



ASTROFILES

Auburn Astronomical Society Newsletter

October 2015

As most of you have noticed, it has been quite a while since we have had a regular newsletter. We believe that a regular newsletter is important to keep the membership informed about the various activities of the club. Hopefully, this issue will get us back on a somewhat regular schedule. At the very least, it will serve as a monthly meeting reminder, but will also feature any recent club activities as well as interesting photos, articles and other contributions by our members. It will also be a work in progress, so the format and content may change and evolve over time, but the most important objective will be to keep the membership informed and provide items of interest. This is *your* newsletter and as editor I will always be open to your suggestions, but especially any contributions that you think will be of interest. Any photos, activities, items for sale that are related to astronomy are welcome. Just forward them to me and I'll incorporate them into a future issue. My e-mail address is the same as the one by which you received this newsletter. I have chosen to distribute the newsletter as a PDF document, since it can be read across most computing platforms with free PDF readers.

John Wingard - Secretary/Treasurer - Auburn Astronomical Society - jwin2485@bellsouth.net

The next regular meeting of the AAS will be Friday, October 23, 2015. We will meet at 7:45 PM CT in room 215 of Davis Hall (Aerospace Engineering) on the AU campus. In case you are wondering, Auburn will be playing an away game at Arkansas that weekend, so the local traffic should be somewhat manageable. Specific directions to the meeting site can be found on the AAS web page - www.auburnastro.org

We also have a Facebook page that we use to post interesting photos and other items of interest. If you have a Facebook account, just do a search for "Auburn Astronomical Society" and you can then join the group.

The month of September marked a major milestone in the history of the Auburn Astronomical Society. It was the 35th anniversary of the club, and to celebrate the occasion we held a dinner

at Niffer's restaurant in downtown Opelika, AL on Friday, September 25, 2015. This was in lieu of the normal club meeting for September. More than twenty AAS members and their spouses enjoyed a night of conversation and fellowship and after eating, we were treated to a special presentation by former AAS President Dr. Rhon Jenkins. Rhon pointed out that we already have an extensive description of the AAS history on our web page, so he decided to highlight many of the achievements in space exploration and astronomy that have occurred since the AAS was formed back in 1980. I was personally amazed at all of the significant things that have happened over the past 35 years, and it was very interesting to see them presented in chronological order, up to and including the recent flyby of Pluto by the New Horizons spacecraft (which is still sending back new data). Here are a few photos from the evening.





All photos courtesy of Gloria & Robert Rock and Russell Whigham

The September 27th Lunar Eclipse

The much-anticipated lunar eclipse of the "super-moon" created a lot of media attention in the days prior to the event, and locally the Gayle Planetarium in Montgomery planned to combine the viewing of the eclipse with a special planetarium program. AAS members were invited to come and bring their telescopes and make them available for viewing the eclipse after the show. However, the weather did not cooperate and it was totally overcast that evening. The turnout by the public was still very good and at least they got to see the planetarium program. A few brave AAS members did make the trip and were there to at least answer any questions that the attendees might have had about the event.

On Friday, October 2 the AAS was asked to provide a stargaze in conjunction with a fund-raising event at former AU coach Pat Dye's lodge just outside of Notasulga, AL. It had been cloudy for several days leading up to that day, and it was indeed totally overcast the night of the event. However, a few stalwart AAS members made the trip just in case a miraculous hole might have opened in the cloud cover, but it was not meant to be. We finally decided to call it quits, but if this turns out to be an annual event, we might be back. One note however...we were very close to the lodge itself which was the center of the activities and there were a lot of lights in the area, so I don't think that we would have been able to see much in the way of faint fuzzies unless we could have set up some distance away from the action. It appeared to be a well attended event, probably several hundred folks.

The next event on our schedule is a stargaze in the Tuskegee National Forest southwest of Auburn off of I-85 on Saturday, October 17. Several weeks ago, AAS members Allen Screws and John Wingard met with Ms. Christine Biggers from the TNF, along with a couple of other park staff and we explored several potential observing sites within the forest and decided on a relatively clear spot at a good elevation that should give us a good view of most of the sky. At the time of this writing, we have not heard back from Ms. Biggers on the final details of the

event. As soon as they are known, an e-mail will be sent out to everyone as a reminder. Let's hope that the weather cooperates this time. Below is a photo of the spot looking roughly northwest.



On Sunday evening, August 30, 2015, AAS members Frank Ward and Russell Whigham traveled to Scout Camp Hobbs outside of Prattville, AL to put on a stargaze for scout leaders and scouts. Frank wrote up a nice recap of the event and here is his report....

Camp Hobbs - Boy Scout Powder Horn Leadership Conference

Frank Ward

Some of my contacts with the local Boy Scouts Tukabatchee Area Council recently requested my participation in an event they had planned for the end of August (08-30-15.) It was the very first Powder Horn course for the Council. The event was designed to present participants (older Scouts, Venturers and adult leaders) with new ideas and experiences to make Scouting even more rewarding than it already is. Among the varied courses, my friends wanted an introduction to Astronomy to round out the weekend. The course outline mentioned the inclusion of “expert consultants” outside of Scouting. Instead, they got me. I was fortunate to be able to bring along the more than capable expert, Russell Whigham.

The event was held at Camp Hobbs, located off county road 40 west of Highway 31 near Pine Level above Prattville. Two sites were offered. The first being near the parking lot with two

street lights on the north side. The second was just down the trail in an open area without lights and a fairly good view of the sky. The second was chosen and Russell and I drove ourselves and equipment there and set up shop. Joining us as a Scouting friend, Ginger Horton. Her husband, who could not make it to the event, sent his small telescope along with her but she didn't know how to set it up. This was quickly done but it was used for demonstration only.

Russell brought along his trusty Celestron C11 and I had my 12 inch Lightbridge. I also carried my 3 inch Celestron and 10X50 Nikon binoculars with tripod. Ginger was given the task of manning the binoculars after I set her up to view M7 in Scorpius. Russell also supplied a Planisphere for demonstration. I also had a laptop computer with Stellarium running. Older issues of Astronomy and Sky&Telescope were on a table for an offering to interested guests. Russell graciously provided a stack of AAS business cards for distribution.

The evening progressed and the afternoon clouds dissipated to reveal a fairly clear night. The participants began to arrive about 8:20. Although it was dark by then, by the number of flash lights present, I would guess we had about 30 interested guests in all. As expected on a school night, they were as advertised...older Scouts, Venturers and several adult leaders from around the region.

I began with an intro of who AAS is and what we do. I then began by beginning an overview of the night sky above them. The laser pointer was, as usual, a hit. Of the several topics the course required, one of the first was to make them aware of the major constellations and how to find Polaris, even when Ursa Major is not prominent in the sky. It seemed important for Scouts to be able to find their way in the dark. They were also introduced to some major stars including the Summer Triangle with Vega, Altair and Deneb displayed near the zenith early on. A brief attempt was made at explaining the ecliptic and after introducing Scorpius, Saturn was highlighted.

Another objective was to present any software amateur astronomers might use as an aide in our endeavors. The program I chose was Stellarium with the evening's sky displayed. Various features were discussed and other programs were mentioned. The folks seem to like the artistic characters of the constellations available with Stellarium as well as the night mode capability. GoogleSky was also mentioned as a downloadable phone application.

With few queries from the crowd, the viewing began. Saturn shone brightly at the head of Scorpius and we had some inkling of the Milky Way above our heads. But, alas, it was not to be. This was the weekend of the full moon and Luna did not disappoint. We first saw it through the trees, rising ominously over the eastern horizon. As we manned our stations, it rose over the pines in full glory. While the participants enjoyed viewing Saturn through both scopes and M7 through mine, many were blown away with the close up views of the lunar landscapes our scopes afforded them. Many a "Wow" and "Whoa!" were heard. The only damper on the event was the humidity. All the equipment got drenched before it was all over but a good time was had by all in the end.

I had prepared Star Charts and information handouts for everyone. I included resources for telescopes and software as well as the AAS website which topped the list. Also listed were major optics retailers and manufactures (Celestron, Meade, Orion, etc.) with websites. As the evening wound down, Russell and I were surprised to be presented each of us with a wooden token from the Council and a nice coin minted for the Powder Horn event. I am sure to hear from the group again in the near future with requests for another Star Gaze. We will try for a less than full moon next time. Here are a few photos from the event:



Well, that's about all I have for now. Please let me hear your comments, suggestions, etc. and feel free to send me any news, photos or other items of interest so I can include them in a future issue. Like I said earlier, this is a work in progress, so bear with me if I tinker with the format as time goes on. Most of all, I want it to be interesting and informative to the members.

Until next time, clear skies!