



The Guide Star



Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh Inc.

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

Web Site: 3ap.org



Mingo Creek Park
Observatory

June 2005

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Nicholas E. Wagman
Observatory

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Election 2005 Results

This month, AAAP members cast their votes in the 2005 election of club officers. At the May 20th business meeting, the ballots were counted and the results announced. The members of the 2005-2006 AAAP Executive Committee are:

- ★ **President: Rich Bailey**
- ★ **Vice-President: Ann Norman**
- ★ **Recording Secretary: Dennis Derda**
- ★ **Membership Secretary: Mark Schomer**
- ★ **Corresponding Secretary: Charlotte Tunney**
- ★ **Guide Star Editor: Kelly Fletcher**



Although not up for election this year, **John Holtz** will continue his duties as **Treasurer**, and Cathy Rivi and Ann Norman (taking on double-duty) will continue on as **Associate Editors** of the Guide Star.

Welcome back to all the returning officers, who have done such an excellent job thus far. And welcome, too, to the new members, who will surely do a fine job as well! Here's to clear skies and smooth sailing (administratively speaking) in 2005-2006!

Lastly, a heartfelt thanks goes out to those Officers who served the club so well in 2004-2005: President George Guzik, Vice-President Bill Yorkshire, Membership Secretary Brent Hudock, and Guide Star Editor Eric Fischer. The club could not be where it is today without all of your generous contributions of time, effort, and enthusiasm.

A Word From the New AAAP President...

Posted on the AAAP Listserv by Rich Bailey on May 5, 2005

A couple of thoughts on last night's election...

I was honored to be asked to serve in such an important position with the club. Knowing the caliber of past presidents, I am humbled and feel flattered by the confidence the members have in me. I will do my best to live up to this challenge.

I congratulate everyone elected last night. With this team and the incredible spirit of all the members, I know we can accomplish much over the next year.

I would also like to thank George, Bill, and Brent for all the hard work they have done over the years. We bid a sad farewell to Brent, but wish all the best to him and his family in the eastern side of the state.

Anyone interested in or having questions about club issues or activities, please email or call me. If I don't know the answer, I will help you to find it.

Thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to serve all the members of the AAAP.



Powder-puff Sky, Not Long Dry

By Dan Peden

...And From the New AAAP VP

Our new Vice-President, Ann Norman, would like to express her gratitude and appreciation for having been given the opportunity to serve the AAAP and its membership.

She's getting an early start on her duties, as well; she is already welcoming ideas for possible speakers, and encourages all members, new or old, to consider whether they have an area of expertise they might wish to speak about and share.

A Message of Thanks

From President George Guzik

After I called the September 2003 Business Meeting to order, my first meeting as AAAP President, I commented to the assembly that standing there at the front of the room certainly provided a different perspective on a Business Meeting. The last two years as President certainly provided a different perspective on the AAAP as a whole! I was very fortunate to have that perspective on the accomplishments of the members of this organization.

I want to take this opportunity to say THANK YOU to the members of the AAAP for all of the great work you did over the past two years.

Stop for a moment and consider what you accomplished since June of 2003:

- You staffed AAAP public Star Parties, which thousands of people attended.
- You held two successful editions of the Laurel Highlands Star Cruise.
- You presented many small, regional astronomy events for schools, scout groups, friends, and your local communities.
- You brought new life to the Manka Memorial Telescope, which was "reborn" with new optics that AAAP members helped to make and install.
- You celebrated the 75th anniversary of the AAAP, an organization that began with just a few members and now has over 530 members.
- You started with a hilltop in Mingo Creek Park and built a second great observatory for the AAAP.

From my perspective, the AAAP definitely has faith of the heart and strength of the soul!

Going forward into the next year, I ask that the officers and members of the AAAP take what has been done so far and strive to make it a bit better. If we keep that simple goal in mind each year, then the AAAP will continue to grow and thrive.

One night at Wagman, when it was getting late and the visitors were leaving, I overheard a comment a visitor made that eloquently describes the spirit of the members of the AAAP. A father was leading his young (about 6 years old) son by the hand toward their car. The father, having experienced an evening of AAAP hospitality, said to his son, "These people are so nice!"

I certainly agree!

Laser Pointer Guidelines



Laser pointers are useful tools when handled properly. To help ensure that laser pointers are used in a safe manner at all AAAP events, the Executive Committee recently adopted this set of guidelines for operation of laser pointers. We request that members and guests follow these guidelines.

1. Never shine a laser pointer toward any person or toward any aircraft or other vehicle.
2. Do not allow children to use a pointer unsupervised. Laser pointers are not toys.
3. If your telescope is equipped with a laser pointer 'finder' that has a "constant-on" setting, do not leave the instrument unattended with the laser switched on.
4. Do not aim a laser pointer toward mirrors or other reflective surfaces. The reflected beam may inadvertently strike someone in the eye. Laser collimators are permissible, but care must be taken in their use.
5. Do not aim a laser pointer skyward if you hear or see an aircraft of any kind flying overhead.
6. Refrain from using laser pointers after midnight.
7. Avoid using laser pointers near astrophotographers/imagers.
8. Laser pointers with output rated greater than five milliwatts are prohibited.

Observed infractions of these regulations shall result in a verbal warning. Repeated failure to follow these laser safety tips may lead to a request to leave the event.



Lightning

By John Pane

Mingo News

The Show Goes On: Musings on the Mingo Star Party

By Dan McKeel

The conversation in the afternoon went like this:

“Dan, how goes it, buddy?”

“Al, I’m doing OK for a Friday. What’s going on with you, guy?”

Al replies, “I just was curious if you’re going to Mingo tonight for the Cub Scout star party?”

Not wanting to reply “You’ve got to be kidding...what about the blasted @#%^% clouds, man,” I frame a better response: “Al, the only thing I see in the sky from where I am is a mass of cloud, so I really didn’t expect there to be anything at Mingo tonight.”

But Al, who has the inside scoop, replies, “It’s going to clear after dark tonight.”

With that, begins the latest saga of two of the Mingo Creek Park Observatory Planetarium’s intrepid hosts. It’s *The Al and Dan Show*, and the show must go on, come rain or (“Ah, Al are you sure it’s going to clear?”) shine.

In all seriousness, folks, the cloud blanket that covered the entire region seemed to be permanently parked over Mingo and all points West, so I was not able to anticipate the fine night that did result. I had a nap after dinner, as the depression from looking up at the sky “clouded” (sorry, really!) my ability to believe in clear sky. However, after I woke up, the sky had actually cleared.

All right Al, stop laughing; I do believe you are the Weather Dude. I toss some stuff in the van and take off. Rolling up the hill at Mingo, I see the 10-inch refractor pointed at the sky and ready to go. We were a go, and the field at the bottom of the observatory hill was lined with Cub Scout campers ready to have a night with the stars.

Bring up the music gently; dim the white light to red, red fading down to nothing as the soft glow of daylight casts a hush over those gathered in anticipation under the blanket of the planetarium dome. The daylight slowly fades as the Sun sets in the west, leaving a faintly glowing dome. Silently, as though teasing us, the stars begin to appear above as Al brings the night sky out upon the suspended canvas of the dome. The soft gasp of our pleasantly surprised audience brings the adventure to its beginning.

Scoutin’ the Sky at Mingo Obs: Thanks to Volunteers

Thanks to the volunteers who trekked to Mingo on May 20th to assist with a Private Star Party for a group of 45 Cub Scouts and their 15 adult chaperones.

The scouts viewed the Moon, Saturn, and Jupiter. Al Paslow and Dan McKeel operated the planetarium, Mike Meteney set up his personal scope, and Larry McHenry did video imaging of the Moon.

We proceed to welcome the group to the observatory and to introduce ourselves. As the stars glow overhead, we learn that scouts *do* know where the Big Dipper is, and explain that its part of Ursa Major, the Great Bear. We use the pointer stars to find Polaris and Little Dipper, explaining that it’s part of the constellation Ursa Minor or the Little Bear. From the darkness, a delighted female says, “Oh, I didn’t know that one,” which made it even better.



Photo by Al Paslow

Al describes the Milky Way, visible now on the dome, and works his way through the night sky with relish, describing the Summer Triangle, the Northern Cross, their stars, and other sights. Next, we take a tour of Lyra, with the description of double stars

times two at the Double-Double, and with blue and yellow Alberio in Cygnus. Working down the east side of the dome as the stars rotate overhead, we catch the beginnings of the Scorpion rising up. Antares gets its due as a large bright star, and the Teapot rises with Sagittarius. A galaxy rotates on the dome’s peak, and Al talks of its relation to our own Milky Way.

Questions are asked and answered as the points of light march along overhead. When the glow of the Milky Way starts to fade in the morning’s light, we talk of the dimming of the stars from light pollution rather than sunrise; we explain the potential loss of the stars in the night sky and what can be done to save them.

Slowly, the sky glow in the east brightens as night passes into day. The red glow increases, brighter red light begins to intrude upon our senses, and finally the room’s light rends the hush with harsh white, announcing the show’s end. Al and I thank our visitors, ask them to enjoy the rest of the visit, and call it

THE END.

Thanks to Volunteers: Mingo Observatory Opening Day

Thanks to all the AAAP members who volunteered at Mingo’s First Official Public Star Party on May 13th.

On May 13th, volunteers brought personal scopes, ran the observatory scopes, and even assisted a man from New Eagle with his recalcitrant Mead Go-To Refractor.

About 100 members of the public were present. Visitors from New Eagle, Eighty Four, Bethel Park, and Houston viewed the Moon, Jupiter, and Saturn, and even stuck around to take advantage of the Planetarium facilities after the sky clouded over.

Volunteers included (but were not limited to) Fred Kline, Dave Smith, Al Paslow, Dan McKeel, Frank Usouski, Ann Norman, Richard Bailey, Linda Bailey, and Bill Moutz.

Wagman News

Short but Satisfying: Wagman Star Party, May 13th

Unfortunately, Wagman's opening Star Party of the 2005 season was cut short by clouds and stormy weather. According to Tom Reiland, though, its brevity did not stop the 19 volunteers and roughly 40 visitors from viewing the Moon, Venus, Saturn with two moons, and Jupiter with four.

Observers were also treated to glimpses of some less familiar sights: a fireball passing just east of the Moon and a weather balloon (which exploded as they watched).

To sum up, the kick-off of the summer season was short, but satisfying nonetheless. Sure, we all love and look forward to those long nights of completely clear sky, but two hours of observing is better than none at all. You go out anyway, hoping there will be clear spots between the clouds, and catch the sights when you can.

Wagman Training Revisted

Because of printing difficulties with the May *Guide Star*, it seems that several members missed out on the last training session at Wagman Observatory. Associate Observatory Director Flacc Stifel has agreed to conduct a second session for these members.

The date is still undecided, although Flacc has suggested that having the session before the June 11th star party is a possibility. If you are interested in attending a training session or would like to propose alternate dates, please email Flacc. Additional information about the training itself and the requirements for becoming a keyholder is also available online on the **AAAP Listserv Digest V #684**.

Gratitude & Appreciation: May Volunteers

Wagman had an excellent turnout of volunteers for the first public Star Party, and also for the private Scout party on the 21st. Thanks to all the AAAP members who assisted at these events!

Public Star Party, May 13

George Guzik, Bill Hayeslip, Larry Sneider, Brent Samay, Frank Pastin, Bill Roemer, Tom Reiland, Flacc Stifel, Mike Petro, Kevin Van Horn, Shirley Caseman, Bob Kalan, Bob Novack, Joyce Osborne-Fischer, Eric Fischer, Tim Manka, Mary DeVaughn, Allen Tracht, John Holtz

Cub Scout Party, May 21

Bill Roemer, Bill Moutz, Bill Hayeslip, Larry Sneider, Mary DeVaughn, Rowen Poole, Kelly Fletcher

Retro Night

With all of the technology that's available today, it's easy to forget how many amateur astronomers acquired their first telescopes: by building them! Because of this, we are organizing a special **Retro Night** at Wagman Observatory to honor handmade scopes and their makers.

We'd like members to bring their homemade scopes, set them up, and show them off! Other members could "tour" the featured scopes, look through them, ask questions, and get the stories behind the making of each one. Although nothing is definite, the proposed date is the Member Star Party on Friday, August 5th.

If you are interested in bringing a scope, giving a short lecture, or have any suggestions, contact Kelly Fletcher: aaap@lexilena.com

Summer Buzz

By-Law Changes: Approved & Completed

As proposed by the Executive Committee, the club by-laws have been changed to separate the AAAP from the Academy of Arts and Sciences (see the April *Guide Star* for more details). The ASAP Council approved the proposal on April 17th, and the AAAP formally submitted its letter of resignation to the ASAP.

Summer Break Commences

The final spring business meeting was held on May 20th, so our Summer Break is now in effect.

The next AAAP meeting is scheduled for **Friday, September 16th**. Meetings will continue to be held on the Friday nearest to Full Moon, at 7:30 p.m. at the Carnegie Science Center.

Joining Us In June

Welcome, new AAAP members!
You are joining us just in time for balmy nights of summertime stargazing!

Bob Goetschkes	Tim Hagan
Miles Hilsenrath	Steve Kalan
Gary Mourfield	Gary Rhodes
Laura Rhodes	Becky Stabile

Thomas E. McDermott
Robert T. Anderson
Kathleen Desantis

MCPO Dedication

Pull out your Day Planner or power up your PDA to mark down this date! The formal dedication ceremony for Mingo Creek Park Observatory is scheduled for 4:00 p.m. on **August 27, 2005**.

Additional details will be published in the *Guide Star* later this summer.

Fond Farewell to Friends

As you may have already heard if you peruse the AAAP listserv, Membership Secretary Brent Hudock withdrew his name from the spring election. He has accepted a new job in Philadelphia, and will be moving there with his family in mid-July.

He intends to remain an AAAP member, however, and to visit us for a few Star Parties this summer. Best of luck, Hooty. Stay in touch. You will be missed!

Address Change

Oops. We missed an address change in the 2005 Membership Directory. The new contact information for John Hansen is:

7448 Spring Village Drive, #307
Springfield, VA 22150-4466
(703) 644-0596

On the Horizon

Okay, so the Sky Gods were a little cranky with us in May (what happened to that stretch of fantastic weather we had in early April, anyway?). But we have a wealth of other events scheduled for June and early July, and are looking for armies of AAAP members to volunteer and join in the fun. Here's what's coming up:

● On **Friday, June 10th** and **Saturday, June 11th**, there will be Public Star Parties at both **Wagman Observatory** and **Mingo Observatory**.

● On **Wednesday, June 15th**, there will be a Private Star Party at **Wagman Observatory** for group of Advanced High School students who will be taking advanced science classes at CMU. The event will start at noon. Flacc Stifel and Tom Reiland will be directing the event, and will probably need one additional volunteer.

● On **Wednesday, June 22nd**, there will be a Private Star Party for group of Boy Scouts at **Wagman Observatory**. The event will start at 8:45 p.m.

● On **Saturday, June 25th**, there will be a *Public Moonrise Special* Star Party at **Wagman Observatory**.

● On **Thursday, June 30th**, the AAAP has been requested to speak about telescopes and the night sky to a Girl Scout camp in the Burgettstown area. If you can help out, call Becky at 724-356-7565 for details. As Tom Reiland pointed out on the AAAP listserv, this is an excellent opportunity to reach young women and "show them that astronomy is for everyone."

● **Friday, July 8th** and **Saturday, July 9th** will be the traditional *Member's Only New Moon* Star Parties.

● **Wednesday, July 6th** through **Saturday, July 9th** is the **Green Bank Star Quest II** at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory in Green Bank West Virginia. For more details, visit: <http://www.greenbankstarquest.org>

● On **Friday, July 15th** and **Saturday, July 16th**, there will be Public Star Parties at **Wagman Observatory**.

● On **Saturday, July 23rd**, there will be another *Public Moonrise Special* Star Party at **Wagman Observatory**.

● On **Friday, July 29th** and **Saturday, July 30th**, there will be Public Star Parties at **Mingo Observatory**.

Links to Chris's *DEEP SKY ESSAYS*

If you enjoy vicarious deep sky observing or need inspiration and advice for your own observing program, check out these links. Chris Genovese describes his deep-sky adventures and explains the tricks he uses to locate particular targets. The pieces are fully hyperlinked to pictures of the objects discussed, maps, papers, and other resources. Excerpts from many of articles have appeared in *Guide Star*, but we've only given you a small taste of what is available!

Seven Nights in September

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000413.html>
Wagman and Mingo, September 2004

Messier Falls

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000418.html>
Wagman, 05 November 2004

A Dobson's Choice

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000419.html>
Wagman, 06 November 2004

Northern Lights and Hot Chocolate

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000420.html>
Mingo, 09 November 2004

The Return of Phil and Other Tales

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000424.html>
Wagman and Mingo, 13-14 November 2004

A Taste of Southern Living

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000425.html>
Tampa, 28-29 November 2004

In Space No One Can Hear You Freeze

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000426.html>
Wagman, 15 December 2004

The Day We've Waited For

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000427.html>
Wagman, 17 December 2004

But You Wouldn't Want To Live There

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000428.html>
Wagman, 14 January 2005

So Cold It Burns

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000429.html>
Wagman, 17 January 2005

Innovation by Moonlight

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000430.html>
Wagman, 27 January 2005

And the Herschel Goes To...

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000431.html>
Wagman, 01 February 2005

Marathon Training, Part I

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000432.html>
Wagman, 04 February 2005

Marathon Training, Part II

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000433.html>
Wagman, 05 February 2005

A Debauch of Galaxies

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000434.html>
Wagman, 12 February 2005

The Road To Marathon

<http://signalplusnoise.com/archives/000435.html>
Pettigrew, 06-08 March 2005

SUNSPOT GALLERY



By Fred Klein



By Phil Hughes



By Fred Klein



By Dan Peden



June AstroEvents

By Al Paslow

Mercury becomes visible from mid-month on: low in the evening sky as it heads for one of the better apparitions of 2005.

Venus in Gemini; climbs higher and becomes more prominent through June in the western sky after sunset. Both planets will be placed exceptionally close together around June 26-27 and near Saturn for a beautiful early evening planetary alignment.

Mars increases somewhat in brightness and enters Pisces in early June. The red planet will be spectacular in late October and early November this year, but for now rises after 2:00 a.m. by June 15 and is still small, at about 9 arc-seconds in diameter.

Jupiter continues to blaze brilliantly around magnitude -2.2 in Virgo and sets shortly after 2:00 a.m. by the middle of June.

Saturn is still visible in the evening sky in Gemini at a magnitude of 0.2, but becomes more difficult to see as the month progresses and it heads for the sun.

Uranus, at a magnitude of 5.9, and **Neptune**, at a magnitude of 7.9, are morning stars, only rising after 1:00 a.m. and midnight, respectively, by the middle of June.

Pluto is visible all night long in the constellation of Serpens, but of course is extremely dim at a magnitude 13.8.

Comet Machholtz slipped below 10th magnitude in May and grows fainter by the day; it is currently located below the bowl of the Big Dipper. You will need finder charts to locate this object.

Special Event of the Month:

A beautiful planetary alignment occurs after mid-June when the planets Mercury, Venus and Saturn will gradually become drawn closer together. By June 26, Venus and Mercury will seem to merge into one *dazzling* star. Saturn will be just below them. This close alignment will be visible 30 to 60 minutes after sunset. Follow this event nightly from the weekend of June 18 until the very end of the month as the planets move first closer and then farther away from each other, with little Mercury leading the way. Don't miss this one!!

Iridium Flares:

Iridium flares are spectacular bursts of light, appearing star-like, that can attain a brilliance of up to -8 magnitude, 30 times brighter than the planet Venus! They are short-lived because they are here and gone within a moment, but a view can make quite an impression to observers on the earth. The flares are from satellites launched by Iridium Satellite LLC, and are caused by sunlight reflecting off the satellites' highly reflective, rectangular antennas. The flares can occur with great predictability. Times of some flares for the weekend of June 18 & 19 are listed. Predicted times are accurate within several minutes of real times, so give your self some leeway. Watch for them in the constellations listed; believe me, you'll know when they happen!

Selected Dates

June 2 – 6: Cherry Springs Star Party, in Cherry Springs Park near Coudersport, PA. Contact Tom Bemus (716) 386-7150.

June 3: Mercury is in superior conjunction and cannot be seen, but will return to the evening sky by mid-month.

June 5: Jupiter retrograde to direct motion.

June 6: New Moon.

June 8: Venus is 4° south of the thin waxing crescent Moon.

June 10: Saturn is 5° south of the Moon.

June 11: The Moon is at apogee.

June 14: Moon is at first quarter. Pluto is at opposition. Venus at perihelion.

June 15: Uranus begins retrograde. Watch Venus, Mercury, and Saturn as they move closer together from now until the end of June.

June 16: Moon 0.4° south of Jupiter.

June 18: Saturday evening Iridium Flare; occurs at 22 h 22m 20s EDT and attains a magnitude of -1.2. Look at constellation of Lyra.

June 19: Sunday evening Iridium Flare; occurs at 22h 16m 34s EDT attains a magnitude of -6.4. Look at constellation of Lyra.

June 20: Moon passes 0.7° north of Antares. Watch the evening sky for a week as Venus, Jupiter, and Saturn move closer.

June 21: Northern solstice at 2:46 p.m. EDT. Summer is here!!!

June 22: "Full Rose" Moon, as named by Europeans.

June 23: Venus 5° south of Pollux.

June 24: Mercury passes 5° south of Pollux. Look for a beautiful planetary alignment this weekend in the evening sky.

June 25: Moon 5° south of Neptune. Venus is about 1.3° north of Saturn. Beautiful planetary alignment in the early evening.

June 26: Mercury 1.4° north of Saturn. Moon 3° south of Uranus. Venus, Mercury, and Saturn very nice together in the early evening.

June 27: Mercury within 0.08° south of Venus. Mercury at 0.1 magnitude, 6.8" diameter. Venus is at -3.9 magnitude. Very close pair!

June 28: Moon at last quarter.

June 29: Moon 2° north of the red planet Mars; now glowing at about 0 magnitude only shows 9.3 arc-seconds diameter.

July 5: Earth at aphelion.

July 7: Mercury 1.6° south of Venus.

July 8: Look for the Moon 5° north of Mercury and 3° north of Venus.

July 9: Mercury at greatest eastern elongation of 26°.

July 12: Venus enters Leo the Lion.

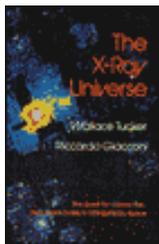
That's it for now, see you next month!! Clear skies!

Book & Movie Reviews

The X-Ray Universe

Reviewed by Fred Klein

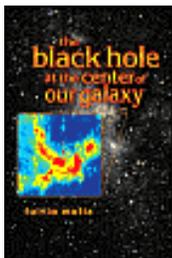
The X-Ray Universe by Wallace Tucker and Riccardo Giacconi (1985), Harvard University Press



This is a very nice book about the history of X-Ray Astronomy and the spacecraft developed to do the observations. There is a good discussion of the observations and what they mean. Giacconi was the main instigator of the space X-Ray program and received the Nobel Prize in 2002 for his efforts.

I found the discussion of the early observations fascinating. It starts with sounding rockets and works up through the Uhuru and to the Einstein X-Ray Observatory.

As an engineer, I found the design requirements for Einstein to be difficult beyond reason, but build it they did. To focus X-Rays, they are bounced from an ultra smooth surface at very low angle. To build a telescope they built 4 nested mirrors—the largest 2 feet in diameter and very long. The X-Ray must bounce twice off of each mirror. It was hard to build and test these mirrors, but they worked in space and gave 2 arc-second resolution! Read the book to find out how they did it.



The Black Hole at the Center of our Galaxy

Reviewed by Fred Klein

The Black Hole at the Center of our Galaxy by Falvio Melia, (2003) Princeton University Press, \$29.95

The first 50 pages of the 178 pages of this book are wonderful. They take you closer and closer to the center of the Milky Way and include fantastic pictures and illustrations. This is all new in the last ten years. The book provides interesting info about how the data was collected and discussion about what it all means. Stars and gas clouds are orbiting at fantastic speeds around the 2.6 million sun mass black hole. There are prospects of even better views in the next few years.

The rest of the book is a reprise of gravity and black holes. There is occasional reference to recent observations, but most of it is standard filler material.

However, the first part of the book is so good that I recommend it.



A Strange Analemma Taken Over Gettysburg

By John Pane



Alien Planet

Reviewed by Ann Norman

Alien Planet on DVD, Discovery Channel Store, \$21.95.

Alien Planet is a pseudo-documentary of a future mission to search for life on a habitable planet 6 ½ light years away from Earth. This computer-generated story is stunning, and imaginative. It draws on current scientific thinking. It is narrated in a soothing drone, exactly mimicking a nature show. The guest researchers and celebrities providing commentary and analyses of the fake data include Stephen Hawking, George Lucas, paleontologist Jack Horner, and NASA scientists.

As final episodes of both *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* play themselves out, it may be a good time to face reality and consider how one would go about space exploration without faster-than-light-speed travel, whether humans should go in person or use unmanned probes, and what aliens might look like if they didn't have to be played by humans in costumes.

Alien Planet is a serious attempt to answer all these questions. It is surprising, entertaining, and thought-provoking. The aliens are amazing, but totally plausible. How did they dream this stuff up? Look for the TV show on Discovery Channel or buy the 2-hour DVD online at Discovery Channel Store, where you can see a movie clip.

Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith

Reviewed by Larry McHenry

Sorry for being a little off topic here, but if you're a *Star Wars* fan, the latest installment is a must see (just exercising my equal "air time" from all the Trekkie postings!).

Just got back with Kyle from seeing the early show, and all I can say is "WOW!" The first hour or so of the movie is standard, fun, light-hearted *Star Wars* universe fare. It opens with probably the best space battle of the entire series, with a few R2D2 hi-jinks thrown in to draw laughs. There is lots of fast paced action with capital ships broadsiding each other and fighters buzzing all around in low orbit above Coruscant.

Most of the violence is directed toward the droid army, with the exception of an encounter with Count Dooku. The middle portion of the movie is taken up with various plots between the Chancellor and the Jedi Council, with a little action and a few romantic scenes scattered here and there, all while the Chancellor is slowly seducing Anakin to the Dark Side.

Then, in the last hour, you could say that all hell breaks loose. You can almost feel the tension leading up to the moment when Anakin flips. Instantly, the tone of the movie turns very dark. Here are the scenes that earned the film a PG13 rating, particularly the last lightsaber duel.

Younger children might have a problem with the end of that scene. During the last half of the movie, the audience reaction was one of dead silence, so intense it was.

If you thought "Empire" had a dark feel to it, wait until you see this movie. All in all, it does a pretty good job of tying the prequel's story line into the older original trilogy.

(May the "Schwartz" be with you!)

Star Party Primer

Recently, a number of newer members have expressed their uncertainty about what actually constitutes “helping” at a Star Party. Basically, if you simply come and assist visitors, talk to them, and answer their questions to the best of your ability, you are making a significant contribution to the event. To help you prepare for future Star Parties, Dave Smith has kindly compiled *The Star Party Primer*: this informal list of the questions and comments that you’ll most likely encounter in your role as Sky Guide.

- 1-What power is your telescope?
- 2-Where do I look?
- 3-What is that star up there?
- 4-How much did your telescope cost?
- 5-How much does your telescope weigh?
- 6-Can you see the flag on the Moon?
Answer: No, we are looking down at the top of the pole.
- 7-I bet you were out looking at the full Moon a few weeks ago.
- 8- I’m a Cancer, can you show it to me? (*Usually asked in June*)
- 9-Do you think there is life out there?
- 10-Is that the North Star? (*Usually pointing at the brightest star*)
- 11-We camped in Cook Forest and the stars were very bright there.
- 12-Can you show us a black hole?
- 13-Have you ever seen a UFO?
- 14-Our Mother just passed away and we had a star named after her. Could we see it?
- 15-How far can with that telescope SEE?
- 16-What is that star over there?
Answer: Jupiter.
Response to Answer: I thought you needed a telescope to see it.
- 17-Do you leave this telescope out in the weather?
- 18-Do you believe in UFOs?
- 19-What am I looking at here?
- 20-Is this your job? Are you an astronomer?
- 21-Can we look at that bright star over there?
- 22-I didn’t know you could see a satellite without a telescope.

- 23-What is a good telescope to buy?
- 24-We have a telescope at home, but have trouble using it.
- 25-We would like to stay longer, but my wife is in the car freezing.
- 26-Is that the Little Dipper? (*Usually pointing at The Pleiades*)
- 27-Where do I focus?
- 28-How long have you been doing this?
- 29-How far away is that?
- 30-Why do the stars twinkle?
- 31-Did you make your telescope?
- 32-I want to do astrophotography; what telescope should I get?
- 33-What am I supposed to be looking at?
- 34-Now, where is that in the sky?
- 35-How did you find that?
- 36-I don’t see anything.
- 37-What is a nebula?
- 38-How long do you stay here?
- 39-Did you go to school for this?
- 40-What constellation are we looking at here?

As Dave points out, it is usually best to keep your answers as simple as possible, but to also be prepared for visitors who *do* know a lot about what they are seeing.

Helping the public to learn about astronomy is not only part of being an active member of the AAAP, but also carries its own reward. “It has always been a rewarding experience,” Dave says, “to let someone look through a telescope for the first time and hear their reactions. In some cases, you have sparked a new interest. You have a chance to teach some basic science—like how the Moon changes phases—and in some cases, to dispel some misconceptions.”

So, go ahead and look over *The Star Party Primer*. Study it. Learn it by heart. And hey, even if you *are* asked a question and don’t know the answer, that’s okay. Just say so, and refer the visitor to another member. Bring your scope, your self, and the knowledge at your disposal to the next series of Star Parties. We’ll see you there.

Guide Star Time Dilation Capsule

I’ve been continuing my readings of the old *Guide Stars* I found in my ancient binder. Often amused and, at times, wondering where all the intervening years went (some of this stuff seems like yesterday to me!), I thought I would proffer something more from the AAAP History Closet.

This time, I am scarfing from the June 1981 issue. Herein one finds that the most recent May yielded our new President, Mr. Art Glaser (who, incidentally, gave the speech at tonight’s meeting on the history of Allegheny Observatory). George Hall was elected Vice-President and the *Guide Star* had co-editors Steve and Barb Piskor. Gordon Jenkins was elected to the office of treasure—even though neither he nor that office was on the ballot!

Longtime club member and many-times past President Tom Reiland had just completed the required observations on the Herschel List (side note: I believe this made him the first “official” recipient of the certificate—i.e. certificate #001).

Another interesting blurb found in the June 1981 issue of the *Guide Star* states the following: “On a personal note, Eric Fischer, *former Guide Star* editor, was married to Joyce Osborne

on Saturday, May 16. Many of you may know Joyce who has participated in many AAAP activities. Eric and Joyce carefully planned every detail of the marriage ceremony which proved as unique as they are.”

Congratulations to Eric and Joyce on 24+ years!

This issue of the *Guide Star* was three pages in length, annual dues for AAAP membership was \$14.00, and Yours Truly would turn 20 years old on June 9th.



Rainbow By Jerry Zhu

JUNE 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
"You know Orion always comes up sideways, Throwing a leg up over our fence of mountains,..."	And rising on his hands, he looks in on me Busy outdoors by lantern-light with something I should have done by daylight..." -- Robert Frost, The Star-Splitter		1	2	3 	4 AAAP SUMMER PICNIC Angler's Grove 3 pm - ?
5	6 	7 	8	9 First AAAP meeting on Pgh Northside 1929	10 Star Parties: NEWO and MCPO	11 Star Parties: NEWO and MCPO
12 	13	14  Flag Day	15	16	17 AO Public Lecture See Below	18
19 Father's Day	20	21 Summer Solstice	22  Rose Moon	23	24	25 Star Party: NEWO Moonrise Special!
26	27 	28 	29	30		

<p>Also this month: June 17 Lecture: "The Search for Supernovae in the Local Universe." Allegheny Observatory. Free. RSVP required. 7:30 pm. University of Pittsburgh (412)-321-2400.</p> <p>Looking ahead: Star Parties July 15, 16, and 23 at NEWO. July 29 and 30 at MCPO.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>AAAP Long-Range Meeting Schedule</u></p> <table style="width: 100%; border: none;"> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Sep. 16, 2005</td> <td style="border: none;">Jan. 13, 2006</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Oct. 14, 2005</td> <td style="border: none;">Feb. 10, 2006</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Nov. 18, 2005</td> <td style="border: none;">Mar. 10, 2006</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="border: none;">Dec. 9, 2005</td> <td style="border: none;">Apr. 7, 2006</td> </tr> </table>	Sep. 16, 2005	Jan. 13, 2006	Oct. 14, 2005	Feb. 10, 2006	Nov. 18, 2005	Mar. 10, 2006	Dec. 9, 2005	Apr. 7, 2006
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Nov. 18, 2005	Mar. 10, 2006								
Dec. 9, 2005	Apr. 7, 2006								

Classifieds

FOR SALE: Meade DS-114AT 5" f/8 Reflecting Telescope with Autostar GO-TO. Like new condition. Asking \$150.00. Email Mark Schomer if interested. mark9@zoominternet.net

Emendments of Egregious Editorial Errors

May 2005 Issue, pg. 1: Rowen Poole did not complete the Mullaney-McCall List, but the Herschel List.

May 2005 Issue, pg. 7: Photo by John Pane was identified as the Black Eye Galaxy, rather than the Sombrero Galaxy.

COMING NEXT MONTH...



*Interview with **Attila Danko**,
Creator of the Clear Sky Clock*

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