

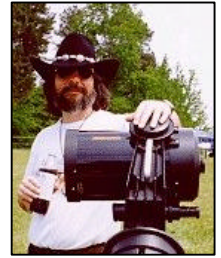
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Skywatch  
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Rod Mollise's

# Skywatch



*We Remember...*

## Big Southern Star Party Spectacular!

### DSRSG 2001!

Rod Mollise

Star parties are alike—yet different. Some are for real observing—hard-core observing. The Texas Star Party comes to mind in this category. At other gatherings, all night fuzzy



hunting takes a backseat to more Earthly, but still astronomical pursuits: meeting old friends, talking

over the current state of amateur astronomy, and buying or drooling over new gear. I place The Riverside Telescope Makers' Conference (RTMC) in this group. A few, rare star parties offer both types of pleasure, both good observing, and a chance to catch up with your many astro-friends and philosophize on the current the state of the art in star gazing. Our area's own Deep South Regional Star Gaze fits into this latter group. The viewing can be surprisingly good, but the chance to be with the many fellow observers I only see once or twice a year is also a big attraction.

Unfortunately, the chance to renew acquaintances with buddies has been about *all* DSRSG has had to offer over the past three years. Despite the growth of the nearby town of McComb, the skies can actually still be amazingly dark, but only when the weather really cooperates. The slightest bit of haze in the sky and the McComb light-dome grows to distressing proportions. Conditions over the last

several years have ranged from fair to, frankly, terrible, with 1999's edition of DSRSG being completely rained out (with the exception of a few sub-par hours on Wednesday night). In order for a gathering like DSRSG to remain healthy and growing, enthusiasm must

be alive in the participants. And, admittedly, after three poor years

our, excitement for "Deep South" was beginning to wane.

But *surely* things would be different for the first DSRSG of the new millennium! And, indeed, the weather reports over the week prior to the star party were the most promising we'd had in years. I tried not to get *too* over-confident. We residents of the Gulf Coast are only too well aware of how conditions can change on a moment's notice, with heavy, deep-sky-destroying clouds a possibility at *any* time or year. But, amazingly, conditions held. Dorothy and I departed for McComb, Mississippi and Percy Quin State Park, home of the DSRSG, on Thursday afternoon, October 18<sup>th</sup> under skies that were so beautifully, deeply blue that they were almost painful to look at. While Deep South currently runs from Wednesday through Saturday, we were unable to break-away from our jobs until Thursday. But as good as the skies looked and as favorable as the weather reports sounded, it appeared that we'd have plenty of hours under the Mississippi Pine Belt's dark skies.

Arriving at Percy Quin is always like coming home. But pulling onto the well-loved observing field, I felt a little disoriented. *Where the heck had all these people and scopes come from?* The field was fuller on a Thursday afternoon than it has been on a Saturday in recent years. We actually had to hunt around for a place to erect our tent canopy and C8, finally settling on a spot on the Southeast end of the field. While I was getting the Ultima C8 ready to go, Dorothy headed down to the cabins to get us set up there. One of the best features of Percy Quin, in

fact, is the comfortable facilities. In addition to clean, modern, heated/air-conditioned cabins, the site features an attractive cafeteria where the star party's meals are served by park staff. Since meals



don't begin 'til Friday, early-arrivers generally get together as a group and head for Mr. Whiskers (The Home of All You Can Eat Catfish), a nearby restaurant, before sundown. Much as I like catfish (particularly the all-you-can-eat bit), I didn't feel overly hungry, having had lunch before departing Mobile. Dorothy felt the same, so we resolved to stay on the field and get squared away for

field viewing needs. The weather reports were predicting clear skies for the weekend, but it was also obvious that humidity would be spiking up as the days wore on, so I elected to place my observing table under the tent canopy this time in hopes of keeping some moisture off, at least. The scope is well equipped with Kendrick Dew Heating Elements, so I didn't expect much trouble in that regard. I'd prepared an extensive and detailed observing list for DSRSG, but, in addition, I'd brought along Kepple and Sanner's *Night Sky Observer's Guide*, and the list I'd been running at the Peach State Star Gaze (and hadn't quite finished), so there'd be no lack of targets. With

everything arranged more-or-less in orderly fashion, we sat back and waited for blessed night.

And when it came, it didn't disappoint. The C8 seemed to cruise effortlessly from object to object. Combining the scope's good 50mm finder, a Telrad, and analog setting circles, it seemed as if no object could escape our grasp. Even



what would obviously be a long night of viewing. In addition to my beloved Celestron Ultima 8, I'd brought along Snoopy, my little Meade ETX 60 to serve our wide-

the notorious **Cocoon Nebula**, IC 5146, was visible (dimly!) in a 2" 38mm Plossl. What were the real beauties of the evening? My favorite was probably the pair NGC 6939 and NGC 6946, a beautiful, compact open cluster, and a detailed near-face-on galaxy respectively. The location of these two, fairly far North in Cepheus, means they're not overly well-known amongst deep sky observers, but what a treat they are! The major attraction is that they're only 2/3 degree apart and can be had in the same field with a widefield eyepiece. The galaxy in particular was a pleasant surprise. At 160x it began



to give up patchy detail suggesting spiral arms. The other big hit with me was the giant planetary nebula, NGC 7293, the Helix Nebula in Aquarius. While it looked great in the C8, it was, believe it or not, astounding in the ETX 60! Equipping the little scope with a 26mm Plossl and an OIII filter allowed it to show the nebula with lots of dark space around it, making for an unbelievable sight. I kept going after objects, really hitting it hard, until nearly 4am, when fatigue finally dictated that I shut things down, drink a quick toast to the bewilderingly beautiful night sky, and get some shut-eye.

Dorothy and I got plenty of sleep, but there was still lots of time to spend on the field Friday during the daytime, talking to friends, browsing the wares of DSRSG's sole vendor (Rex's Astrostuff) and touring the field looking at the many scopes.

Talks and demonstrations are a major part of most star parties. But programs haven't ever really caught on at DSRSG. This year Barry Simon, the star party's chief cook and bottle washer, decided to try a new approach: workshops held on the observing field. I'd seen this work very well at Peach State and enthusiastically supported Barry's idea, volunteering to hold a workshop myself: "The Anatomy of a Schmidt Cassegrain Telescope." Despite a Sun which had grown increasingly hot as the afternoon wore on, and some confusion over where my workshop would be held, it went quite well, with me using my Ultima 8 as a demonstrator and answering many questions from attendees. Following Supper (meals were, as always, adequate, if not quite as high in quality as they have been over the last three years or so), it

was time to get ready for the main event again: the endless night sky.

Friday night was nearly as good as Thursday, but the dew was admittedly heavier. The Kendrick kept my optics bone dry, but by 1am the C8's tube was literally "raining"! I continued to work my observing list, which was composed mainly of new objects. But that didn't mean I didn't visit a few old friends under these good skies. The Veil Nebula was, as always, intensely beautiful. The C8 and I toured up and down the filigreed loop of the Bridal Veil, glorying in every wisp! I didn't ignore my little ETX, either. I used it to show the North America Nebula (NGC 7000) to a number of fellow observers who'd never seen it before. Surprisingly, a small widefield scope shows of the North America better than some large instruments. It takes something like the ETX60 to put enough dark sky



around this huge nebula to make it recognizable.

And so it went hour after hour until the new day was almost upon us. I was tired and happy, but also a little weary. It was, more than anything else, the heavy dew that seemed to sap the energy from me. By the time I shut down in the early hours, everything was sopping wet.

Saturday, the last day of DSRSG 2001, dawned promisingly, but scattered clouds caused some alarm as the day went on. Actually, we needn't have worried, as they all dispersed by sundown. What didn't disperse was the dew, which was, if anything, heavier than the night before. Luckily for me, extra help was at hand in the form of a prototype product being developed by fellow SCT-fancier Ron Keating. Ron has developed a replacement controller for use with the Kendrick heating elements, which uses a temperature sensor to apply heat to the scope rather than the Kendrick controller's simple timed-on-off scheme. With the Kendrick, the elements stay on longer before cycling off as you advance the heater control. This works alright, but using an actual temperature sensor as Ron has done (it fits under the corrector heating element) is much more efficient and increases battery life. All I know is that Ron's controller kept my scope going during what was some of the dampest observing in memory!

I had a lot of fun Saturday night. My list was basically finished with the exception of a few Southwestern Objects I hadn't been able to catch before they headed into the tree line. So I spent some time both looking at showpieces and hunting "impossible" objects. I also enjoyed superb views through my friend and observing companion Pat Rochford's mighty 24" dob. If the Veil looked *wonderful* in my C8...it was **mind-blowing** in Pat's scope!

Despite a wonderful evening, I must report that one of the few problems with DSRSG really manifested itself Saturday night. Over the years, DSRSG policy has allowed observers to remove cars from the field during three 15 minute windows

beginning at 9pm, 11pm and 1am. If folks would follow the rules, this would not be a big problem. But the 15 minutes often stretches to 45 minutes. And though the regulations state that only parking lights may be used, some people always wind up turning on the headlights or, dangerously, trying to drive off the field with no lights at all! Barry has just announced that this practice of removing vehicles from the field will be completely discontinued, with the access road chained off. While this will create a small hardship for the people who follow the rules scrupulously, I think this is a needed change. As Barry has pointed out, there is no other major star party (and DSRSG is certainly becoming "major") that allows driving off observing fields after dark.

The final morning of any star party is always a little depressing for me. But, strangely enough, I felt peaceful, happy, and just plain worn-out rather than sad on Sunday. Maybe because I had finally got my fill of observing (almost, anyway) at a DSRSG! This was a *great* one, long to be remembered. But I'm already looking forward to making my way back to storied Percy Quin again for DSRSG 2002!

## Peach State Star Gaze 2001 (PSSG)

**Rod Mollise**

In the last several years, Georgia's Peach State Star Gaze, sponsored by the Atlanta Astronomy Club, has become one of my favorite star parties. And not just because it's a relatively easy and comfortable drive for me (it's located near Jackson, Georgia, about, oh, 70 miles south of Atlanta, and most of the trip from Mobile is via I-65 and I-85). It's just a well-done affair thanks to



Ken Poshedly (I've known Ken for quite a few years, now) and the PSSG staff.

This year's Peach State was to be held September 13-16, and, with the dreadful events of September 11, I was suddenly unsure about going this year, though I'd registered months previously and had been really looking forward to the outing. After all, I do work in the defense industry. But, actually, it turned out that we really weren't needed at work while security was being revamped. *So off to PSSG I went.*

I had planned on leaving VERY early Thursday morning, but hadn't had a chance to pack Wednesday afternoon. I was just too tired to face gathering everything up after teaching my Wednesday evening astronomy lab at the University of South Alabama. So, I got up about 5am on Thursday, packed everything (the Ultima 8 lives downstairs, so all I had to do was carry her to the car) I could think of, and hit the road at 7:30am. I was by myself this time, since my dear wife and usual star party companion Dorothy's very demanding schedule kept her from attending this year.

I spent the first couple of hours of the drive up I-65 listening to NPR's news coverage of the week's events. But I finally reached the point where I couldn't bear any more, and started listening to a book-on-tape I'd checked out of the library, *Newton: The Last Sorcerer*, a biography of Isaac Newton (natch) on 10 cassettes. Recommended. I

reached Montgomery in due time, stopping at Stuckey's for a hamburger and onion rings (yes, it was only 9:30am, but that's a tradition with me) before cutting over to I-85 for the run into Georgia. I was at my exit, Newnan, before long, found Georgia Hwy 16 without a problem, and was pulling into Indian Springs State Park by 1pm.

The site of PSSG, Indian Springs, has some pluses and minuses. On the plus side of the ledger, the facilities are very, very good: a large meeting/dining hall, clean cabins, a nice separate building for vendors, access to several area restaurants and a decent football-field-sized observing field. Minuses? At less than 100 miles from the Atlanta Metro Area, the light dome from that megalopolis is unmistakable.

This is not as bad as you would think, however--it's in a relatively uninteresting part of the sky, the Northwest, and it peters out at about 25-30 degrees. The rest of the sky, particularly the East, is quite good. While the observing field is nice, there's only *one* field, and with the attendance at the 250 mark, space is at a PREMIUM.

Indeed, despite arriving at 1pm, the appointed time for the field to open, I really had to hunt around for a spot, finally settling for a place on the southwest edge of the field. This denied me access to the sky's southern Summer wonders, but had the benefit of giving me a little shade along the tree-line to provide shelter from the still-intense Georgia Sun!

I unpacked, set-up the C8 and got myself settled into the cabin. I had finished everything I needed to do by 4pm, and tried to amuse myself while waiting the several slow hours for dark to come. I spent most of the time walking around the field, hunting up friends from the Atlanta Astronomy Club (AAC), meeting some SCT-User mailing list members in



person for the first time, and admiring the many and varied



telescopes.

While I didn't see much new (no NS11s, no LX-90s), one thing was clear: SCTs are making a huge comeback. At one time they were becoming an endangered species at star parties, being visibly outnumbered by truss tube dobbs and refractors. There were still many bigdobs on the field, but there were *many* more SCTs, and the once-fashionable high-end refractors appeared to be a vanishing species!

What do you do for **food** at PSSG, a subject near and dear to Rod's heart, as many of you know? Well, there are hotdogs and hamburgers on sale by the Atlanta Astronomy Club's "Ladies of the Night" group (they donated the money they collected to the Red Cross this time, for obvious reasons), and there are numerous area restaurants, but on this first night, I just dined on junk food I'd brought along.

Early afternoon was enlivened by a cell-phone call I received from Pat Rochford informing me of the announcement of the forthcoming Meade LX200 GPS.

Soon enough it WAS dark, and what a darkness! No, the Indian Springs site is not perfect, but it was very good on this evening! The Milky Way was bright and prominent, for

sure. What did I look at? Well, I had a fairly extensive list I'd brought, and there was the excellent "Peach Fuzzies" list done by Rich Jakiel, but I was tired enough that I spent Thursday night largely on showpiece stuff. My best memory of that night is of M31.

It had been a long time since I'd really spent much quality time with this monster galaxy. I used a variety of magnifications to tease out details like the dark lanes near the nucleus, NGC 206 (the great cloud of giant stars in one arm), and G1, the fizzle-fuzz ball that is the brightest (I believe) of M31's globular clusters.

Dew was *somewhat* heavy on this evening, even for this part of the country, but my Kendrick System dealt with it easily enough. I toured the sky for most of the night, revisiting many old friends, but by 2:30 - 3am, I was definitely feeling the strain after having arisen at 5 the previous morning. The sky, while still OK, seemed to be hazing over, too. I sat in my lawn chair, Dixie Cup of Rebel Yell in my hand, and ruminated upon the strange constellations of Autumn, now at their zenith, and the soon to be dominant Winter majesty in the East.

By the time I awoke on Friday (about 10am), the sky was clouding over. I tried not to think of that, and headed over to the meeting hall

for the day's talks. Following hamburgers, hotdogs and chips, things got underway. This year's presentations were, without exception, excellent, but the two that stood out were Rich Jakiel's talk on the history of deep sky observing and Art Russell's program on star hopping. As many of you know, the featured speaker for PSSG 2001 was to have been celestial cartographer extraordinaire, Wil Tirion. The world situation, of course, made it completely impossible for him to fly in from Europe.

At supertime, friends *insisted* that I give the Fresh Aire Barbeque, which is just down the road from the park, a try. I don't know if the barbeque there is *really* the "best in the south" as they claim, but it was DARNED good.

When evening arrived, I was hopeful. There were still clouds everywhere, but the sky appeared to be clearing, and there were many clear patches along the meridian. I did at least a dozen objects in the Cygnus area, including a couple of nice planetaries from Rich's list that were new to me. By about 11pm, the last of these sucker holes had closed, though. I gave it until 2, but nothing changed or appeared ready to change. Wouldn't you know it, though? The sky cleared rapidly in



the wee hours, and by 3:30am it was as clear as the proverbial bell. Unfortunately, I was snoozing *heavily* by this time.

Saturday the sky turned that beautiful shade of blue that spells coming deep sky heaven! And there was COOL weather. No more roasting on the field or in the auditorium. More talks, more touring the field (I shot about 15 minutes of video with my camcorder, and I'll post some stills from this tape on my website as soon as I can), and, as always, more hopes of winning a prize at the giveaway. As usual, I didn't win a thing. The number of prizes did seem down this year. Perhaps some dealers and manufacturers are cutting back on donations due to the economy? The only vendor on site this time was Wolf Camera from Sarasota. There was a lot of nice gear on display, but my only purchase was an additional Kendrick heating element to add to my collection.

Walking out of the Vendor Hall, I was suddenly concerned about the sky. There were scudding clouds and high Cirrus evident! Apparently more of the leavings of the tropical storm that had deviled us on the previous evening! We all tried to keep our spirits up, buoyed by weather reports that insisted that the skies WOULD clear.

On this evening I dined at Bruckner's up on the Bucksnot Road (no, I'm not making this up). This is a combined restaurant and bluegrass/gospel music hall. Its chief claim to fame (other than having been visited by the erstwhile Donna Douglas, AKA Ellie Mae Clampet) is the way the food is *served*. You sit at a round table large enough for about a dozen diners. Food is placed on a huge lazy-susan mounted on the table. You turn it to bring the item of your choice to you. What do they have? Southern ONLY: fried chicken, barbeque meat, cornbread, and an assortment of vegetables all cooked

with pork fat (Emeril does say, "PORK FAT RULES!"). Quite familiar fare from Grandma's table for us Southern folk. A few transplanted northerners in attendance were rather *puzzled* by the cuisine, however!

Returning to PSSG, the clouds still lingered on. And lingered! But by 11pm, the wind sprang up and off they went revealing diamond-hard stars in their wake! This being the case, I pushed my Ultima 8 HARD. Doing things like the Crescent Nebula (NGC 6888), that are usually something of a challenge for an 8 inch telescope. I worked my own list and Rich's Peach Fuzzies, but was hindered on both lists by not being able to get to the far southern or western skies due to my position on the field.

As the night began to grow old, the stars of Winter made their presence known. Favorites? Other than my tour of the open clusters of Auriga, it was NGC 1023, the little galaxy in Perseus. At 300x in the C8 it was large, detailed, and gave a chilling reminder of the scope and depth of the universe when compared to the "friendly" open clusters! I kept going as long as I dared, considering the fact that I needed to hit the road the next morning as early as possible. By 4am I was in bed.

At 8:30am Sunday morning, I was packed and on the road, saying a somewhat bittersweet farewell to PSSG. Why bittersweet? Well, PSSG will go on, but not at Indian Springs. In quest of darker skies, the star party is being moved to the Georgia-Carolina border next year. I *hope* I'll make it back to Peach State next year, and certainly plan to, but with my fall schedule the way it is, the extra drive is a *little* bit daunting.

But whether or not I ever return to Peach State, I had a wonderful, wonderful time this year! To the Atlanta Astronomy Club a great, big THANK YOU for a wonderful weekend!

## The Nexstar 11

**Bob Berta**

*Celestron's new computerized-goto Nexstar 11 was undoubtedly this year's most awaited scope. But despite having been on the market for some time now, I hadn't seen any really in-depth reviews of this feature-laden instrument. Luckily, Bob Berta has contributed this excellent review to answer our questions...*

Hi Rod:

As Mr. SCT I thought you might be interested in my initial experiences with my new Celestron Nexstar 11" GPS. I got this with the idea of replacing my beloved 8" Celestar Deluxe Faststar down the road. The 8" is excellent and has been trouble free and gives great results image wise. Once the Faststar lens element comes out for the 11", I will most likely sell the 8".

The scope is very quiet, a welcome change from the Meade LX200s in my club and my kids' ETX 60 refractor. Goto is deadly accurate. Once I do a two point star align the scope will place any object in the exact same spot in my 21mm eyepiece every time--within the central 1/3of the FOV. Pretty amazing.

Being a tech-oriented person, I couldn't resist pulling-off the covers to see what was "under the hood". I was quite impressed: heavy metal casting inside with beefy motors, worm gears on both axes with big ring gears. The various worm gears, mounting blocks, etc. are chunky aluminum that is very nicely machined--really precision machine work. The ball bearing in the DEC axis is a big single unit on each side. The RA axis has a very large raceway, and instead of a giant ball bearing, it has several smaller roller bearings that travel around this track, a neat way to get smooth action without resorting to one huge, heavy ball bearing.



The big question: is the GPS useful? Well, sort of. In the ALT AZ mode it does find north, get the date, set the time to the exact second, and get the Long/Lat coordinates down to the second. It then auto-slews to a bright star present that night and time. You then use the controller to center the star exactly, and hit align. It slews to a second star and you do the same thing. Very quick and once done, it never missed an object all night long--even though I set the alignment around 8:30pm and didn't shut it down until 3:30am.

It has 9 slew speeds, and the faster speeds are synced for looking through the finder scope or a Telrad. Once you do the rough align and get the alignment star in the FOV of the finder scope/Telrad and hit enter it switches to a slower slew speed and also changes the direction of the keys to work with the view when looking through the telescope itself. As far as the GPS, it only works for alignment in the ALTAZ mode, but does get all the other information like date/time/LONG/LAT in all other modes. If you can find Polaris you really don't need the GPS. In my opinion it is just a gee-whiz type of thing. When I mounted my scope on my extra heavy-duty wedge I found that you use a completely different alignment method. Basically, it finds level, but once there you need to use the slew motors to move the

scope to a known bright star and align it. Same thing for a second star. Once done it, again, is deadly accurate. Unless you are going to be photographing, it makes more sense and is faster in setup to just use the scope in ALT-AZ mode.

I like the ability to update the scope's database (make corrections. I already found two minor errors) via the Internet and update the BIOS as new features come out or bugs are found.

Other than that, my real concern was on the quality of the optics. My existing 8" has been noted as possessing a particularly good set of optics. I was really concerned that I would get a scope that would have poorer optics. But that didn't happen. In fact, using Suiter's testing methods, the scope has tested to have *excellent* optics--among the best I have tested on any SCT. The Spherical aberration test shows a null result, neither under nor over correction, which is unusual for a SCT. There is no roughness, no zones, no turned-down edge, no spikes, and no astigmatism. This one is a real keeper!! I also noted the image shift is almost non-existent, although a friend's new Nexstar 11 does show some more in this regard. On my 8" I was able to adjust out nearly all of it so suspect the same trick will work for the 11" SCTs.

The bigger scope does take a while to cool down, longer than the 8". However, I found that if I used my Kendrick dew heater it stabilized a lot faster; maybe 45 minutes on the outside. It also gave better star tests with it. Without it I had a bit of constant heat spikes; with the dew heater it quickly went to perfectly round and symmetrical out-of-focus images.

The image is sharp and contrasty. Doubles were very cleanly split. I did an A/B test between the scope and my 6" APO refractor and the results were interesting. The 11" did go a

little deeper but not dramatically so. The image was a little less contrasty, but again it was very slight. If anything, the bigger aperture compensated. Resolution-wise the big refractor was matched pretty much by the 11". Between the two I would say it was close: the 11" went a little deeper, and the 6" had a more contrasty image which showed up as more detailed gray-scale in nebula.

The final "test" was whether I could handle it by myself. While a big SCT has always appealed to me, the weight has put me off. I needed a scope that I could transport to various star parties and my backyard that wouldn't always require assistance to setup. The 12" Meade SCT my friend has was far beyond something I thought I could handle by myself. The 11" weighs 62 pounds for the tube and fork and about 24 pounds for the tripod. I had no problem putting the scope on the tripod; in fact it is easier to put it on the wedge than in ALTAZ mode due to the problem of lining up the centering pin. Just don't try to do this with the tripod extended. Put the scope on the mount and then pull out the legs if you need more height. I previously had tried the C-11 on the CI700 mount and that was an impossible task for a single person...you have to lift that scope up a LOOONNNGGGG ways. The fork mount allows the scope to be mounted a lot lower. The mount is very solid too--no vibration problems in either ALTAZ or wedge mount. A good thump is damped out in less than a second. The scope comes with a set of Vibration Reducing Pads, and as you know, I am a big proponent of these. They certainly are a good addition to the Nexstar.

Anyway, the NS11 has proven to be a great scope and trouble free other than that one of the buttons on the hand controller light doesn't work...Celestron will exchange it.



# My Back Pages



## Club Notes

### MAS

An important change has been made: Mobile Astronomical Society Meetings, formerly held on the first Wednesday of each month, will now be held on the first THURSDAY of each month. We feel this will cause fewer conflicts with other commitments and should allow members to attend club meetings on a more regular, continuing basis.

I think the wisdom of this decision was borne out at the MAS November meeting, which was held on November 1<sup>st</sup>. We had the largest number of members in attendance that I can remember in quite some time. We also saw some faces that hadn't been seen around the old ESC many a Moon.

As far as meeting business went, the meeting was conducted by Rod Mollise in the absence of Pat Rochford, who was unable to attend due to being in hospital. We resolved to nominate and elect officers at the next (December 6<sup>th</sup>) meeting. Dianne proposed that we hold a Star Party in Citronelle for elementary students in that location. She is to firm-up details and report back. Finally, we've set up an ESC Leonid's star party (members ONLY) to be held on the grounds of the ESC on Saturday evening, November 17. If you need further details on any of this, please email me at [RMOLLISE@aol.com](mailto:RMOLLISE@aol.com).

### SCT-USER

The SCT-User Mailing list continues to grow and thrive. Now approaching the ripe old age of three, membership is within' spittin' distance of 2000. If you'd like to participate, just go here:

[<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sct-user>](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sct-user)

*EEEEYUCK...WHAT UGLY COSTUMES!...I KNOW, YOU BOYS ARE DRESSED AS BEAVIS AND BUTT-HEAD!*

*Huh-huh, huh-huh...Uhhhhhhh...these aren't costumes, DILLWEED.*

*Yeh-yeh, heh-heh...we want treats..TREATS!*

*The upshot of this exchange? When the **two odd ones** had left, I found an hermetically sealed mayo jar on the front porch of Chaos Manor South...one containing yet another DOSE of...*

## RUMOURS

*What is Meade up to these days? When we asked this question last time, no one knew. Now we *do* know: The LX200 GPS. Yes, the venerable LX200 is *history*, replaced by a scope that is similar to, but claims to improve upon, the Celestron Nexstar 11 and 8. In addition to all the computer frippery, the **LX200 GPS** (in 7, 8, 10, and 12 inch apertures) features a lockable primary mirror and a built in Crayford style focuser for 0 image shift! It looks great! Will it *be* great? Only time will tell. Stay tuned.*

*But Meade didn't stop there. In addition, Meade is introducing two lines of "LXD55" scopes. These are mounted on what appears to be an upgraded GEM not unlike the previous LXD500 mount. But this time with goto via an included Autostar computer. And the buyer can choose between either a **Schmidt Newtonian** (in 6, 8 and 10 inch apertures) or an achromatic refractor (in 5 and 6 inch apertures). Both the refractors and SNTs are VERY reasonably priced. If they do what they're supposed to, either or both of the LXD55 series could be very, VERY big.*

*What ELSE Meade up to? **They've sued Celestron.** Over the rights to the goto system Celestron is using in their*



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Nexstar scopes. Apparently Meade's suit claims that Celestron is using technology—including a distributed processing system—that Meade developed. Should we be alarmed at this turn of events? No. Businesses sue each other all the time. Partially, it's because of current patent law. Suffice to say that these days if a company doesn't rigorously defend its patents it—for all practical intents and purposes—loses them. What's the worst that could happen to Celestron? Probably that they'd have to pay a licensing fee.

What's Celestron doing with itself, suit or no suit? They've just released the **Nexstar 8 GPS**. This is not intended to replace the Nexstar 8. It's a more advanced scope that instead replaces the former top of the line 8, the **Celestar Deluxe**. What's it like? Very much like a shrunken NS 11 (see the review in this month's issue). GPS, double tine fork, and capability for extended imaging (PPEC).

**What else is goin' down?** If you think the optics on your old SCT aren't up to snuff, there may be a cure! **Aries Optics**, the developers of the **Chromacorr** corrector for achromatic refractors, are considering developing a lens element that will remove spherical aberration from SCTs. This unit would work like a barlow and would be reasonably priced. According to Yuri at Aries (Russia), if there's sufficient interest, they will produce this device shortly! If you want more details, hang out on the SCT-User mailing list. Yuri is a member and will be doing most of his testing/beta testing in cooperation with list members.

All for now!



## The Anonymous Astronomer

