



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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October 19th: Friday, 7:30 at the Carnegie Science Center:

Our own Chris Genovese, explaining "How to Get Started in Amateur Astronomy".

Dr. Hapke is a Professor Emeritus at Pitt and studies the surfaces of planets and satellites by analyses of remote sensing data. He was a member of the Mariner 10 and Viking Imaging Science Teams and a principal investigator for the study of Apollo lunar samples! He is past Chairman of the Division for Planetary Sciences of the American Astronomical Society. Bring your questions about past, present, and upcoming Mars missions, the choice between manned missions and unmanned probes, and life on Mars! I think he has the inside scoop!



Professor Bruce Hapke is a veteran of the Viking Mission!

Chris Genovese joined our club in 2004 and in one year went from newbie to expert observer, perhaps rivaling Wagman Observatory Director, Tom Reiland. He has developed a step-by-step program that anyone can follow.



He is generous with his observing tips and eagerly shares them with visitors to the hill (Wagman Observatory). Remarkably, he has taught his elementary-school-age son to find most of the Messier objects. Chris's methods will be useful to the novice as well as the experienced observer who is still having

a little trouble sorting out the Virgo Cluster.

The 2007-2008 AAAP LECTURE SEASON BEGINS!

(And there's something for everybody)

By Ann Norman

A short online poll was taken this month to gather suggestions for upcoming meetings. So, by popular demand, the next two meetings will be:

September 21st, Friday, 7:30 at the Carnegie Science Center:

Professor Bruce Hapke, on "Mars" AND

MINGO CREEK TRAINING SESSION

By Larry McHenry

We have scheduled our first Mingo Creek Park Observatory general membership training session for Saturday, September 8th at 4:00 PM depending on the weather. The session should last for about 1-1/2 hours. If we are unable to open the observatory roofs due to rain, an additional session will be scheduled for recap and to finish that portion of the training. After the training session, we encourage members to stay for that evening's public star party (we'll order in pizza!).

All members who have met the criteria of at least one year of membership in the AAAP and assist at three or more Mingo star parties are eligible for training. Upon attending and completing the training session, eligible members will receive a key to the building, and may begin using the facility per regulations listed in the observatory handbook.

Having a key does not restrict one to only using the observatory telescopes. You may receive a key if you wish to use your own equipment on the hilltop and want to open the building for warm-up or other purposes without using the observatory telescopes.

Also, members who do not feel they are ready for the responsibility of having a key to the observatory may still attend the training session to become more familiar with the MCPO facility and are under no obligation to become a key holder.

If you would like to download and review in advance the MCPO Observatory Guidelines and Handbook, here are the PDF links:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lsmch/MCPO-Guidelines.PDF>
<http://home.comcast.net/~lsmch/MCPO-Handbook.PDF>

Please email me off-list if you are interested in attending the training session so we may plan accordingly. Thanks, Larry McHenry at lsmch@comcast.net.

TENTATIVE STARHOPPING CLASS DATES AT WAGMAN OBSERVATORY

By Tom Reiland

September 17 or 18 and 24 or 25
October 1 or 2

Let me know if you're interested (TRCassiopeia@aol.com). There will be no charge for this and it will be for members only.

AAAP TREKKIES UNITE!

By Ann Norman

(Pictures Ann Norman and Kelly and Derek Findlay)



AAAPers Ann Norman, Eric Fischer, John Holtz, and Kelly and Derek Findlay

Eric Fischer, John Holtz, myself (Ann Norman), and new members Kelly and Derek Findlay made the pilgrimage to Cherry Hill, New Jersey (outskirts of Philadelphia), on the Fortieth Anniversary of Star Trek. We had a different kind of star party—we basked in the glow of radiant minus-2-magnitude stars like William Shatner, Leonard Nimoy, and Connor Trinneer (Commander Trip Tucker), but were also entertained by some dimmer stars like a belly dancer and the guy who wore the rubber Gorn costume, both from the Original Series.

I met up with a handful of friends from a Star Trek website that I'm involved with. It was all I'd hoped for and more. It was more fun than . . . well . . . anything—with the possible exception of the last Star Trek Convention. Eric compares his experience to witnessing the Apollo 11 launch at Kennedy Space Center in 1969, and seeing the 7-minute total solar eclipse from a cruise ship off Mexico in 1991 (with John Holtz).

First, I met up with an online buddy (and Star Trek site owner) John Orcutt. (Kelly and I both met John through the site and were introduced to each other through him.) John and I spent Friday morning meeting and greeting other online friends. Most of us were meeting in person for the first time!

Kelly couldn't get there for the first night, which focused on the series *Enterprise* with appearances by Connor Trinneer (Commander Charles "Trip" Tucker), and Anthony Montgomery (Ensign Travis Mayweather). This was a big disappointment since both of us are huge fans of Connor. However, before I'd left Pittsburgh, she'd given me her two pre-paid tickets for the Friday Night "Dinner with the Stars," so I could try to sell them at the conference.

Good deeds pay off because as I was talking to the ticket people trying to negotiate a deal for Kelly, my friend and I realized we were standing beside CONNOR TRINNEER, who turned to greet us. We were wearing our "Not Dead" T-shirts. (Protesting the demise of his character, Trip, in *Enterprise's* last episode—And we won that battle, by the way! Trip was just resurrected in the books.) I managed to tell Connor, "We are your two biggest fans," before he shook my hand and I "de-evolved" into a giggling teenager.

I pulled it together for Connor's presentation that afternoon, and even got to ask him a question.

Soon our group of eight was sitting down to a "Dinner with the Stars." (A banquet where you get to interact with select cast members). I chatted normally with MARC ALAIMO, and got to tell him his portrayal of the Cardassian Dukat was "riveting." He was quite appreciative and charming. Just as he left our table, I got a call on my cell phone. It was Kelly wondering if I had managed to sell her tickets. "Yes," I told her, "I sold them both . . . but WAIT! HERE HE COMES." Connor was walking over to our table just at that moment. Kelly could hear him begin to chat with our table. So I spoke up: "My friend Kelly was supposed to make it to the dinner tonight, but she couldn't come, and I had to sell her tickets. Could you say 'hi'?"

"Sure!" Connor says, and takes the call! "So Kelly, have you bought the new Harry Potter book?"

How cool is that? She calls to see if I sold her tickets, and I put her straight on the phone with the star!

Eric Fischer and John Holtz showed up the next day. Of course, the highlight for most fans was the Sunday appearance of William Shatner and Leonard Nimoy, legends together on stage. After their performance, a bunch of us—my AAAP and online friends together—went out to Country Buffet, where we bumped into George Takei (almost literally). He was eating there like a regular civilian!

But all hero worship aside (yeah right!), the main reason to attend a Star Trek conference is to be with other fans. These people tend to be friendly; as serious as they are

silly; smart and creative; enthusiastic; and just plain fun. A typical fan is both a writer and an engineer. For instance, both Kelly and Eric are technical writers and editors. Derek is a computer guy and musician. John O. is an applied math major, creative writer, and is working on a new satellite propulsion system for NASA.

The highlight for me was the Star Trek Trivia Contest. Our own Eric Fischer and my friend John O. were BOTH selected from a crowd of hundreds to be on the three-person panel of experts that would answer questions from the audience. They played as a team. Eric, of course, is an Original Series expert, and John, a college student, is an expert on all the later series, from *Next Generation* to *Enterprise*. They had to answer five questions correctly in a row to win. They had racked up four correct answers in a row when they were hit with, "What species has Borg designation 125?" Their guess: The Ferengi. NOoooo!! It's the Vulcans!

But Eric and John picked up some nice consolation prizes, and I was proud of them! (Even though they blanked on the name of Travis's brother: *It's Paul!!!!*) I tried, but my telepathy wasn't working . . . Here is a slideshow of the trivia contest: <http://s74.photobucket.com/albums/i269/justTripn/Cherry%20Hill/?action=view¤t=49a181b3.pbw>

The next day Eric competed in a second contest: Propose a Plot for the Next Star Trek Movie. There were about 10 participants. Eric told a story in which the galaxy erupts in strange chaotic phenomenon (unstable stars exploding, shock waves through space-time, etc.) During this turbulence, the various telepathic species (Vulcans, Betazedes, etc.) sense some kind of cosmic dispute is going on . . . they "hear" arguments such as "Leave the lower-level life-forms alone!" and "We have every right to limit their movements!!" In time, Spock and Picard figure out that some kind of war has erupted between the Organians and the Q (two omnipotent species). Because of Q's grudging respect for Picard, he allows Spock and Picard to act as negotiators between the warring parties.

It was quite spellbinding, and Eric got loud applause, but an 18-year-old kid already had the contest wrapped up with a brilliant story in which Picard leads *Enterprise* on a mission to STOP a rouge temporal agent from going back through time to prevent the creation of the Borg. Picard is conflicted and so is the crew, and there is a mutiny on *Enterprise*.

Of course there was a costume contest. The curious can click to the pictures:

<http://s74.photobucket.com/albums/i269/justTripn/Cherry%20Hill/?action=view¤t=586d020e.pbw>

Every night we were up until one or two. We had DVD *Enterprise* marathons; posted to our extensive online community; laughed through the worst horror movie ever made (a semi-naked Jolene Blalock running from a smoke monster); applauded as friends outlined their next fan fics; and pounded away at the problem of life, the universe, and everything—beginning with that annoying speed-of-light barrier

that hinders our journey through the galaxy.

New to me was the phenomenon of people conversing in a group while typing on laptops. For instance, someone says, "There's a theory that the electron is actually a tiny black hole" and instantly that topic has been pulled up on Wikipedia, and we are talking specifics. And someone laughs and reads a new post left by someone in our website community. I felt like I was in an Arthur C. Clark novel where everyone has a chip in their brain to instantly access data and each other's thoughts. For one brief moment, I was living in the future and it was . . . thrilling.

As Derek alluded:

"[Being] open to options . . . never considered. That is the exploration that awaits [us]. Not mapping stars and studying nebulae . . . but charting the unknown possibilities . . . of existence."

(Yes, he was quoting Q.)

And you *really* should have been there.

Here are the rest of the pictures (Derek, Kelly, John O. and I toured the Battleship New Jersey):

<http://s74.photobucket.com/albums/i269/justTripn/Cherry%20Hill/?action=view¤t=bbda8f73.pbw>

RAYSTOWN STAR PARTY

August 4, 2007
By George Guzik

You really can fool Mother Nature - if only for a little while! For the past 4 years, we made an annual trek to Raystown Lake to hold a Star Party for the campers there. Each of those events was either rain-soaked or simply clouded-out. This year, on our 5th try, we FINALLY had a successful Star Party! It must have been because we sort of "accidentally on-purpose" forgot to "cc" Mother Nature on our announcement of the event. By the time she realized that we were gazing at REAL stars, not just the PowerPoint variety, it was too late for her to do much about it. She sent in the clouds at around 11:30 PM but by then, we were concluding a very nice evening of astronomy.

This year's event was greatly enhanced when members of the Central Pennsylvania Observers and the Starlight Astronomy Club who heard of the event via a newspaper article (and discreetly didn't mention it to you-know-who) joined us in front of the visitor center at the lake. Along with AAAPer, Bill and Maureen Moutz and Fred Klein, we had quite a nice gathering of astronomers and instruments for our guests to enjoy.

The Star Party began with solar observing and some early evening views of Venus. To further disguise the true purpose of the event from MN, we had our guests retreat

temporarily to the classroom in the visitor center where I delivered the customary "in-case-of-clouds" PowerPoint intro to astronomy. When it concluded, we headed back to the telescopes and went busily to work educating and entertaining our guests. We were able to view many of the favorites of the summer sky along with a good ISS pass late in the evening.



Our thanks and appreciation go out to the Army Corps of Engineers and their staff for their assistance and for making us welcome at the lake. We also thank the Central Pennsylvania Observers and the Starlight Astronomy Club for their fine support. Special thanks go to Bill and Maureen Moutz for coordinating the three astronomy organizations. Finally, we thank Mother Nature for giving us a break this year!

RAYSTOWN STAR PARTY

By Ted Kominsky, member of
Central Pennsylvania Observers State College and
Starlight Astronomy Club Hollidaysburg



I just want to thank everyone from the Amateur Astronomy Association of Pittsburgh, Central Pennsylvania Observers State College, Starlight Astronomy Club Hollidaysburg, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the very successful Star Party at the Raystown Lake Visitors Center Saturday, August 4, 2007.

There were members from all of the clubs with more than 10 telescopes. There was a large public turnout, many of whom never saw a telescope let alone look through one. Viewing started at 3:30 PM.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineer's Rangers did a more than exceptional job helping and making us feel very welcome. There were 12 (or more throughout our visit) that were always there to take care of our needs. I know that

there were some behind the scenes that were not seen, but their job was necessary and greatly appreciated.



I am very happy that the Amateur Astronomy Association of Pittsburgh invited the two clubs that I am a member of to join them. There

was a good mix of talents among the three clubs. It was an experience that hundreds of people will always remember.

We are already looking forward to the next time we can do this at Raystown. Yes, it surely was a night to remember. I wish you all clear skies.

THANK YOU FROM WASH (WIRELESS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH HILLS)

By Frank Bobro

Dear Members of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh:



On behalf of the Wireless Association of South Hills, I would like to thank you for allowing us to use your grounds for our Field Day activities. We loved the location! It is

accessible and high, with lots of trees for antennas, adequate parking and, perhaps most important, modern and nearby restrooms!

Field Day is a way for Amateur Radio Operators, or "Hams", as they are more commonly known, to have fun under simulated emergency conditions. It is also a chance to fine-tune emergency communication skills. Generators and battery power are used, along with transmitters/receivers and antennas set up in the field. The idea is to put together a self-sufficient working station quickly and begin making contacts with other stations. As it turned out, we made contact with 1,430 other stations! We were even successful at making contacts

using amateur satellites! Overall, this was a very successful event for our club.

This year's score was better than last years and we believe that the location made the difference. It was enjoyable to us that some of your club members stopped by to see what we were doing and we also enjoyed the scouts stopping by – that is one of the reasons why we like to do events like Field Day, to let the public learn more about the activities of local Hams and what our hobby entails.

2008 WASH FIELD DAY

By Larry McHenry

We are in the early stages of developing a bigger and better co-event for next year! The National Amateur Radio Field-Day event for 2008 is scheduled for Saturday, June 28th starting at 2:00 pm running through Sunday, June 29th 2:00pm.

The MCPO Committee is planning a public star party for both that Friday and Saturday night (June 27th & 28th, 2008).

Additionally, taking advantage of and building on the fact that we will already be there all day Saturday thru 2:00 PM Sunday with scheduled activities, the committee has decided to restart Mingo's Summerfest on that weekend, running from Friday afternoon, June 27th thru Sunday afternoon, June 29th (in a way, this year was a mini Summerfest, but with just one day of limited activities).

We will be reserving both Shelter 10 (which we will share with the radio club), and the camping area, so as to have complete control of the entire site during the co-event Summerfest weekend. In addition to camping, astronomical talks, planetarium shows, and evening observing at the observatory, and amateur radio demonstrations at both the observatory and Shelter 10, we will be looking at including some of the other past activities that we use to do at our StarCruise conventions (children's activities, rocket launches, astro quiz game). While Summerfest will not be on par with a StarCruise or is meant to compete with the other regional conventions, (we don't have the dark skies), we will offer an astronomy oriented camping event that will appeal to our local members and general public!

After the first of the year, when details are more final, we'll be posting more information to the AAAP listserver and updates to the AAAP website for Summerfest.

We think there is a great potential to make this a yearly co-event for both clubs, and we look forward to working with WASH to make it happen.

MESSAGE FROM MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

By Mark Schomer

All changes of address, email, telephone, receiving Guide Star online or in the mail, etc. should be directed to me, and I will see that the person in charge is notified. By doing it this way, we keep all the membership records up-to-date.

MEMBERS ONLY OBSERVING DATES FOR WAGMAN

By Tom Reiland

Members' only weekends at Wagman Observatory for the rest of this year are:

September 7-9 October 12-14
November 9-11 December 7-9

2008 PUBLIC STAR PARTIES AT WAGMAN OBSERVATORY

February 16 Winterfest
April 11 & 12
May 9 & 10
June 6 & 7
July 11 & 12
August 8 & 9
September 5 & 6, 20
October 4 & 18
The Club Picnic will be June 28, 2008

MINGO 2007 PUBLIC STAR PARTY DATES

September 7 and 8
October 6 and 20

MEMBERSHIP MEETINGS AT CARNEGIE SCIENCE CENTER

By Ed Moss

The following are the dates of the membership meetings:

September 21, 2007
October 19, 2007
November 16, 2007
December 14, 2007
January 11, 2008
February 8, 2008
March 14, 2008
April 18, 2008
May 16, 2008

IMPORTANT DATES

Second annual East Coast Conference on Astronomical Imaging (ECCAI), to be held on Sept 28-30th 2007, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Please visit our website for more details: www.pennastroimaging.com/eccai2007/. Please call me with any further questions. Steve Mazlin, 215-860-9046.

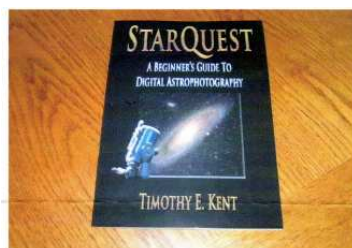
Black Forest Star Party September 14, 15, 16

Reyerson Station Arts in the Park (Star Party) September 22 & 23

Allegheny Observatory Open House will take place on Friday, September 28th beginning at 7:00 p.m. We will need many volunteers to be inside the observatory and club members to set up telescopes on the front lawn outside the building. If you would like tickets or you would like to help out, please contact Lou Coban at: coban@pitt.edu or 412-321-2400.

BOOK REPORT STARQUEST—A BEGINNER'S GUIDE TO DIGITAL ASTROPHOTOGRAPHY

By Timothy Kent



ISBN 978-1-929148-73-8. Softcover 102 pages 6 by 9 inches

Tim Kent, a Starlab portable planetarium resource teacher for Baltimore County Public Schools has written a limited-run, self-published book on digital astrophotography for beginners. It is entitled "*StarQuest—A Beginner's Guide to Digital Astrophotography*". It is written for amateur astronomers of any age who wish to take the next step from viewing celestial objects through a telescope to photographing them with a basic point-and-shoot digital camera. The book is written in an easy-to-read, non-technical format so that anyone who owns a point-and-shoot digital camera can apply the techniques and take beautiful celestial images with or without a telescope. This book will also appeal to anyone who wishes to get involved in the fascinating hobby of astrophotography, but who only has a "shoestring" budget to spend on astronomical and photographic equipment. The cost of the book retails for \$16.95; however, that cost is negotiable, especially if you consider purchasing a number of copies. If you would like more information, check out the website below:

<http://mysite.verizon.net/vzex6141/starquestastrophotographyguide>

FOR SALE

Equatorial Platform drive kit for DOBS. Equatorial Platform drive kit consisting of Powermax 1.8 degree stepper motor with gear reduction, mounted drive wheel, CMD microstep 260 drive controller, 24 VDC power supply, 7 new extra hardness skate wheels and bearings, all with wiring documentation including calculations, photos for building a platform, for 40 degree latitude. Asking \$145. Wood platform plans also included. Contact Carl M.Chernan - 724-224-7691 or by e-mail: carlm01@comcast.net

Meade Magellan 1 for a Starfinder Equatorial Telescope Paid \$295 asking \$195, also a Meade 8" Star Finder on equatorial mount with adjustable legs for leveling the scope and a JMI motofocuser and rotating rings for the scope. I can sell the scope with or without the extras. \$900 or best offer. Contact Frank Pastin at home at 724-457-7048 or by email at frankpastin2@verizon.net.

Celestron C-8 includes case for telescope, accessories box, wedge, tripod and many quality extras. Price \$500 for everything. Contact Bill Dilmore email wjd28xx@verizon.net or call 724-327-3130 or 412-858-5155.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Bruce E. Lane
 Donald Madzey Jr.
 David F Antonelli
 Michael F Antonelli
 Robert Gable
 Shannon Gable
 Michael D Nizinski
 Danielle L Powers
 Lawrence R Powers IV
 Erin E. Brubaker
 Craig Dunn
 Martina Guercio
 Peter Guercio Jr.
 Barry M Jones
 Anthony Lapiana
 Helen M. Marks
 David J. Torhan

OBSERVATIONS

Mark Arelt: I decided to buck the weatherman and the Clear Sky Clock on August 13 and headed for Greene County to watch the Perseids. Unlike Saturday night when there may as well have been a star party there, Frank Weilgus, his friend Nate, Craig Smith and I shared the hilltop that night. I arrived just after sunset to a desolate site. Banks of clouds kept rolling through with large sucker holes in between until about 10:30 when it socked in altogether. Since I thought I had already wasted the trip, I decided I may as well catch some sleep. I woke up at 12:30 a.m. to find the clouds pretty much dissipated. I

quickly set up and aligned my mount, set my camera with a 40mm lens, and aimed near the center of Andromeda (per Jerry Lodriguss's advice, "Don't aim right at the radiant") and started snapping off 1-minute exposures. I also started a wide-angle video camera on a fixed tripod aimed a bit further west than my driven still camera. I laid back in a lounge chair from 1:30 to 2:30. In that dedicated hour of watching, I counted 22 Perseids (2 of which left trails that lasted several seconds), about 5 edge-of-vision bogies, and 1 bright sporadic that came out of the far west and crossed near Polaris, dying out just before entering my camera's field of view. In fact, most of the bright Perseids that might have been captured seemed to be intentionally avoiding my efforts to secure images of their fiery immolations. Upon a cursory examination of the roughly 40 frames captured on my still camera, I saw none. But review on a larger screen may reveal some. The video camera ran from 1:30 'till about 2:50. I have yet to review that. It had become such a fine night by 2:30; much better than the previous one that I abandoned my dedicated Perseid watch in favor of some wide-angle and deep sky imaging but between then and 4:45 or so when I started to tear down, I saw 17 more Perseids at odd moments looking up from my other work for a grand total of 39 confirmed.

James Schultheis: I have been trying for two years now to observe IC 1296 an Mv 15.5 galaxy in Lyra with my 15"/f/4.5 Obsession and Friday night (8-10-07) at Cherry Springs, PA. I accomplished my goal! The galaxy was only a faint smudge with averted vision but it made my hair on the back of my neck stand up with the excitement. I then finally found and observed M 2-9 Minkowski's Butterfly an Mv 14.6 planetary (this was my 6th try). Conditions Friday night started out actually poor in both seeing and transparency but by about 1:00 a.m. things improved dramatically. The biggest problem was the dew. Sue found N4036 and we tried to see the super nova 2007gi but we could not resolve it in her 12.5" and it was not until we tried my 15" under very high power was it evident with averted vision. Perseids were few and far between both nights. There were about 25 observers on the field Friday and maybe 50 on Saturday. Saturday started off with fair conditions, which got bad by about midnight. Saturday night there were about 300 people at the public Stars and Parks area adjacent to the astronomy area and it was very interesting to hear the crowd when a fireball shot across the sky.

Gene Kulakowski: The Perseid meteor party turned out to be a successful event at MCPO. I arrived around 7PM, making sure the gates were open for the arrival of our members and visitors. At the beginning of the evening, the skies were partly cloudy and we were all hopeful that clear skies would eventually emerge. Many of the visitors set up their lounge chairs and blankets across the observatory grounds. A few of the members and visitors brought their cameras in hopes of capturing some great shots of the meteor shower. After midnight, the clouds cleared and we were greeted with a wonderful view of the sky. The meteor show started to pick up after midnight

and continued to dawn.

We passed out a Perseid meteor shower count survey asking the visitors and members to record their observations and counts. One of the visitors reported, in three hours of observing, 37 meteors—some with intense light and various colors.

In a total of three hours, my personal count was 73. The breakdown:

From 1:45AM to 2:45AM: 27
 From 2:45AM to 3:45AM: 22
 From 3:50AM to 4:50AM: 24

I personally saw over 10 green meteors with smoke trails and one large, intense white meteor that lit up a quarter of the sky. I saw a strange meteor that started straight then curved at a 30-degree angle and also saw six satellites, including a pair of Noss satellites. The ISS could not be seen due to the low angle of its flight path.

Sherry O'Neill: Last night was day #1 of the August Star Party at Wagman Observatory. When I left the house it was sunny, and for the most part clear but the closer I got to Wagman, the cloudier it got. I'm afraid that I'm going to start getting the moniker "The Cloud Lady" as I seem to bring the clouds with me every time I go up there! Fortunately, the closer it got to darkness the sky began to clear off. I arrived at 7:50 PM, about 25 minutes before sunset. Guests started streaming in right around sunset. While we were waiting for it to get dark, I showed some people the moon and also Jupiter and its moons. By 9:00 PM it was dark enough to show off some of the deep sky sights. I showed quite a few assorted guests: M8, some globulars in Sagittarius, M15, The Andromeda Galaxy, some double stars, and a few assorted open star clusters. The clouds were intermittent throughout the evening. I had to wait about 20 minutes before trying to find M31 due to the clouds. We also saw a nice pass of the ISS with attached shuttle, Endeavor. By 11:30 PM, it was getting cold, and a lot of people were leaving. Also the clouds were rolling in from the west. So I packed it in and came home. Later on during the night, it cleared off again. I actually got some more stargazing in from the driveway just prior to dawn's first light. I checked out the Pleiades, M35, M36, M37, M38, and a few open clusters in Perseus. I looked for M1, but by then it was starting to get light. I got to see M42 last week by dragging my scope over into the driveway across the street. I didn't bother this morning. I think I'll just be lazy and wait a couple of weeks until it gets up high enough before dawn to clear the house. This morning I also saw Sirius for the first time this year in the morning sky. I saw it about 3 degrees above the horizon—through a gap in the trees at 5:52AM. This beats my old "first time" record by 4 days set back in 2003.

Michael Fisher: Opting not to relax after a very intense

work week, I loaded up my equipment and headed to MCPO for some moon observation time. I timed my departure to arrive at Mingo just after sunset. I had to unlock the gate but still felt there might be a diehard at the observatory; there was not.

My scope was set up and tracking the moon by 8:45 PM. Even with a medium thick haze, the moon was stunning. Jupiter hung like a jewel while Antares poked in and out of the southern haze. Vega, Deneb and Altair were visible all night long as well as Arcturus. Polaris struggled to be seen but did show herself now and then.

For a while, I was the only human creature in the vicinity, except for the tremendous amount of insects chirping, buzzing and clicking; the chorus of life abounding. Around 11:00 PM, the cricket chorus was interrupted by the wale of some unknown creature down the observation hill emanating from the picnic pavilion. I have no idea what kind of creature makes such vocalizations. It reminded me somewhat of the sounds that "Predator" makes in the movies *Predator vs. Alien*, which I just happened to watch the night before on cable TV; although there was a throaty sort of growl with a sort of groan mixed in. Needless to say, this creature got my attention and I believe its intent was to get my attention. I followed his movements with my ears as it made its way along the western tree line. His growling was getting intense and kept me very aware. I used my binoculars to look at the tree line as he ascended the hill. It was too dark over there to see anything even with the brightly lit sky. As he climbed the hill, he would growl perhaps every 20 seconds or so. I decided to answer him with a whistle. Every time he growled, I whistled. This caused him to pause and he would remain stationary briefly. We kept up this communication for 15 minutes or so as he made his way up the hill towards the observatory. The last location I heard him in was somewhere in the trees west of the observatory building.

I love that tingly feeling that goes up the spine when confronted with the possibility of danger. I presume when dogs' fur raises on their back, they are feeling the same thing. I was glad to have this creature pass without incident. I would like to know what it was though.

Around 1:00 AM, a small herd of deer decided to join me. There is one small scrub tree in the observing field halfway down the hill. This group of deer liked this tree and gathered around it. I had my radio playing and some red lights on so they knew I was there but came up anyway. I said hello to them; they easily heard me being so close. I would say that little scrub tree is what? 200 feet away. The herd milled around, looked at me from time to time, then went on their way heading southeast. What is funny is I never noticed from what direction they came.

They were just suddenly there. I suppose I hadn't noticed because I had my head turned quite often looking at the tree line behind the building plus the valley below was pretty well socked in with fog. At 2:00 AM, I packed it in and left for home.

A POEM

By Kathy DeSantis

I have heard quite a racket out of sight,
From vantage on the hill, at Mingo, at night.

I would just as well let go,
Choosing to not really know.

Who in the nocturnal auditory drama, has been the winner

And as a part of the process, on the contrary, who has been dinner?

But, I suppose it tempts one to know, what makes the sound

Especially when there are so few other people around.

COOL WEBSITES

<http://hubblesite.org/newscenter/>

<http://www.supernovae.net/isn.htm>

<http://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory?id=3509107>

<http://www.alleghenycounty.us/parks/dlfac.aspx>

<http://www.gocomics.com/boundandgagged/2007/08/19/>

<http://www.astromeeing.de/planets/070816venus1.htm>

<http://www.fredkleinastro.com/images/VenusComposite07d.jpg>

<http://www.cloudynights.com/>

<http://al-paslow.smugmug.com/gallery/3207764#176935394>

<http://www.lightsout.org/>

<http://www.independence07.com/>

<http://www.aavso.org/>

<http://www.cfa.harvard.edu/iau/Ephemerides/Comets/>

<http://www.heavens-above.com/>

<http://www.supernovae.net/snimages/>

<http://www.cfa.harvard.edu/iau/lists/Supernovae.html>

<http://sec.noaa.gov/pmap/index.html>

<http://www.spaceweather.com/>

<http://www.skyandtelescope.com/>

<http://www.weather.com/>

http://weather.unisys.com/satellite/sat_ir_at.html

http://weather.unisys.com/satellite/sat_ir_us.html

http://www.ssec.wisc.edu/data/g8/latest_g8ir.gif

<http://www.lpl.arizona.edu/alpo/>

http://www.space.com/scienceastronomy/070626_st_tunguska_crater.html

SEPTEMBER PLANET HAPPENINGS

Mercury is at greatest elongation from the Sun on the evening of September 29 but it is too low in the western twilight for observation.

Venus blazes in the eastern dawn sky at magnitude -4.5 rising progressively earlier throughout the month from 5:00 a.m. at the start to 3:30 a.m. by the end. Through a telescope it appears as a crescent. The waning crescent Moon lies above left on the morning of September 8 and below left the following morning.

Mars is a morning object, rising at midnight at the start of September and just after 11:00 p.m. by the end. It moves from between the horns of Taurus, the Bull, then towards the feet of Gemini, the Twins, brightening from magnitude $+0.2$ to -0.1 . The last quarter Moon lies north of it on the morning of September 4.

Saturn emerges into the eastern dawn sky in the second half of the month. It lies under the body of Leo at magnitude $+0.7$.

Jupiter is an evening object, setting before midnight at the start of the month and just after 10:00 p.m. by the end. It lies between Ophiuchus and Scorpius at magnitude -2.1 . The Moon, just before first quarter, lies below left of it on the evening of September 18.

Taken from Night Sky wall calendar 2007.

Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc.

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

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Note to New Members:

If you do not already own a telescope and are unsure of what to buy, feel free to come out to our star parties and talk to members about their scopes. We always have a variety on the field and you will hear the pros and cons of each type and size. If you have a scope but are unsure of how to set up and use it properly, a member is sure to be there with a similar one who will be happy to assist you with yours.

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