The Guide Star

Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh, Inc.

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Mingo Creek Park Observatory

Nicholas E. Wagman Observatory

In This Issue...

MCPO Dedication: Come Celebrate!

After several years of planning and hard work, the AAAP's vision for the Mingo Creek Park site has finally come to fruition. It has evolved from its original state—a nebulous "dream on the hilltop" (coined by Al Paslow)—to a fully functional observatory for the use and enjoyment of AAAP members and visitors alike. Please join us at its Dedication Ceremony on Saturday, August 27th, 2005. The event will begin at the Pavilion at 4:00 p.m., rain or shine (for once, we won't be thwarted by clouds and poor seeing).

The program will begin with our lineup of speakers, which will include AAAP Officers and Executive Committee members; representatives from Washington County, the U.S. House of Representatives, and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania; and several guest speakers who are still to be announced. We will move up to the Observatory for the Ribbon Cutting Ceremony, and then conclude by opening up the Observatory for food, refreshments, tours of the facility, and an early start to the night's public Star Party. Members are encouraged to bring personal scopes, so we can show the Dedication guests and members of the public what a Star Party is all about!

Members making last minute plans are welcome, of course, but if at all possible, please RSVP by August 15th so we can make sure there are enough refreshments to go around. If you do plan to attend, please contact George Guzik at **GeorgeGuzik@aol.com** or **724-863-8008** and let him know how many will be in your party.

Exec Comm Officers 2005-2006

A new year for the AAAAP is "officially" underway. President Rich Bailey has completed his selection of the 2005-2006 Executive Committee roster. Welcome to our new Executive Committee Officers:

Richard Bailey	President
Ann Norman	Vice President
John Holtz	Treasurer
Kelly Fletcher	*Guide Star* Editor
Charlotte Tunney	Corresponding Secretary
Dennis Derda	Recording Secretary
Mark Schomer	Membership Secretary
Tom Reiland	Director, Wagman
Wade Barbin	Assistant Director, Wagman
Flacc Stifel	Assistant Director, Wagman
Larry McHenry	Director, Mingo Creek
Ed Moss	Assistant Director, Mingo Creek
Mike Meteney	Assistant Director, Mingo Creek
George Guzik	Past President
Bill Yorkshire	Past Vice President
Dave Smith	
Rowen Poole	
Chrissie Chojnicki	
Dave Hougy	
Al Paslow	
Larry Sneider	

M8 and M20, Crest View Farm, MO
by Mark Arelt

Farewell, Scotty

Live Long and Prosper!
Eric Fischer with James Doohan at a Star Trek Convention

Star Trek fans around the world recently lost a much-loved science-fiction icon. James Doohan, better known to us simply as "Scotty," passed away on July 20th, 2005.

In the original *Star Trek* series, Doohan played Montgomery Scott, Chief Engineer of the Starship Enterprise. His character's technological virtuosity pulled Kirk, Spock, and company through dire danger on an almost weekly basis. Although it was never actually used on a *Star Trek* episode, "Beam me up, Scotty" became a familiar catchphrase even outside sci-fi circles.

After the series ended, Doohan became an active participant in the burgeoning *Trek* culture, and a frequent convention attendee. His accessibility has made him a favorite among convention-goers; over the decades, his willingness to meet and talk with his fans has become nearly legendary.

James "Scotty" Doohan will be sadly missed, and long remembered. His fans are still many, and we will remember him not only as an influential actor, but also as a generous man and beloved friend.

Summer Buzz

Merchandise Report

For those of you who have been dying to try on a new hat, we will be ordering new ball caps for MCPO.

If you're looking for other merchandise, we also have a wide selection of AAAP stuff—from ***Star Cruise*** sweatshirts and pins (sure to become classics) to general AAAP sweatshirts, hats, and buttons.

We also received a discount from *Astronomy Magazine* for ordering calendars early, so the "Deep Space Mysteries Calendar 2006" is now available.

To check out merchandise online, visit:
http://www.starglider.com/aaap

To order, contact Rowen Poole at:
412-527-0074 or
aaap@starglider.com

Misleading Mars Mail

Many of you have probably heard about (or been recipients of) the report on the spectacular Mars opposition coming up on August 27th. But in case you haven't, the report refers to the opposition in 2003 (this year it will be on November 7th) and also claims that Mars "will look as large as the full moon to the naked eye."

The report has been circulating for months, and members have been confronted with it with increasing regularity. In an effort to combat this misinformation on a larger scale, Tom Reiland has sent news releases to the local media, and Webmaster Kenn Lippert has agreed include a link to correct information on the AAAP Website.

Condolences...

We were sorry to hear about the passing of Ed Moss' mother early in July, and offer our condolences and best wishes to Ed and his family.

Jokes for Astronomers

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Two hydrogen atoms meet. One says, "I've lost my electron." The other says, "Are you sure?" The first replies, "Yes, I'm positive."

(*From Tom Reiland*): Cows have extremely large pupils, so large they can probably see all the Messier Objects without optical aid. This brought about the birth of Cow Astronomy many years ago. It began with the great astronomer, Cow Perinicus and was brought into the modern age by Cow Sagan. William Herschel named the variable star Moo Cephei the Garnet Star. There's also the Cow Pie Nebula in Sagittarius. And where do you think Uranus got all its methane from? I have to stop now before this get udderly ridiculous.

Q: Who's the Jedi Knight who delivers babies?
A: OB-GYN Kenobe.

Q: What do you call a cowardly Sith?
A: A Sithy.

Q: How many astronomers does it take to change a light bulb?
A: Two: one to change the bulb, the other to complain about the light pollution.
Alternate A: I thought astronomers used standard candles.

Mingo News

Articles by Dan McKeel and Al Paslow
Photos by Al Paslow

Dedication of the Dream on the Hilltop

This month is quite special, as it marks a milestone for the MCPO Project. On Saturday, August 27th, 2005, the AAAP will formally present Mingo Observatory and Planetarium to the public. Invitations are being sent, along with our sincere gratitude to all the individuals who helped to make this dream on a hilltop into a reality. Dan and I personally want to applaud the tremendous effort the AAAP has made. We hope for a strong turnout and encourage all club members to attend this historic event.

Thanks, Gene!

Planetarium shows have proven to be very popular at MCPO events. Hats off to Gene Kulalowski, who has greatly assisted us on many show. He has a demonstration that illustrates the insulating qualities of the tile made for the Space Shuttle. In the middle of a show, he holds the tile outward, carefully heats one side of the material with a torch, and invites attendees touch the cool back of the same tile. We thank you tremendously, Gene, for all your help!!

Project Southern Skies

I have been working on a project that may be of interest to the AAAP and to Mingo Observatory. It involves members of an amateur astronomy group in the Dominican Republic, *La Sociedad Astronómica Dominicana*. Like the AAAP, the group has a planetarium and is obtaining funds from their government to build a "National Free Observatory" for the benefit of their people.

Their plans also include what may be described as an "astronomical resort," located at a very accommodating beachfront resort hotel, complete with an observatory. Guests and speakers from the U.S. can gather here to talk and enjoy the southern stars in beautiful Caribbean skies! A second, larger observatory with a sizable Ritchey-Cretien instrument will be built far away from lights

My family and I have been invited to attend a star party at the El Portilla Beach Resort in the Dominican Republic on August 5th and 6th. We have accepted. Eric Ramos, who is leading the project, has suggested that perhaps the AAAP and LSAD may be able to work together, and in the process can benefit from the mutual exchange of cultures, ideas, and the like.

Hey Dan! I do believe it's time to get out the tanning lotion. This will be my first real vacation in five years!

Wow. Southern skies, beautiful beaches, all-inclusive hotels! Sounds good to me!

Hmm?
What was that? Don't rub it in, you say?

Never fear, Dan, my friend...the only thing I'll be rubbing in is the suntan lotion! And someday, maybe, a bunch of us will all go down together...to enjoy the sun, the sand, and the southern stars...and to visit with new friends who share in our good will and our love of astronomy.

Better Than the Weather: Mingo Progress Report

The latest news on the 24-inch Ritchey-Cretien OTA: the expected delivery date will be in January 2006. However, the beginning of August will bring the delivery and installation of the Parallax HD 300 German Equatorial mounting. This unit will feature Byers Gears and 3-inch shafts. Additionally, it has the latest computer go-to wizardry, including a "park" feature. So, while the tube assembly is still almost a half a year away, the mount will be ready and waiting.

We have replaced the old planetarium projector with a more recent, "low mileage" unit that appears to work very well. The newer machine was specially prepared for us by a qualified specialist who did away with troublesome old technology and replaced the "heart" of the unit with a foolproof system. We have also had a special control box fabricated; it is strictly manual in operation, and has no complex circuitry or computer boards. It is so simple and user-friendly that Dan and I feel more AAAP members should consider learning how to run this device.

That's *Peerless*, NOT *Pierless*

At the time of this article, the piers to both telescopes have been installed. On July 21st, Mike Meteney and I moved the piers into the Observatory. Later, we were joined by Ed Moss and Eugene Kulakowski.

Our intrepid crew installed the piers for the 24-inch and the 10-inch telescopes. With the pier for the 10-inch in place, Eugene, Mike and Ed are quite happy.

With a mighty push, all four of us lifted the massive refractor pier to its new home. Only seconds before this shot was taken, while the pier was still at an extreme angle, someone muttered, "It's like raising the flag on Iwo Jima."

Lastly, we are working to modify the 10-inch refractor to a modified Star-Liner mount. While the mount is temporary, for the present it will serve us with a clock drive and smoother overall operation.

Until next issue, we bid you a quiet farewell! May the "gods of good seeing" be with you,
Al & Dan

Wagman News

Moonrise Special:
Members Rise to the Occasion

By Kelly Fletcher
Photos by Dave Smith

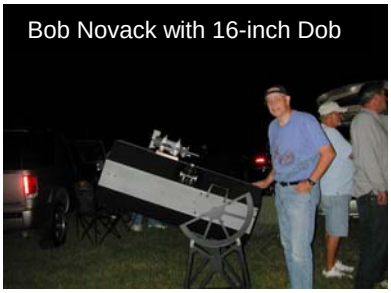
Wagman Before Sunset

The Moonrise Special Public Star Party on Saturday, July 23rd got off to an auspicious start. The skies were fairly clear. Members must have been eager to begin a night of observing, because one side of the driveway was filled with cars and telescopes well before sunset, and the other side filled up shortly thereafter. A few visitors showed up early, too, and circulated between member scopes, the Manka, and the Brashear for views of Venus and Jupiter until dark.

Fred Klein Views Venus

I'm not sure exactly how many members attended, but there seemed to be a lot of us there helping out! Dave Smith cruised around the grounds with a digital camera, and got some good pics of the event. Eric Heckathorn ran the Manka, Rowen Poole ran the Brashear, and numerous members set up their scopes on the drive. Phil Breidenbach directed traffic (very important, especially once the second row of cars started) and sacrificed his pedometer in the process. Les Johnson, Al Paslow, and I manned the reception desk; Al took some time out to assist a young man who was having trouble setting up his scope, as well. Tom gave his traditional lecture, and drew quite a crowd. I also got the opportunity to meet and talk with several members I knew by name and email address, but had never met face-to-face.

Bob Novack with 16-inch Dob



Stargazing through the BFT

Visitors started pouring in after dark, and there were around 150 guests total. The stream of observers shuttling in and out of the telescope rooms was steady, and they all kept us busy at the desk answering questions and passing out literature and planispheres!

Clouds started moving in sometime after 9:00, and by moonrise at 10:38 the transparency was poor. It wasn't long before most of us wrapped it up, packed it in, and headed for home, but we got in a bit of fine observing and good conversation in the short time we had.

Define Your Terms:
What Qualifies as a Star Party?

Excerpted from the AAAP Listserv Digest VO #769-70
RE: Wagman Public Star Party on Friday, July 15, 2005

Bill Hayeslip: Following my personal star party guide (if it isn't actually raining at the moment, there's still hope), I went over to Wagman to find Larry Sneider already there! We were soon joined by Jon Grimme who did set up his Dob and the three of us waited for the sky to clear. Because we didn't have any visitors, we never opened up the building to give tours of the scopes. Now the question is, was this a Star Party or just three guys on the hill drinking coffee and telling lies? I'll let Tom figure that one out.

Rowen Poole: Since the weather has been *so* cooperative this year, it seems there is not much else to do but get philosophical about how we define Star Parties. Here are my suggestions:

1) Any gathering of two or more club members that have at least one random public visitor where at least one celestial object is observed could constitute a valid Public Star Party.

2) Any gathering of two or more club members with no public visitors where at least one celestial object is observed could constitute a valid Private Star Party.

3) Any gathering of two or more club members where at least one non-club member shows up that's part of a group that reserved an evening with club members and at least one celestial object is observed also constitutes a Private Star Party.

By these definitions, it would seem that, indeed, you, Larry and Jon did enjoy a small but nonetheless valid Private Star Party last night. However, since not a single visitor showed up, I would suspect this would not qualify as something Tom would write in the books. We may need to revise these definitions further

Bill Hayeslip: I think that was intended to be a rhetorical question, not a debate with multi-part analysis, serious research, vote by the general membership, court cases and the anticipated appeals. If a tree falls in the woods and no one hears it, did the tree really fall? Work on that one instead. 8^)

Dave Smith: I am not sure if the sound carries, but it may branch out and hang there by a limb.

Rowen Poole: Bill, that depends. The falling tree could be witnessed by a deaf person.

John Close: Rowen, I am in total agreement with your definitions of a star party. Moreover, I would suggest that they be brought before the Membership for a vote as additions to the AAAP bylaws.

Tom Reiland: Nice try guys, but it's not a Star Party without visitors. And as William Shatner once said, "Someone needs to get a life."

So, the jury is still out. Although the issue was not addressed at the last Executive Committee meeting, it may yet find a place in the next meeting's agenda.

On the Horizon

A few events you've already heard about, included for easy reference, and a few new ones added. Don't forget to check the listserver for events that come up in between issues. For the present, though, here's what's ***On the Horizon***:

Upcoming dates for Wagman Observatory Star Parties:

Friday, September 9th and **Saturday, September 10th** will be Public Star Parties.

Saturday, September 24th will be a Public ***Dark Sky Special*** Star Party.

Saturday, October 8th will be a Public Star Party.

Saturday, October 22nd will be a Public ***Moonrise Special*** Star Party.

Upcoming Dates for Mingo Observatory Star Parties:

Friday, August 26th and **Saturday, August 27th** will be Public Star Parties.

Friday, September 9th and **Saturday, September 10th** will be Public Star Parties.

Saturday, October 1st will be a Public Star Party.

Saturday, October 22nd will be a Public ***Moonrise Special*** Star Party.

Upcoming dates for *Members Only New Moon* Star Parties at NEWO and MCPO:

Friday, August 5th and **Saturday, August 6th**

Friday, September 2nd and **Saturday, September 3rd**

Don't Miss the MCPO Dedication!

Saturday, August 27th.
Check the front page for details!

Don't Miss the Perseid Weekend!

The peak night of the Perseid Meteor Shower, **Thursday, August 11th**, is reserved as a Members Only Star Party at Wagman Observatory.

Friday, August 12th and **Saturday, August 13th** will be Public Star Parties at Wagman Observatory.

The Perseids will reach maximum on August 12th at 17 UT, or 1:00 p.m. EDT. We may not see them at the peak rate of one per minute, but all three nights should still be great for viewing. These will be the only all-night events for this year, so come join us to count some meteors!

Upcoming Dates for Miscellaneous Events:

On **Wednesday, August 17th**, The Henry Buhl, Jr. Planetarium and Carnegie Science Center are hosting author and scientist Dr. William K. Hartman for a book signing and a discussion of his latest book, *The Grand Tour: A Traveler's Guide to the Solar System*. For $25, attendees will receive a signed copy of Hartman's new book, a dessert buffet, and an observing session at the CSC observatory (weather permitting). The event will begin at 7:00 p.m. Advanced reservations are required.
Tickets can be purchased online at
www.carnegiesciencecenter.org.
For more info, call Dan Malerbo at 412-237-1692 or email him at malerbod@carnegiesciencecenter.org.

Any Volunteers?

The Regional Environmental Education Center in Upper St. Clair has asked the AAAP to give a presentation at their facility. At present, a date in October is being considered, but if anyone would be able to assist them sooner, please contact Kostoula Vallianos at (412) 838-0064. For additional information about their organization and site, visit: http://www.regionaleec.org/

If there is an event or activity that you think AAAP members might be interested in, contact Kelly at aaap@lexilena.com or 724-316-8480.
Thanks to all the members who have submitted info about coming events!

August AstroEvents

By Al Paslow

Mercury becomes visible in the predawn sky after midmonth and heads for greatest western elongation on the 23rd.

Venus, an "evening star," is brilliant at magnitude -3.9. It slowly sets in the western sky a bit earlier each evening as the month progresses, but still moving towards Jupiter. A nice conjunction will occur at month's end.

Mars steadily increases in brightness quite a bit during August. It begins the month at magnitude - 0.48 and grows from 11.3 to 14.02 arcseconds by the 31st to blaze at magnitude -1 by September 1st. This is a good time to look for surface activity. Observers should watch for major dust storms, as this represents the first peak storm period. The Mountains of Mitchell will reduce to a few bright patches and will soon disappear, probably early in the month. The Martian Southern Summer Solstice occurs on the 17th. The Red Planet will be spectacular and well placed in the evening sky in late October and early November. This year at opposition the south polar cap will be well represented. Mars rises by 11:30 p.m. EDT by midmonth.

Jupiter, at magnitude -1.6 in Virgo, sinks farther into the west and sets by 10:30 p.m. EDT by midmonth. Look for the brilliant planet near the Moon on the 9th. Venus approaches Jupiter in the last week of August; they are spectacularly close together by the 31st, and even closer for the first several days in September. The pair forms a triangle with Spica, magnitude +0.9 about this time. Jupiter is getting low soon after dark, and GRS (Great Red Spot) transits often occur either after the planet has set or during daylight hours.

Saturn, now in Cancer at magnitude 0.5, has reemerged in the morning sky and will appear above the planet Mercury for a time. The pair is best seen from the 20thto the 27th. The ringed planet rises at 5:00 a.m. (about 1.5 hours before sunrise.) by midmonth.

Uranus and **Neptune,** at magnitudes 5.7 and 7.8, rise at about 8:54 p.m. and 7:50 p.m. EDT respectively by the middle of August.

Pluto sets by 2:20 a.m. midmonth and is visible in the constellation of Serpens. It is extremely dim, between magnitude 13.9 to 14.

At the time of this edition, **Comet 9P/Tempel 1** is in Libra, at perhaps magnitude 10.5. It is heading in a southerly direction. ***Note:*** the comet is large and diffuse, making it very difficult to detect, particularly in light polluted skies. A dark site and low magnification are a must. You'll need finder charts to locate this object.

Special Event of the Month:

Perseid Meteor Shower: This is the grand naked-eye event of August. Watch from the 10th to the 13th. Expect 10 to 30 shooting stars per hour in dark skies. The shower will be at its best the evening of August 11-12th, when 50 or 60 meteors per hour have been seen in past years. This year the Moon is at first quarter phase, but sets at about 11:20 p.m. on the evening of the 11th, so the best views will be in the morning hours of the 12th. Find yourself a dark sky away from lights. The meteor storm radiates from the constellation of Perseus (in the northeast) so observe in that general direction. This event is often mentioned in the news...don't miss this one!!

Venus-Jupiter Conjunction: If you missed last month's fantastic three-planet conjunction, here's another one for you!! Another conjunction of Venus, this time with Jupiter, occurs late this month and early September. A pretty sight in the western sky within an hour after sunset.

Iridium Flares: Times for some flares for the weekend of August 12th, 13th, and 14th are listed. Predicted times are accurate within several minutes of real time, so give yourself some leeway. Watch for them in the constellations listed; believe me, you'll know when they happen!

Selected Dates

August 1: Alpha Capricornids Meteor Show peaks. Relatively unknown. Average meteor is fainter than 2nd magnitude.

August 4: The Moon is at apogee.

August 5: New Moon. First man on moon Neil A.Armstrong born today in 1930. The famous ***Stellafane Telescope Makers Convention***, near Springfield, Vermont, begins today and runs through August 6th.

August 6: Mercury is in inferior conjunction with the Sun, and hence is not visible.

August 8: Venus is 1° 2' south of the Moon. Occultation of Venus by the Moon visible in Western Canada, but not from our location. Neptune is at opposition.

August 10: Jupiter is 1° 3' north of the Moon.

August 11-12: Perseid Meteor show peaks after midnight. The long trailed shooting stars are actually dust from Comet Swift Tuttle. Look for two Iridium Flares the evening of Aug 12th, both in the direction of Sagittarius. The first one is at 9:09:26 p.m. EDT and is magnitude -1.8. Look for the next one at 9:14:11 pm EDT; it is magnitude -2.2.

August 13: First Quarter Moon. Iridium Flares at 09:03:22 p.m. EDT, magnitude -0.5m and at 9:12:53 p.m. EDT, magnitude 0.7m. You can see both in the direction of Sagittarius again!

August 14: Antares is 0° 4' south of the Moon. Iridium Flare at 9:06:13 p.m. EDT, magnitude -2.3. Look in direction of Sagittarius.

August 15: Mercury appears to be motionless in the sky as it moves toward its greatest elongation west of the Sun from a position east of the Sun as viewed from Earth. Look for the Great Red Spot to transit Jupiter at 9:10 p.m. EDT. Sunset is at 8:17 p.m.

August 18: Neptune is 5° north of the Moon.

August 19: The Moon is Full and at perigee.

August 20: Uranus is 2° north of the Moon. Great Red Spot transits Jupiter at 8:20 p.m. EDT. Sunset is shortly before this!

August 23: Mercury at greatest elongation, 18.4° southwest of the Sun. Magnitude = +0.1; Phase = 43%; Diameter =7.3".

August 25: Mars is 6° south of the Moon.

August 26: Last Quarter Moon in Taurus.

August 27: ***Mingo Observatory and Planetarium Dedication.*** Festivities begin about 4:00 p.m. Be there!!!!

August 31: Saturn is 5° south of the crescent Moon. Saturn within 2 degrees of M44, the Beehive Cluster.

September 1: The Moon is at apogee. Look for the Jupiter and Venus encounter this evening and the next. Beautiful!

September 2: Venus is only 82 arc minutes south of Jupiter. Take a look!

September 3: New Moon. Pluto appears to be motionless in the sky as it goes from retrograde to direct motion.

September 4: Mercury is 1° 1' north of Regulus.

September 5: Venus is 1° 8' north of Spica.

September 6: Waxing Crescent Moon joins Venus. Jupiter and Spica grouping.

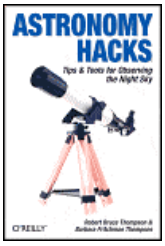
September 7: Jupiter is 1° 8' north of the Moon. Spica is 1° 3' south of the Moon. Venus is 0° 6' north of the Moon.

September 10: Antares is 0° 2' south of the Moon. .

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

Reviews & Resources

Fred Klein Reviews *Lifting Titan's Veil*



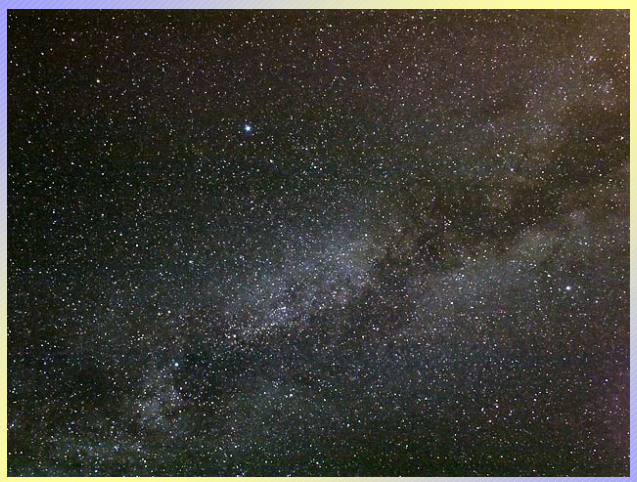
***Lifting Titan's Veil*, by Ralph Lorenz and Jacqueline Mitton. (2002) $35.00.**

This is a wonderful book about the discoveries of the properties of the moon of Saturn Titan. This is the moon that the Huygens probe landed on early this year and sent back pictures and other data. Ralph was a contributor to the probe, working on the surface penetrometer. His perspective really adds to the book. He was seen in some of the Huygens probe landing interviews.

Titan was discovered by Christian Huygens in 1655. For a long time, not much was known about the moon. Visual observation of limb darkening at 750x by Sola in 1907 gave the first hint that Titan might have an atmosphere. In 1943, Kuiper spectroscopically detected methane on Titan. Over the next 60 years, more detailed examinations determined more about the atmosphere, its density, temperature, and composition. That exploration forms the bulk of this book. I found it to be very exciting reading. There is a lot of modeling of the atmosphere to interpret the observations. There is more technical information in this book than in most general public books and it really adds to the content. However, it is not too heavy for the general reader.

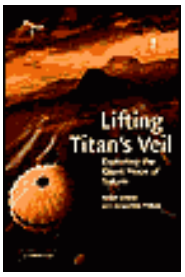
Another topic I found interesting was observations of surface features on Titan. With a LOT of work investigators found surface markings and determined the rotation rate. Distinguishing between changing cloud formations and the surface took a lot of work.

It took a lot of courage to publish this book before the Huygens probe landing. However, the results released thus far show just how right the predictions were. I strongly recommend this book.



Milky Way, Greene County
by John Pane

John Cheng Recommends *Astronomy Hacks: Tips and Tools for Observing the Night Sky*



***Astronomy Hacks: Tips and Tools for Observing the Night Sky*, by Robert Bruce Thompson and Barbara Fritchman Thompson. (2005) $19.96. at Barnes and Noble.**

Browsing the shelves at Barnes and Noble turned up a new book, *Astronomy Hacks*, aimed at amateur observers. Much of the book consists of tips and instructions that would be useful to observers just a bit beyond beginner. Some examples: how to determine the true magnification of a Barlow, how to intelligently select a set of eyepieces, and how to star hop. Also a section that made me smile—observing field and star party etiquette!! (My own opinion—the first three commandments should be mind the headlights, use a red flashlight, and keep whatever you consider music in your own earphones.)*

But some of the items are unique and might be useful to all levels of observers. For example, the idea of using a heavy chain on the mirror box to balance a Dob (so as to automatically vary the amount of counter-weight depending on elevation) was new to me. Also, they point out other factors involved in the Dob balancing act that aren't immediately obvious.

There are scattered nuggets of wisdom (the "been there, done that" kinda stuff that can save you some pain if you're willing to listen). For example, the author's definition of a true grab-and-go scope as one that can be carried (mount and all) with one hand is, unfortunately, something I'd wish I'd known before foundering around with all manner of rigs.

Much of what's in the book can be found tucked away in other books such as *The Backyard Astronomer's Guide*, *Star Ware*, or the old J.B. Sidgwick handbooks. But from what I was able to read at a glance, this isn't a bad book. Some of it's opinionated, but I got the impression that this husband/wife team has actually spent a lot of time "fumbling with equipment out in the dark." The book is a lot of useful stuff all in one place.

Below are two links. The first points to four "hacks," or tips, from the actual book, while the second is the authors' suggestions for hard copy star atlases.

http://www.oreilly.com/catalog/astronomyhks/

http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/network/2005/07/18/staratlases.html?page=

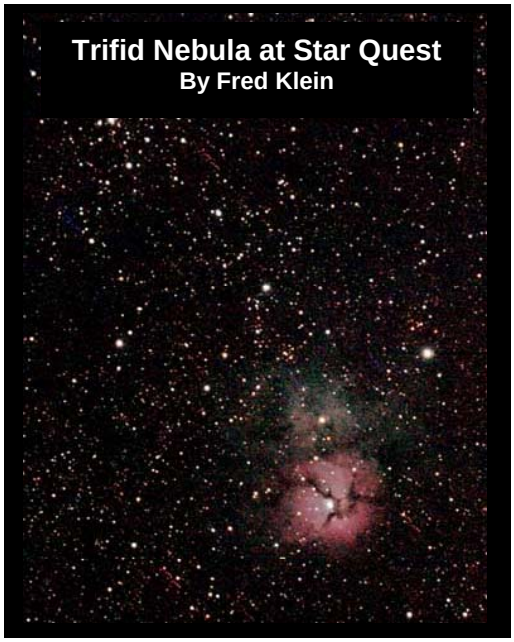
*[***Editor's note***: My vote? Keep playing the (quiet) observing music.]

Observations

STAR QUEST Star Party Report

By Jeff Marsh

I attended ***Star Quest II***, the Star Party at Green Bank, West Virginia, this past weekend (July 8, 9, and 10). The Star Party was well run and very interesting. The organizers did a good job. I enjoyed the event and certainly recommend it.



Star Quest is held at the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) at Green Bank, West Virginia. Holding it at NRAO is a great idea. You get to tour the place, which is impressive, can learn to use a radio telescope (really), and the star party makes extensive use of the new science center/visitor center. The center has a good auditorium for the star party presentations, several of which were by the radio astronomers working at NRAO. The talks were excellent. The visitor center also provides a nice air-conditioned space for: meals at the visitor center cafe (good); group dinners; more presentations in the classrooms; an image processing clinic in the computer lab; a remote observing connection to New Mexico; a vendor area; kids' events; a raffle; science displays; and a gift shop. The center is also a pleasant, cool place to gather during the hot days. It has nice bathrooms (always nice when camping a few days).

Oh yes, the sky was dark. It's not as dark as Cherry Springs, Spruce Knob, or our old ***Star Cruise*** site, but it is much darker than Wagman, Mingo, or even our Greene County site. There are several small light domes around. These were worsened by the high humidity, but they did not hinder things much. I'm not going to complain.

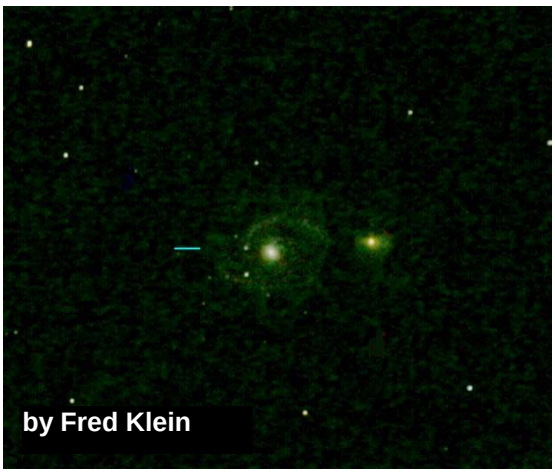
For example, the Milky Way was strong down to the horizon even with very high humidity. I could see M13 naked eye, and my eyes aren't that sharp. The humidity did cause heavy dew and fog. One or the other put most observers out of operation by midnight to 2:00 a.mm on both Friday and Saturday nights. Heavy dew is something I always notice in the West Virginia mountains—if you go, be prepared. Despite these problems, I had great views of the North America and Veil nebulas. I saw the Wild Duck cluster through a 20-inch Dob (beautiful) and the Swan Nebula through a 24-inch Dob (lots of detail). If you are just looking for darkest skies, go to Spruce Knob. But if you want an interesting Star Party to go along with some quite dark skies, this is a good event.

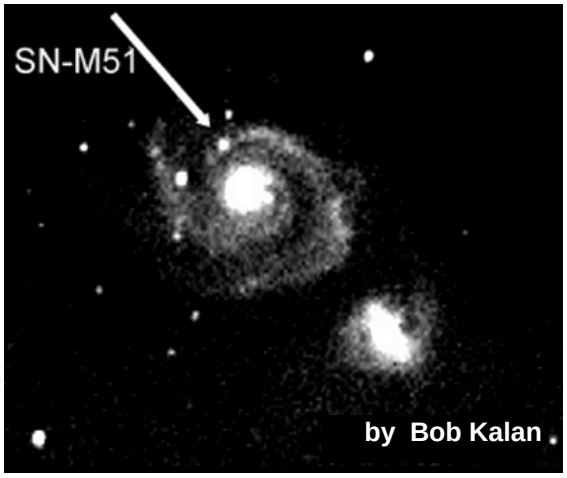
I do not know the attendance, but it was not nearly as many as we have had at ***Star Cruise***. This was the second year for the event. It is located well off the interstate. It took me about four hours and close to 200 miles to get there from Pleasant Hills (near Century III Mall). The roads were good and scenic. The hills weren't bad. If you can drive around Pittsburgh, you are qualified for West Virginia. By far, the roughest road of the trip was I-79 in good ol' PA. The tiny town of Green Bank is close to NRAO with gas stations, a few restaurants, some motels, and grocery stores all within a few miles of the site. There are some West Virginia-type daytime things to do in the area. For example, the Cass Scenic Railroad is not far away. On the drive back, I stopped at the chili cook-off at Snowshoe.

jjj

Supernova in Whirlpool Galaxy a Blast!

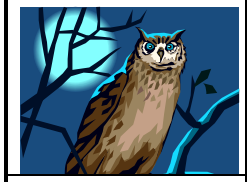
Members were awed by the supernova that appeared in the Whirlpool Galaxy on Monday, June 27th.
It was viewed on computers screens via members' digital photography and directly in telescopes of 8 inches or more.





Fridge Calendar *by Cathy Rivi*

August 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4 	5 Members Only NEW MOON Star Parties NEWO MCPO	6 Members Only NEW MOON Star Parties NEWO MCPO
7 The Earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament hanging…	8 …in the blackness of space. As we got farther and farther away it diminished in size.	9 Finally it shrank to the size of a marble,…	10 the most beautiful marble you can imagine. *James Irwin, USA*	11 Members Only NEWO Star Party Perseids!	12  Star Party NEWO Perseids!	Star Party 13 NEWO Perseids! 
14 Quotes from astronauts who have gone into space:	15 	16	17 William K. Hartman book signing CSC 7 p.m.	18	19 AO Public Lecture See Below 	20
21 	22 The sun truly "comes up like thunder," and it sets just as fast…	23 Each sunrise and sunset lasts only a few seconds. And you see sixteen sunrises…	24 … and sixteen sunsets every day you're in space. Joseph Allen, USA	25 	26  Star Party MCPO	27 Star Party MCPO **Dedication 4 p.m.**
28	29 	30	31 	**Reminder: AAAP Business Meetings resume Sept. 16!**		

Also this month: August 19 - Lecture: **Astrogravitational Effects: The Einstein Legacy**. Allegheny Observatory. Free. RSVP required. 7:30 P.M. Univ. of Pittsburgh (412) 321-2400.
Looking ahead: Star Parties: **Sept. 9, 10, 24—NEWO Sept. 9, 10—MCPO**

AAAP Long-Range Meeting Schedule

Sept. 16, 2005	Jan. 13, 2006
Oct. 14, 2005	Feb. 10, 2006
Nov. 18, 2005	Mar. 10, 2006
Dec. 9, 2005	Apr. 7, 2006

Classifieds

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ross.h.potter@ieee.org
658 13th Street
Oakmont, PA 15139

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