed Potosky	1
Mike Fisher	2	Dan Reed	1
Jon Grimme	2	Tom Reiland	15**
George Guzik	1	Bill Roemer	1
Bill Hayeslip	15**	Patrick Glen Rockhill	1
Don Hoecker	7*	Sheri Rockhill	1
John Holtz	5*	Lori Seitz	8*
Brent Hudock	1	Andrew Smith	1
Phil Hughes	1	Dave Smith	1
Jeff Kearns	1	Larry Sneider	1
Ron Kirkwood	1	Flac Stifel	14**
Fred Klein	11*	Terry Trees	6*
James Klueber	2	Wallace Watson	2
Gene Kulakowski	1	Bill Yorkshire	11**
Roy Lahet	1*	Diane Yorkshire	5*
Jack Landman	1	Julie Yorkshire	1
Craig Lang	1	Pete Zapadka	6

MINGO STAR PARTY VOLUNTEERS FOR 2009

By Gene Kulakowski

Allinger, Stephen	3	Lang, Craig	4
Bauer, Erik	1	Leis, Gene	2
Bishop, Beverly	1	Meteney, Mike	6
Bishop, Melody	7	Moss, Ed	10
Caseman, Shirley	2	Mullen, Chris	1
DeSantis, Kathy ¹	3	Nizinski, Mike	1
DeVaughn, Mary	1	Odell, Joyce	1
Diller, John	3	Paslow, Al	3
Evans, Linda	2	Rapp, David	1
Fisher, Mike	1	Ritchie, Clark	3
Godlewski, David	2	Roemer, Bill	2
Godlewski, Joseph	1	Rusch, Florence	4
Godlewski, Herb	3	Saut, Rob	2
Griffith, Patrick	1	Schuster, Jerry	6
Haddad, Dick	2	Skowvron, Mike	1
Henderson, Gene	1	Smith, Glenn	6
Johnson, Jon	1	Smith, Sierra	1
Kelly, Todd	2	Snyder, Bill	4
Klein, Fred	4	Swanson, Ann	3
Kobus, Ken	10	Terry, Sam	1
Kobus, Linda	2	Ukasik, Joseph	1
Kostelac, Beverly	2	Ukasik, Matthew	1
Kostelac, Reginald	3	Watson, Wallace	1
Kulakowski, Gene	11		

VP COLUMN

By Craig Lang

Before I ramble in my usual fashion, I would like everyone to note that the **May 2010** meeting has been rescheduled and is now occurring on **Friday the 14th**. Please update your calendars.

I would like to thank everyone who helped out, cleaned up, and was a part of the Holiday Party. It seemed that everyone there had a good time and it was a great success thanks to all those who helped. If you would like to be involved with next year's party or have ideas, let me know.

At our January 8th meeting, AAAP member Bill Roemer will be speaking, find the article on page 1 in this issue for more details. Louis Coban, Allegheny Observatory and AAAP member, will be at our February 5th meeting to update us on happenings at Allegheny Observatory. AccuWeather meteorologists Lisa Beightol and Krissy Podynowski will be speaking at our March 5th meeting. Also expect some special audience guests at that March meeting. You will know who I am referring to when you see them, so be sure to give them a warm welcome.

I know it is cold out there and the cloud cover does not help any, but if you have some winter observing experiences, consider writing a short blurb about them and sending them to Bill and Maureen for inclusion in the next Guide Star. I am quite sure they would welcome the content and I believe that your fellow members will enjoy hearing about your observation experiences.

Now get out there and start wondering...

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE 2009 AWARD WINNERS

The John Brashear Award: Edward Moss

The George Lindbloom Award: Gene Kulakowski and Ken Kobus

The Lois Harrison Award: Joyce Osborne-Fischer

The Nova Award: Clark Ritchey, Anne Beswick, Dan Cousineau, Steve Alinger, Matt Maskas, and Matt Ukasik

WAGMAN WINTERFEST FEBRUARY 20, 2010 AT 4:00 P.M.

By Pete Zapadka



There is no need to register to attend Wagman Winterfest. Admission? It's free. Parking fees? Nope. But be sure to bundle up. Bring a warm beverage, such as hot chocolate or hot cider. Dress for the weather conditions!

Please be careful where you park and walk—the grounds may be slippery.

If the weather cooperates, we'll take a look at some of the winter's wonders, such as the Orion Nebula! Did you receive a telescope for Christmas and you don't know how to use it? Bring it along and we'll try to help.

Wagman Winterfest is held weather permitting. Severe cold or heavy snow will cause the star party to be canceled. So will persistent cloud cover, for which Pittsburgh is famous!

For more information, call the AAAP's Wagman Observatory at 724-224-2510 or Wagman Winterfest Director, Pete Zapadka, at (412) 487-9363 or email Pete at: pzapadka@3ap.org.

HOLIDAY PARTY PHOTOS

By Maureen Moutz



CREATING A TWITTER ACCOUNT

1. Go to <http://www.twitter.com> in your web browser.
2. On the front page, click on the button that reads "Sign Up Now".
3. On the next page, complete the form by filling in your real name, a user name, password, email address, and the captcha. **Be sure to remember this information!**
4. Once complete, Twitter will ask you for your email address and password. It can access your address book to check and see if any of your contacts are already using Twitter. This step is optional; you may click the Continue button at the bottom of the form to skip this step.
5. The next page suggests popular accounts that you might want to follow. Again, this step is completely optional and can be skipped by clicking the link at the bottom of the page.
6. Finally, your account is set up and ready to go. From this home page, you can update your status, find other Twitter accounts to follow, and see the posts of those accounts.
7. Links at the top of the page will let you customize your profile and register your phone to post Twitter updates. (See step #9).
8. Your Twitter feed can also be monitored by free 3rd party applications such as:
 - a. TweetDeck — www.tweetdeck.com (My personal favorite runs on Windows and iPhone)
 - b. Echofon — A Mozilla Firefox web browser plugin.
 - c. UberTwitter — A Blackberry application
 - d. Various websites and mobile applications, a Google search for "free Twitter client" will return hundreds of hits.
9. Your cell phone can also be used to send/receive updates. These are sent as standard SMS messages (text messages) and can incur usage fees. **Please consider any fees you may incur before selecting this option as the AAAP is not responsible for any charges you may incur.** An 'unlimited' or 'bank of messages' plan is suggested. Discuss this further with your provider.
 - a. <http://www.tweetsms.com/> can help you set up your Twitter account for use from your cell phone.
10. To follow the 3AP meetings twitter feed, click on "Find People" link at the top of your Twitter home page.
11. In the search box provided, type in the name 3apMeetings and click the Search button.

What account are you looking for?

Search for a user name, first or last name, business or brand

12. A new page will appear showing the 3apMeetings.

Name results for: 3apMeetings

Search for a user name, first or last name, business or brand

User Name



3apMeetings

Vice President, AAAP | Pittsburgh, PA

November 6th, 7:30pm: General Meeting at Carnegie

Science Center. Topic: Kevin Brunelle

Astrophotography Contest 2:21 PM Oct 24th

Follow 3apMeetings



13. Click on the button with the silhouette of the person to follow this account.
14. Congratulations! You are now set up to receive AAAP updates for future meetings!

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

CARY CAMERON
 PAT DEAROLF
 KEVIN KUCHTA
 SCOTT A. McLAIN and FAMILY
 DIANE TURNSHEK

FOR SALE



Free to any member, a custom-made Dob style alt-azimuth mount, fabricated by Teeter Telescope.

The mount is 31 inches tall. Cradle aperture is 7.25 inches in diameter.

It was formerly used to carry a 6-inch Newtonian.

I'll arrange to deliver it to Wagman or possibly the eastern end of the city. Contact John Cheng at: john_a_cheng@hotmail.com or phone - 412-421-5135.

NEW GATE COMBINATION FOR WAGMAN

By Tom Reiland

The new combinations are in place. Key fees and dues for 2009 must be paid before we can give out the combinations. I will give out the numbers in person or over the phone. I do not wish to give out that information via email for security reasons. Mike Meteney will have the numbers and so will Flacc.

SHARING THE UNIVERSE VIDEOS

By Kenneth Frank
 Night Sky Network Administrator
 Astronomical Society of the Pacific

ANNOUNCING! Sharing the Universe - Videos
 Sharing the Universe - Video Tips for Stellar Presentations

As active members of the Night Sky Network, we know that sharing the universe with the public is one of your favorite things to do.

The Astronomical Society of the Pacific has just released a new set of videos designed to give you helpful quick tips to address some common questions you as amateurs have about doing outreach.

Do any these questions sound familiar?

- What if someone asks me a question I can't answer?
- How do I talk to kids?
- What should I do when people ask me about aliens, UFO's, and conspiracies?
- I'm interested in doing outreach; what should I do to get started?

Watch these NEW High-Def video's here:

<http://www.astrosociety.org/SharingTheUniverse>

(And you can download them for FREE)

Accompanying each video are additional tips on the videos topic to gain deeper insights, ideas for practicing your new skills, and examples of astronomy activities to get you started.

Please give us your feedback and ideas on these new videos by writing to: stu@astrosociety.org

2010 STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR WAGMAN

February 20 Winterfest
 April 16 & 17
 May 21 & 22
 June 18 & 19
 July 16 & 17
 August 13 & 14
 September 11 & 25
 October 16 & 23

2010 STAR PARTY SCHEDULE FOR MINGO

April 16 & 17
 May 7 & 8, 21 & 22
 June 18 & 19
 July 16 & 17
 August 13 & 14
 September 10 & 11
 October 2, 16 & 23

2010 CARNEGIE SCIENCE CENTER MEETING DATES

January 8
February 5
March 5
April 9
May 14

I WILL NEVER FORGET THAT FOGGY NIGHT IN 2001!

By John Pane

Because of the fog, I decided to head to the Laurel Highlands or Mt. Davis. Driving there, the fog varied from very heavy to reasonably light. One of the worst spots was the Wilksburg entrance to the Parkway, and I almost turned around and went home.

I hit another bad spot on the turnpike, just after New Stanton, as I climbed through the layers of fog. But a few miles before the Donegal exit I suddenly broke through to very clear skies. I immediately began to see meteors, a dozen in the first minute, while I was driving!

Before I got off the turnpike, I had seen more meteors than I'd ever seen in one night. I got off at Donegal, but there were still scattered patches of ground fog, so I decided to go higher, to Laurel Mountain. As I was driving there I went through more dense fog as I approached Ligonier, and began to doubt my decision. I knew the show had started and I worried that it was peaking early and I would miss it. But I stuck to the plan, and the fog cleared again before halfway up the mountain.

I was headed to the ski area parking lot, but the park entrance was closed. There was a streetlight near this location, yet many people had gathered there because it was the biggest open area along the road. I stopped and started getting things out of the car, but I realized that it was a bad place to stay because the people were shining lights and cars were driving in and out. So I picked up my stuff and hiked about a half-mile along the closed park road, until I reached a relatively tree-free area. But even at this place, the forest did not permit a full-sky view.

I was now alone in a pretty dark place, with meteors flashing so fast that I quickly decided not to try counting them. It was just before 5 a.m. I could barely take my eyes off the sky to set up my camera. The radiant quickly became obvious because there were so many to trace back from various directions. I spent most of my time looking and shooting toward the north, with the radiant high in the sky behind me.

The brightest meteors lit up the landscape and left persistent trails. I was lucky enough to have one of the brightest go right through the center of my exposure. Its trail was visible for nearly ten minutes. After ending the exposure of the meteor itself, I took another to record the trail, which started

out as a vertical line and evolved to a backward question mark, then a C shape, and finally a horizontal line.

At times I saw six or seven at once in my field of vision. It seemed like I caught meteors in almost every exposure (50mm lens on a tripod), and some of my shots may have caught a dozen or more. We shall see. [So far, the most I have found in a single frame is six]. I stayed until shortly after 6. By then there were fewer meteors due to twilight, and the ZHR may have been diminishing anyway. But as I was walking back to the car there was still plenty of entertainment.

On the drive back, I was amazed to see meteors in the blue morning sky. I saw a very nice one at 6:43, only ten or fifteen minutes before sunrise. At that time, the only star I could see through the windshield was Sirius.

In the short time I was there, I did not notice an obvious peak, just short cycles when there were more or fewer visible. It also seemed that particular parts of the sky had periods of heavier or lighter activity. Overall, I estimate that I saw 800-1200 meteors. But I did not count them, so take this estimate with a grain of salt while you wait for the more experienced observers to file their reports.

I was at about 40 09.730 N, 79 09.519 W, at 2742 elevation according to my GPS. This is 45 miles from here (straight line), and it took about 1.5 hours each way (in the fog). The temperature was about 25 degrees, and there was no wind. I guess the hike helped me to stay cozy warm. It's a good thing because I had left the sleeping bags and lawn chair back in the car.

I took these photographs during the Leonids meteor storm on Sunday, November 18, 2001, from Laurel Mountain State Park near Ligonier, PA, USA. I did not use a telescope or telephoto lens. The photos were taken with an ordinary 35mm SLR camera mounted on a tripod, with a "normal" 50mm f/1.4 lens. I used two Kodak films: PJM 640 and TMZ 3200. I did not keep accurate records of exposure lengths. They ranged from ten seconds to two minutes. Copyright © 2001 John Pane. All rights reserved.

Meteor and Trail from Series One

The first two photographs in Series One (below) show a meteor and its immediate aftermath. This composite image combines the two photos, as if I had just taken a single photograph for the duration of the two photos.



Series One

This series of six photographs were taken over a span of ten or fifteen minutes, around 5:40am ET. The meteor shown here was one of the brightest I saw that night, and I was very lucky to have it appear right in the middle of my photograph. The bowl of the Little Dipper (Ursa Minor) is just to the left of the meteor.



This meteor left behind a glowing trail that was visible for more than ten minutes as it was re-shaped by the air currents in the upper atmosphere. The rest of the pictures show the trail's evolution as it expanded and moved down towards the horizon. By the time I took the sixth photograph in this series, the trail was twice as long as the original image of the meteor itself, and spanned almost the entire horizontal field of view of the camera. Seventeen shots (and a film change) after the meteor, I was no longer aware of the trail but it was still being picked up by the high-speed black & white film. Although they are less spectacular, there are at least seven other meteors visible in this series of photos.



For more photos, see the following website:

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~pane/Leonids2001/>

Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc.*Founded June 9, 1929 by**Chester B. Roe and Leo J. Scanlon***2009-2010 Executive Officers:**

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gseditor@3ap.org

AAAP Member Dues*:

AAAP Dues:	\$24.00
Student Membership (K-12 & full time college student):	\$16.00
Family Membership	\$40.00

***Basic Procedure for Paying Dues:**

1. Make check payable to "AAAP Inc."
2. Send check to Michael Meteney, Treasurer, 1070 Sugar Run Road; Venetia, PA 15367-1514



Please submit any articles for the Guide Star to the Guide Star Editors at gseditor@3ap.org by the 20th of each month.

****Some websites may need to be copied and pasted in your browser to view them****

Check www.3ap.org for January 2010 calendar

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