

The Guide Star

Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh Inc.

A Section of the Academy of Science & Art of Pittsburgh

September, 2002

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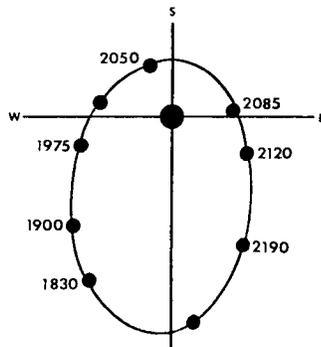
Nicholas E. Wagman Observatory



Mark Stauffer Speaks of Binary Stars

It's Double Or Nothing At Sept. 20 Meeting

On those heavy-hazy nights, there is little to show visitors during a public star party, except of course the Moon and any available planets. As far as deep-sky objects go, the various "Fuzzy Patch" objects (nebulae, globulars, etc.) are really not worth viewing. The notable exception is double stars. Even on a Moon-lit night, famous pairs such as Mizar-Alcor and Albireo hold up quite well. If you would like to locate and learn more about double stars, make sure to attend the club's first indoor meeting of the 2002-2003 season, **September 20, 2002, 7:30 pm** at the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh. On hand will be one of the best promoters of double-star observing, AAAP member **Mark Stauffer** (see bio and topic on page 2). Not to many years ago, Mark was a regular contributor to the Guide Star with his "Seeing Double" column.

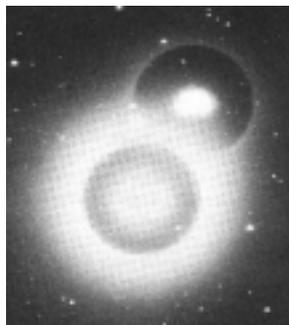


This year represents a break from AAAP tradition for September meetings. For example, this is the first meeting that does not follow our old "Second-Friday-of-the-Month" formula. Check the bottom of the Fridge Calendar (page 6) for the new 2002-2003 meeting dates. Also, in recent years, the September meeting featured a panoply of member's photos and observation reports from the Summer. Fear not...if you have such a collection to show and tell, we will allot plenty of time for these during the meeting. The September meeting is also an opportunity to meet up with astro-comrades you might have not seen during the summer star party season. In fact, if you have a large number of images to show (slides or digital), make sure to contact Larry McHenry in advance so that he can allocate fair parcels of time to each member.

Right Place At The Right Time

Unlike previous CSC meetings, we will not be going to the Planetarium. Instead, members are to go directly to the "Science Stage" auditorium in the corner of the main lobby (to the right as you enter the main front entrance). There are no admission or parking fees, and if you are unfamiliar with the CSC, please check with any staff member on the main lobby area.

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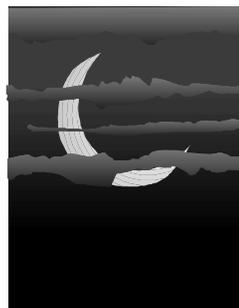
Sept. 14, 27 and 28

Moon Coming and Going At Wagman September Star Parties

Some people must think we're just nuts. At the typical "Moonrise Special" star parties, AAAP members begin to gather on the east side of the building, many with binoculars, some with scopes, all sweeping the Eastern horizon for that first sprout of the Moon's cusp. Even visitors can sense the tension and high drama as everyone awaits the first shout of "THERE IT IS!"

If you wonder what all the hub-bub is about, attend the **Sept. 27 and 28** Moonrise Special star parties at **Wagman Observatory**. Of course, we're there for a lot more than just the rising Moon; the star party starts at **Sunset** as we also show the visiting public the remarkable variety of late Summer/early Fall deep-sky objects, undiminished by bright Moonlight.

(continued on page 2, column 1)



Season's Last Wave Pool Star Party On Sept. 14

Perhaps you have seen the TV commercials for Kennywood Park, showing the various rides covered in snow...an inducement to get there before the park closes for the year. The same thing is true for the South Park Wave Pool area: One more chance for South Hills members to share observations with their colleagues before the lot is sprinkled with leaves and then buried in snow. Come to the **Sept. 14** star party, which starts at **Sunset**, and you may get some of your best-ever views of M45 and other great Fall sky objects through big scopes. After that, it's **8-months** until the next party.



Wagman Star Parties Include Two "Moonrise Specials"

(continued from front page)

Two weeks prior to the "Moonrise Special" weekend we stage a good old, garden-variety public star party at Wagman, **September 14**, also starting at *sunset*. The Moon will be just a tad past First Quarter, a good time to show the public the various lunar surface features in great detail (thanks to long shadows). To encourage visitors to return for the Moonrise Special star parties, you might point out that the "left" half of the Moon (then in darkness) also contains a rich selection of features such as the bright crater Aristarcus.

Is It Your Turn to Provide Non-Telescopic Help?

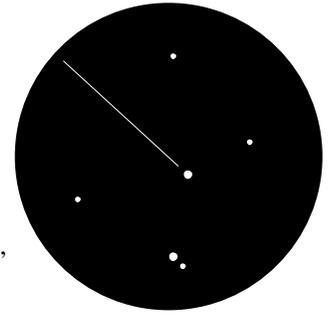
AAAP members have consistently pitched in to help park cars, direct crowds in and out of the building, fold literature, etc. But it seems like the same set of people (John Holtz, John Close, Bill and Diane Yorkshire, Charlotte Tunney, Joyce Osborne-Fischer, etc.) are providing these services with every star party. If you

do not bring a scope but want to help out in some way, consider spelling these folks for awhile so that they can relax for bit, talk astronomy with the public, or simply get some refreshments from the members' warm-up room. Of course, the more volunteers we have for these important assignments, the less time any one person has to be on duty for them.



Clouds Part Just Enough for Most To See Asteroid Flyby

As far as we know, the last time anyone observed an astronomical object with perceptible proper motion was Comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock in May, 1983. At the right eyepiece power, you could see the tailless fuzzball moving against the background stars. Luckily for Western PA observers, we had five straight days of clear skies to observe that comet. Not so last



month for the pass of Asteroid 2002NY40, which was predicted to move at almost satellite-like speed at its closest approach to Earth. Fast-moving, low-level clouds (plus haze) teased observers around the area and complicated efforts to track the object telescopically, either using star-hopping or computer-guided drives. Despite all these impediments, many members got a glimpse of the space rock as it glided past the stars.

At Wagman Observatory, the first observations were made the evening of August 16; it took only about a minute to detect that the asteroid had changed position relative to the background stars. **John Holtz** was the hero that night, running back and forth between different scopes (such as Frank Pastin's) to point them in the right direction. On the next night, the clouds, haze and Moonlight were even worse and, at times, blanketed the entire sky. Still, there were occasional 3 to 5 minute breaks when everybody scrambled to get a glimpse. The "star-hoppers" had the best luck finding 2002NY40, while the computer-based guys had more difficulties (much depended on the source of the ephemeris). But just when a cloud gap opened up, it closed a short time later, forcing the star hoppers to start all over again.

All the struggles were worth it. Seeing an asteroid speed by the earth was spectacular, knowing the object was a mere 330K

(continued on page 3, column 2)

Profile of Sept. Guest Speaker

(continued from front page)

Mark Stauffer is an avid double-star observer and an Assistant Professor of Chemistry at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg. Mark received his Bachelor of Science and Ph. D., both in chemistry, from the University of Pittsburgh. He has held teaching positions at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Shippensburg University and was a research associate with Carnegie Mellon University's Science Van Outreach Program. Dr. Stauffer has held memberships in the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh (AAAP) and the Baton Rouge Astronomical Society, of which he is a former President. He has had two articles on double stars published in *ASTRONOMY Magazine*, and is a frequent contributor to the *Double Star Observer*. Mark was also a frequent contributor to the *Observer's Guide* and wrote the column "Seeing Double" that appeared in the AAAP's "Guide Star" newsletter during the 1990s. He also wrote a column on double stars for the newsletter of the Baton Rouge Astronomical Society in the late

(continued at right)

1980's and early 1990's. In addition, he has given several presentations on double stars. Mark, his wife Resa, and their two cats, Kara and Shelly, reside in Monongahela, PA, south of Pittsburgh.

Mark's presentation "Observing Visual Double Stars", will focus on visual double stars and the various facets of observing this wonderful class of night-sky objects. Anyone who has ever beheld the gold and deep blue splendor of Albireo through the eyepiece of any telescope can only marvel at the beauty of this colorful pair of stars. Topics to be presented include:

- Types of visual double stars.
- Angular separation and position angle.
- Telescopes for observing double stars.
- Factors that affect double star observations.
- Techniques for observing double stars.
- Double stars you can observe in early June.

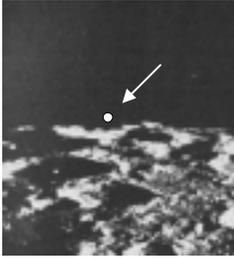
If time permits, techniques for measuring separations and position angles of double stars will be discussed.

(Editor's note: This bio on Mark Stauffer was forwarded by Terry Trees).

Upcoming Lunar Graze

By John Holtz (from AAAP Listserv)

A good grazing occultation, the first in a long time, will occur on Thursday morning, Sept 26. What is a grazing occultation, you ask?



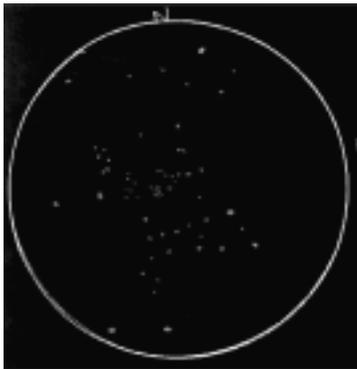
A grazing occultation occurs when the Moon passes very close to a star. From some areas, the Moon actually covers the star: an occultation. From other areas, the Moon cleanly misses. At the zone in between these extremes, the star passes along the edge of the Moon, or grazes it. If you are observing from this zone,

you can watch the star disappear and reappear multiple times as it passes behind mountains and appears in the valleys. Not quite the static views we are used to seeing in astronomy, and one of the few transient events that amateurs can easily enjoy.

This upcoming event occurs at 6:28 am on Sept 26. The star is bright (magnitude 6.1) and high in the sky, and more important, grazes the Moon far from the cusp (10.4 degrees). For added convenience, the path from which the graze is visible is only a few miles north of Wagman Observatory. (Somehow it squeezes between Wagman and my house just 5 miles away!) Other regions that the graze crosses include Aliquippa, Ambridge, Mars, Valencia, Freeport, and Whitesburg.

If you would like to join the "expedition", please contact me at JWHoltz@aol.com or 724-352-7596.

What Does This Astro-Sketch Have to Do With the Guide Star On-Line?



Until now, we seldom published astronomical sketches (the above drawn by Larry McHenry) or photos, especially deep-sky objects, because they reproduce badly when printed in hard copy. The *GSOL* changes all that. When an astro image appears on your PC screen, you can see all the faint stars, the wisps of nebulosity, the color nuances, etc. A click of the mouse will zoom you in to an interesting point of detail.

To best view astronomical images in our newsletter, write "I Want My *GSOL*" with your name and address, and e-mail it to Alison Conte at alisonconte@hotmail.com. During the first week of each month, when the new issue of the *GSOL* is posted on the AAAP web site, online users will receive an email reminder with a link to the site. If you don't like it, you can re-subscribe to the paper version at any time.

A Good Time On the "Dark Side" of Star Parties

by Tom Reiland (from AAAP Listserv)

I'd like to thank all the members who took the time to help with our Dark Sky Special Weekend at Wagman on August 3. I had another commitment on Friday, but it was mostly cloudy anyway. Sixteen members did show up and about 15 public. Flacc Sitfel and others did an interview for the Butler Eagle that should bring us more publicity.

Saturday night was a good night. We had close to 300 visitors and over 30 members helped educate and entertain them. We were able to show them Venus, Neptune and Uranus, along with a number of satellites and some bright, early Perseids. They got to see many deep sky objects and double stars. It went quite well.

I arrived a little after 7:30 PM and didn't leave until 5:45 AM. I observed the recently discovered Comet Hoenig and 2 or 3 meteors that were 0 mag. or brighter. I waited until I got my first observations of Orion and Jupiter rising before I left. Low haze caused about a 10 minute delay before I could see Orion and Jupiter clearly. We had no dew and the temperature got down to a comfortable 64 deg. with a light breeze. Seeing was average to good and transparency was slightly above average. All in all it was a fun night.

2002NY40 A Challenge, But Worth Every Brief Moment

(continued from page 2)

miles from Earth. To this writer, the asteroid reminded me of a geostationary satellite drifting through M11 or M42. Here are some other member's accounts of this unique observation:

Gary Van Drie – "Got a good chance to see asteroid ...Lost it once when my wife KD and I swapped views, but found it again about 10 minutes later .AMAZING how fast it was moving!"

Pete Zapadka (August 16) - " thanks to the keen eye of John Holtz and his mighty band of astronuts, many folks were able to observe the asteroid 2002 NY40... what was amazing was that motion easily could be detected as you observed through the eyepiece! .Fascinating stuff!"

John Holtz (August 16) - "...We had to wait for a hole in the clouds to move over to the Delphinus and Equules area, at which time I used Frank Pastin's 8-inch reflector to locate it...The motion was visible in about a minute or quicker when it passed close to another star."

Terry Trees(August 16/17) - "...It was creeping along and its motion was best noted by memorizing an angle it made with a couple of stars, letting someone else look and then returning to the view to see the change....Sunday morning it was much closer...quite a bit different....really worth seeing."

Tom Reiland (August 17) - "...We watched it "buzz" right by Theta Herculis.....Too bad the clearing didn't happen a few hours earlier so that more people could have seen it."

David Burton (August 17) - "...I finally located 2002 NY40 as it slid just past a 8-9 magnitude star at 0100 local. Once I found it, I couldn't understand how I had missed it before. Then after about 3-4 minutes of easy tracking, the clouds rolled in. But at least I saw it. Pretty impressive."

Club Members Play Key Role in Keystone Park S.P.

by Terry N. Trees (from AAAP Listserver)

First, I'd like to thank the AAAP volunteers who hosted the August 10 star party at Keystone State Park, near New Alexandria, in Westmoreland County: **John Diller, George Guzik, Frank Pastin, Charlotte** and **Jim Tunney** and **Joanne** and **Sean Trees**. Not only did they make the trek out there through a typical PennDOT construction zone and its attendant slow-downs, but on the way back, they may have almost got run over by speeding cop cars. About 15 of them converged on the Bee Hive strip joint in Delmont around 11:30 or so as we passed by on the way home. Flashing lights everywhere. They must have heard we were showing heavenly bodies and went to the wrong place.

Of course, we didn't need them and their flashing lights at our function. We had enough light pollution with the humid skies, New Alexandria, Latrobe and Greensburg nearby. A dark sky site it ain't! The south and northwest were really washed-out.

However, on the plus side, there were close to 50 attendees and it seemed like they had a great time, although the ones with young kids left early. We showed them Alberio, M-13, M-92, M-57, M-31, M-29, the Cat's Eye Nebula and The Blinking Nebula, among other things through our 17.5" Dob and our 8" LX-200. I also had a computer display showing the four inner planets orbiting the Sun so they could see their different orbital speeds. I know John showed them M-11, M-15 and M-5 and someone showed them the crescent moon and Venus, but I'm not sure what other sights were seen. However, the group was very appreciative. A lot of thanks were heard and when we finally showed M-13 with the 17.5" Dob at about 180x, there were lots of "oohs" and "aahs".



We also had two passes of Iridiums (0 and -1 mag) and one of the ISS that they got a kick out of. Six to 10 Perseids were seen, but one poor fellow was ALWAYS looking the wrong way. I don't know if he ever saw one.

There was also an old lady there (old = 60s or 70s) whose mother's sister had been married to some guy named John Brashear who has a high school named after him and who made telescope lenses almost 100 years ago! All in all a great time and I hope you can make it next year. Thanks again everyone.

Several Major AAAP Anniversaries

All we can say is "wow" to **Bob Schmidt** (50 years; see page 8), **Dr. Gil McMaster** (45 years) and **Wade Barbin** (40 years) for reaching these impressive AAAP membership milestones. Best wishes also to **Rich Hansen** for reaching his 15th AAAP year, and **Bob Lucas** for passing year No. 5.



Heat/Haze/Humidity Fail to Dampen August 10 Wave Pool Party

by Wayne Gondella (from AAAP Listserver)

August 10 was the final talk at Borders. I could not directly attend, but understand about 30 people showed up for Truman's talk on Asteroids! Most encouraging was that after four clear nights this week, it actually stayed clear again for the Wavepool! While it was far from ideal, the seeing questionable at times, and the skies very muggy and gray with humidity, we had a phenomenal turnout!

I have no accurate count, but I would guess we had close to 30 telescopes there with many more members, many traveling from quite a distance. At its peak, there may have been a total number of people there, including public, of around 100 people! I even had a man in a wheelchair looking at Neptune in my refractor! I think the time was enjoyed by all, and personally, I finally got a chance to see the club's own coveted Cook Refractor in person and up close!

We actually stayed quite late (for South Park) with no problems from the park police (could it be the new Krispy Kremes? ☺). Truman Kohman and I were the last ones there, leaving some time past 2:30 am. I even got to see a few Perseids! Thanks to all for making the night a success!

News to Remember for September

- ❑ Congratulations are in order for member **Tim Manka**. For his help in teaching astronomy and other nature-related subjects for Scouting merit badges, Ranger Tim Manka was presented the "Silver Beaver" award, the highest award a volunteer can receive in scouting. Tim has been in scouting for 45 years. Note: Tim has also been a tremendous help at Wagman star parties this year (as in previous years), giving talks to visiting school and scout groups. Thanks again from all of us, Tim, for providing this valued service.
- ❑ Tom Reiland reports that one of the Wagman Observatory downspouts was recently vandalized. We're considering removing all of the observatory's gutters and downspouts so that troublemakers will have one less thing to damage, and one less item to climb upon while trying to get up on the roof. (They serve no urgent purpose there, anyway.) Thus, if you notice that all the gutters and downspouts are missing, it is by our own design.



(continued on page 5, column 2)



Bob Kepple and a big dob he could almost climb inside (digital photo by Larry McHenry)

AstroBlast Well Worth the Trip, Heat

by Larry E McHenry (from AAAP Listserver)

Along with a number of other AAAP'ers, I enjoyed a nice 'hot' weekend at ORAS's AstroBlast 2002. I arrived Friday afternoon, met up with George Kepple, and after a little help from a couple of other attendees, set up camp (went through two water bottles doing this). After the sun got lower in the sky, and the air temperature became more agreeable, it was enjoyable to stroll around the field and chat with other amateur astronomers from the region, and survey their telescope equipment. There was a mixture of high and low tech scopes, ranging from small aperture scopes to several large truss dobs.

A number of AAAP and Kiski members were there at some point in the weekend. In addition to George Kepple, there was Bob Novak (who was exhibiting his latest creation, which is sure to win a prize this week at Stellafane), John Holtz, George Guzik, Garry & Donna Shannon, Terry Van Horn and family, Tim Hagan, Charolette & Jim Tunney, and three or four other AAAP members who I can't remember their names, and Wini & John Labreque, and Ray Montgomery, from Kiski.

Our VP, Terry Trees, presented an interesting talk on astronomy software Friday night. (JoAnne was there too). There were a number of friendly ORAS staff members in attendance including Tim Spuck, John O'Hara, and Pete Johnson in from New Hampshire. Besides George (Astrocards), and Tim (Helix), there were several other vendors on hand thru the weekend: Highpoint Scientific, Tech 2000, and a fellow who makes miniature brass telescopes.

As usual, the ORAS runs a good low-key event. They had a nice selection of door prizes (including a couple of eyepieces, which AAAP members cleaned up on), a number of interesting speakers, food vendor, and something a little different: a mobile exhibit from the NASA Glenn Research Center in Cleveland which was on a air-conditioned bus! (a popular cooling off activity on Saturday ☺).

Friday evening started out relatively clear, but soon gave over to a sucker hole filled sky. Eventually the whole thing clouded over around 11:00 PM. I managed to get in a little deep-sky video imaging, mainly M13 & the Ring. A lightning and thunder show rolled past us to the northwest about 2:00 am, but other than a few sprinkles, missed us. Saturday dawned with a very clear and transparent sky that lasted all day. Everyone enjoyed solar observing activities (two big prominences!), until the heat started getting obnoxious again. The evening was crystal clear and dark, with a very bright summer milky-way arching overhead, filled with breathtaking rifts, and starclouds. Putting up with the daytime temperatures was well worth the evening rewards.

(continued on page 9, column 2)

This Month's News Notes

(continued from page 4, column 2)

- ❑ Related Matter #1: Tom also reports that a wallet was apparently stolen from a friends' car while that friend was inside the Observatory building. Members visiting the observatory on weeknights (i.e. when crowds are small) are reminded to take extra precautions, such as closing (and locking, if need be) the site's gate.
- ❑ Related Matter #2: Ed Moss and Dave Smith recently discovered that the Wagman gate lock thumbwheels were not set to "0000". Sorry for the nag, but all members are reminded to set the lock to 0000, and not leave the combination showing.
- ❑ Our thanks to **Truman Kohman** for serving as guest speaker at last month's astronomy lecture at Borders Books on August 10. Among others, Truman handed out charts for asteroid 2002NY40.
- ❑ Terry Trees regrets to report that progress continues towards the construction of the new Frazer Mall south of the Wagman site. The developer expects to open the Mall by 2004, although not all final approvals are in. Sighhhhhh.

Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc.

A section of the Academy of Science and Art of Pittsburgh

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

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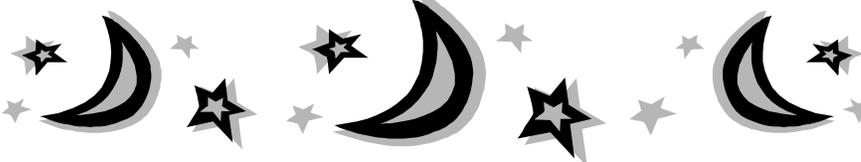
AAAP Member Dues***:

AAAP Dues:	\$18.00
Junior Member (under 18):	\$13.00
Sky & Telescope Magazine:	Add \$30.00
Astronomy Magazine:	Add \$29.00

***Basic Procedure for Paying Dues:

1. Make check payable to "AAAP Inc."
2. Send check to John Holtz, Treasurer, 176 Hidden Hill Rd, Sarver, PA 16055-8907

SEPTEMBER, 2002

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3 J. Holtz Astro Class (Wagman) 7:30 p.m.	4 	5	6 	7
8 	9	10 J. Holtz Astro Class (Wagman) 7:30 p.m.	11	12	13 	14 Star Parties: Wagman & South Park Wave Pool
15	16	17 J. Holtz Astro Class (Wagman) 7:30 p.m.	18	19	20 AAAP Meeting Carnegie Science Center 7:30 p.m.	21 
22 Autumnal Equinox	23	24	25	26 	27 Special "Moonrise" Star Party at Wagman	28 Special "Moonrise" Star Party at Wagman
29 	30					

<p>Looking ahead: October 12 & 26 - Wagman Star Party, Wagman "Moonrise Special" Star Party October 18 - AAAP Meeting (Site TBD)</p> <p>Did you know? If you attempted to count the stars in a galaxy at a rate of one every second, it would take 3000 years to count them all. From uselessknowledge.com.</p>	<p>AAAP Long-Range Meeting Schedule</p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="width: 50%;">Oct. 18, 2002</td> <td style="width: 50%;">Feb. 14, 2003</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Nov. 15, 2002</td> <td>March 14, 2003</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dec. 13, 2002</td> <td>April 18, 2003</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Jan. 17, 2003</td> <td>May 16, 2003</td> </tr> </table>	Oct. 18, 2002	Feb. 14, 2003	Nov. 15, 2002	March 14, 2003	Dec. 13, 2002	April 18, 2003	Jan. 17, 2003	May 16, 2003
Oct. 18, 2002	Feb. 14, 2003								
Nov. 15, 2002	March 14, 2003								
Dec. 13, 2002	April 18, 2003								
Jan. 17, 2003	May 16, 2003								

Parallax Unparalleled

by Dan Peden

Review of *“Parallax: The Race to Measure the Cosmos”*
by Alan W. Hirshfeld. Owl Books.
Reprint Edition (May 2002)

I just finished reading a wonderful book that I would like to recommend—“Parallax: The Race to Measure the Cosmos” by Alan W. Hirshfeld.

This fascinating work chronicles the effort to learn the distance to objects beyond Earth, beginning with attempts by early Greek philosophers. Unlike other writers who restrict themselves to drawing a direct line of “connections” between successful inventors, Hirshfeld pauses long enough for us to get to know the times and tribulations of each of the persons who struggled to achieve this goal, whether they succeeded or not. Indeed, most of the men studied here were failures as far as stellar parallax is concerned. Nevertheless, their ingenuity, dogged determination, and heroic efforts should be remembered and applauded by students of astronomy. They were true pioneers.

Of particular interest is the story of Joseph Fraunhofer, discoverer of the famous Fraunhofer lines. An orphan in a Dickensian foster home, he was made famous by miraculously surviving a house collapse and later rose to become one of the most renowned and respected telescope makers of the nineteenth century.

This book is a must read for anyone interested in the history of astronomy.

Moscow, We Have a Problem

by Ann Norman

Review of *“Dragonfly: NASA and the Crisis Aboard Mir”* by Bryan Burroughs.
HarperCollins Publishers (1998).

The title refers to the fragile insect-like appearance of the late great Russian space station with its pairs of solar panel “wings.” The book documents the missions of the joint Russian-U.S. crews aboard Mir in the last few years of the station’s life.

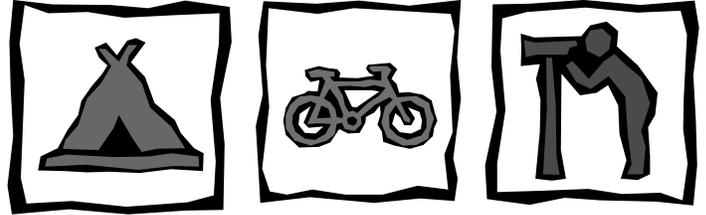
When President George Bush (the first) proposed the U.S.-Russian collaboration on Mir, it made a lot of political sense. The plan was to keep brilliant, post-Soviet

Russian scientists busy in a nonmilitary endeavors and pave the way for an International Space Station. As an afterthought, they threw together some science experiments to keep the astronauts busy.

Because the Russian space program was nearly broke, cosmonauts were even doing soft-drink and pretzel commercials in space to bring in extra funds. The Russians were more than willing to rent space on Mir to the deep-pocketed Americans.

Americans making the trip would be shocked to find cats roaming freely through Russian mission control—to keep down the population of mice. Mir crews launched from desolate Kazakhstan, a foreign country to Russians since the fall of the Soviet Union. The launch pad was surrounded by the ruins of buildings burned by rioting. The decay Americans observed on
(continued at right)

Happy Campers Recommend Dark Sites, with Scenery and Biking



(From the AAAP listserv)

- ❖ We did a day trip out to Ohiopyle and had a splendid time (Brett)
- ❖ Mt. Davis is a good area to camp. Its not too far from Ohiopyle. (Brent Hudock)
- ❖ After Labor Day, I'd recommend Bear Run Campground in Butler County. It is 45 minutes north of Pittsburgh. It's a commercial campground so, unlike state parks, you can take pets, drink alcoholic beverages, etc. (So you can get your dog drunk.) It adjoins Moraine State Park and includes a walking trail that leads into the park and Lake Arthur. (Don Peden)
- ❖ I frequent Pine Hill Campground, site of Star Cruise. The "field" is usually totally vacant. (Charlie Pritt.)
- ❖ The area around Blackwater Falls State Park in Tucker County, West Virginia has it all. It is about 3 hours away and is from 3000' to 4862' elevation on Spruce Knob (highest point in WV). The Cannan Valley, 3000', is near Blackwater and is a popular mountain bike area. The area has very dark skies. (Dave Smith)
- ❖ At Moraine State Park there is an outdoor amphitheater. It has very wide and open dark skies. Go about 4 miles in from the bike rental on the left. You have to park near the road and walk into the field. Make sure to leave a note on your windshield telling what you are doing or the Park Ranger may call out the game commission in the belief that someone is poaching deer. (Bill & Maureen Moutzal)

the ground eerily foreshadowed the conditions that would greet them on the space station. There, walls leaked green fluid and one airlock was held shut with a C-clamp.

The story is packed with action and brushes with death. I read the most exciting sequences aloud to my kids at bedtime. They wanted to know “Is this a true story or Star Trek?” and “Have they made this into a movie?”

It's a docudrama that reads like fiction. And like good science fiction, it has us pondering the BIG questions. Why, again, do we want to be floating out there? Does our species have a future in space? What price will we pay to achieve our dreams? How much depends on luck?"



Fifty Years and Counting...

by Bob Schmidt

(The Editors invited Bob Schmidt to survey his experiences and accomplishments in astronomy on the occasion of his Golden Anniversary with the AAAP).

A half century ago, September 1952, a skinny kid with a duck sweep hairdo and pegged pants actually showed up and received a membership welcome at his first meeting as a new member of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh.

The meeting was in Buhl Planetarium's Science Theatre Lecture Room at the West end of the main gallery by that noisy static generator exhibit. The officers presiding at the meetings wore dress shirts, ties, and jackets. We were an impressive-looking group; no hint of denim anywhere. This in contrast to our current gatherings of raggedy jeaned urchins.

I had joined the club a month earlier by invitation of Mr. Mathie, an AAAP member and business associate of my father who learned of my intense interest in making a real telescope for viewing the cosmic gems of the night sky.

Two years prior to joining the AAAP I had made a refractor using several single-element Plano convex glass components bought from Suffolk Science Co. that advertised in Popular Science and Mechanix Illustrated zines. This was a starting point. But, hello, the club had an optical/mechanical workshop with an instructor. Now a real telescope could be made, and at a reasonable cost.

Leo Schoenig (a former Heschian officer under the Kaiser), ran the shop with a metal-shavings-covered fist. Leo knew mirror making and machining and many fine 6 to 12 inch Newtonians came out of Leo's den.

I set out to make a 6 inch f/8, which took me a little over a year, working two nights per week. This is where I met the late George Lindbloom, an esteemed variable star observer who was finishing up a mirror. I also met Clark McClelland, who took two years making his mirror. He had to grind out scratches so many times, his 6", f/8 mirror ended up an f/6. Space does not permit here, but a small book could be written about many a "shop happening," both amusing and, in several instances, horrifying.



Bob with his first-built telescope.

Chronologically, the adventure continues:

1953: Completed my 6" f/7.7 Newtonian.

1954: Entered the 6" in my physics senior class contest and won its prize. Graduated from South Hills High that same year.

1954: Was appointed President of the new AAAP Junior Section.

1954: Viewed Mars opposition with a 13" at Allegheny Observatory (AO).

(continued upper right)

1956: Viewed Mars opposition with a 13" at AO and submitted the resulting drawings to Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO). Served as a tour guide and lecturer at Allegheny Observatory.

1957: Was appointed Captain of Moonwatch Team at Allegheny Observatory, charged with tracking and plotting orbits of Soviet sputniks.

1962--63: Used the Advanced Optics Workshop at AO to build an 8" Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope (Wiley design).

1964: Built 5" f/5 rich-field, refractor telescope (Jaeger Lens).

1966: Built 4.25" f/27 Schiefspiegler while working at Three B Optical Co.

1966: My 8" Schmidt-Cassegrain telescope appeared in the "Gleanings" section of April issues of Sky and Telescope.

1967: Given Golden Hammer award by Mechanix Illustrated.

1968: Contributed to Guide Star production and mailing.

1969: Produced a 10" f/6 at Three B Optical Co. for E. K. Owen's Observatory in Oklahoma City, a telescope which made the cover of the September 1970 issue of Sky and Telescope.

1972: Was elected President of AAAP.

1975: My Jupiter drawings appeared in the Oct. issue of Astronomy and my Mars drawings appeared in the Dec. issue.

1976: My Viking cartoon ran in the Oct. issue of Astronomy.

1979: A 10" Schiefspiegler that I had helped on appeared in the September issue of Telescope Making, no. 4.

1960 - 1990: Did cartooning for the Guide Star.

1991: Purchased a 5" f/12 D&G Optical Co. optical tube assembly, precision figured doublet 20th wv. 97.6 Strehl. (Barry Greiner and Mike Dudley did the lens.)

Early 1990s: Worked on the Brashear restoration project and acquired Dr. Cook's \$4,000 Astro Physics Starfire refractor for the AAAP following his death.

1998 - present: Honorary Member AAAP, retired.

In summary, the past fifty years have gone by like a bolide--from novice telescope making in my sophomore year right on up to my first Social Security check last year. Many of you have commented on the role I played in reinforcing your astronomical interests and, especially, in the "tools of the trade" area. I thank you for airing your appreciation and, in return, it was my pleasure.

Its not easy being an optical perfectionist, ya know, especially when I note all the optically mediocre telescopes standing around that were bought with hard earned dollars. It's a terrible thing to have a great pair of healthy eyes and cheat them with low-quality optical information. Time to be good to yourself!



Bob at the Optics Workshop

Classifieds

FOR SALE: 4-inch F-10 Celestron refractor with many extras; full aperture solar filter, extension pier, 9X50 finder, clock drive, 2 eyepieces, mirror star diagonal, erect image star diagonal. Over \$1000 invested. \$525.00 or best offer. Contact Robert Yajko: 724-842-8202, yaj@mymailstation.com

FOR SALE:

- 10" Meade LX50, 5 years old, well kept, GOOD condition! Complete with all accessories: \$1800 or best offer
- Celestron radial guider: \$80
- Taurus Tracker 3: \$200
- Meade eyepieces: 25, 9, & 12 mm illum. reticle: \$25 each

Contact Gary Myers: 724-285-9591 or Vyger201@hotmail.com

FOR SALE: 11" 5.4 Starmaster. Contact Vern Cox for details and price: 724-228-9602, nitavern@attbi.com

FOR SALE: Complete set of Sky & Telescope magazines back to first issue in 1941. Good condition. Contact Rich Hansen at 412-824-6792 for price and details.

LOST AND FOUND - Pair of prescription sunglasses at Wagman Observatory. Frames are bronze metal with "Harry Potter" on inside of temple and a black lightning-bolt logo on outside of each temple. Hinges are spring-loaded. Lenses are small oval. Correction seems to be for myopia, with the left lens slightly stronger. Black plastic ear pieces. Contact Flacc Stifel (412-486-8067) if yours.

2002 Astroblast Report

(continued from page 5, column 1)

The only downside was that dew quickly began to take out one telescope after another. Eventually, only the scopes with megawatt heaters were left standing. I managed to stay in the game for awhile, having to rely on my DSC's and laptops when my finders bit the dust. Eventually, the dew nailed me by shorting out my 8" SCT drive electronics (the scope drive LED's started flashing like a Christmas tree). Hopefully, after drying out for a few days, my scope will recover. I did manage to video image a number of Messier objects including M22, M8, M20, and M17. The visitors to my campsite all enjoyed the real-time deep-sky views with my Astrovid Stellacam video camera. Resolving M22 to the core was very impressive, and it was fun seeing how many stars inside the Ring would fade in & out of view. Still, even with the dew, the sky was great! If you haven't been to a convention before, this event is a great way to get started.



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