Amateur Astronomy WITH AN ATTITUDE *from Chaos Manor South!*

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"A Newsletter for the Truly Outbound!"

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Skywatch
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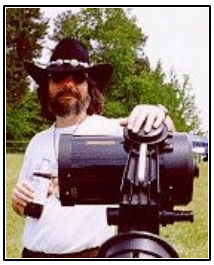
Rod Mollise's

Skywatch



Peach State Star Gaze IX!

Georgia's Peach of a Star Party is Transplanted to New Soil…

Uncle Rod

Is the only enemy of "good enough" *really* "more better?" Can you improve on an already successful star party—especially when "improving" involves moving it to a new location hundreds of miles away—without alienating your original audience and smashin' up the whole thing? When Peach State Star Gaze organizers announced that PSSG would be moving to a new location for 2002 (this year's edition was scheduled for October 3-6), that's what I wondered. Peach state, now in its 9th year, has grown into a big success. Why move? Why spoil a good thing?

Why? A couple of reasons. The original PSSG site at Indian Springs State Park near Jackson, Georgia featured good facilities—nice cabins and a large well-appointed meeting/dining hall—but there were some liabilities. Indian Springs State Park is close enough to Atlanta for that megalopolis' light-dome to be fairly prominent. I never found this to be too disturbing, as most of the bright sky is to the relatively uninteresting Northwest, but, no, the skies at the park were not pristine. The skies weren't the only problem, however; the observing field was even more problematical. As the star party's attendance had inched up toward 300, it had become evident that the Indian Springs site had been outgrown. The single observing field was full in both 2000 and 2001, with some observers being forced to set up in the less desirable areas outside the vendor building and the meeting hall. I hated to leave familiar, comfortable Indian Springs, but trusted that the site picked by PSSG organizer Ken Poshedly and his colleagues--the Whitewater Express camp in the foothills of the Smoky Mountains just over the Tennessee border--would be a good one.

I had been a little worried about the longer drive, but the journey from Mobile to Ducktown, Tennessee turned out to be a relatively easy one. I65 to Montgomery, I85/75 to and through Atlanta, and I575 almost to the site. The move to Whitewater Express did add a couple of hours to my journey, but since virtually all of it was on four-lane highway, it was pretty painless—even Georgia 5 is four-laned these days. I brought along a nice, long book-on-tape, a thriller by Peter Straub, and that made the trip bearable and even enjoyable.

Finding the site? It was easy enough to locate, though the final approach was a little

different from what I'd imagined from the directions I had—at one point I passed a huge sign that announced, "Welcome to North Carolina," and being the perceptive individual that I am, I decided I must have taken a wrong turn! I got going in the right direction again and arrived at the camp/site without more trouble.

I must admit that I was impressed—very impressed--from the beginning. Whitewater Express is a private adventure camp that features, as the name implies, whitewater rafting in the nearby Ocoee river. During the off-season the camp is a popular retreat for church groups and other organizations. The site covers a considerable area, and, in addition to a dining hall, a meeting hall, and cabins, it offers an observing field easily twice the size of the old one at Indian Springs. To put it simply: this is a *beautiful* spot, bordered by the abruptly rising Smokies. The observing field, dotted with dozens of scopes and ringed by mountains, managed to look familiar and exotic at the same time.

The *ambience* sounds good, but how are the *facilities*? After finding a spot on the field and getting my Nexstar 11 and tent canopy set-up, I headed to my assigned cabin to check things out. The cabins are clean, but are a tad small considering the number of beds in each. Well, not really "beds." The walls are lined with wooden bunks three tiers high equipped with mattresses that might charitably be described as "a wee-bit thin." Certainly bearable for a day or three, but not as nice as the real beds at Indian Springs. Also, the cabins do not feature bathrooms/showers. In my case, this was not a problem, as the dining hall just across the street from me offered decent facilities. Those folks who had to use the freestanding showers/bathrooms due to the locations of their cabins did mention to me the *rustic* nature of this bathroom, though. Dining? Simple but decent fare in an open-air dining hall (pleasant surroundings, but I wonder what happens when things get chilly up in the mountains—as they can do even in September?). Some folks will invariably complain bitterly about star party food, but I found it *more* than adequate, average but edible institutional fare. For those wanting something better, the town of Copperhill Tennessee is close at hand and offers considerable tourist amenities.

But the real key to a winning star party is the condition of the **skies**. How do I rate the Whitewater heavens? I give 'em a *conditional* pass. Most areas of the sky were dark, but there was a noticeable light-dome from Chattanooga. This was undoubtedly made worse by the high humidity and hazy conditions we had to endure throughout the star party. But this was the result of nasty Hurricane Lili coming ashore over Louisiana and spreading her tendrils as far as Tennessee by the time as PSSG got underway, not normal conditions.

All three nights of PSSG featured at least some observing, but I had to work

around cloudy patches and take breaks off and on on all three evenings. The weather was not perfect, no, but I was nevertheless able to make *detailed* observations of about 50 deep sky objects over the course of the event. I rate this site as potentially considerably better than that of McComb, Mississippi, site of the Deep South Regional Star Gaze (but not quite equal to the really dark skies of Chiefland, Florida). This is because of the higher elevation and the generally less developed nature of the Ducktown/Copperhill area. The elusive nebulae strung throughout Cassiopeia and Cepheus, for example, showed up far better at Whitewater than I have ever seen them at DSRSG's Percy Quin. I was happy with the obsering time I got, and soldiered on with my C11 until clouds or dawn sent us to bed.

Observing is cool, but how about *buying*? There's no use denying that one of my favorite pleasures at any star party is the opportunity to purchase astro-goodies in person rather than through the mail, since we have no equipment dealers in Mobile, Alabama (!). The vendors' hall at Whitewater was well-placed and large enough to accommodate Wolf Camera (Chuck Pisa), Ken's Rings and Things (Ken Dauzat), Astronomy to Go, and a couple of other entrepreneurs. I was particularly happy to see Chuck's well-stocked tables, as he had the Lumicon 2" UHC filter I'd been wanting (I considered this a critical buy, as Lumicon has recently gone out of business, and there may not be any more of the highly regarded Lumicon filters—at least not for a while). I was very surprised to see that the Dauzats had made it to PSSG with a good selection of their custom-made telescope rings and accessories—their Louisiana home had been smack in the path of the Lili! After sundown, the vendors' hall offered plenty of the hot coffee and sugar-laden snack items essential for late-night/early morning observing runs .

Observing conditions are critical to a star party's success, and buying stuff is a lot of fun. But good speakers have always added a lot to my enjoyment of an event. PSSG has had, since its inception, a reputation for providing world-class guests. This year, though, Ken and company really outdid themselves. The featured speaker was David Levy. Need I say more? David spoke both Friday and Saturday and delivered his usual eloquent, moving presentation. The other principal guest, Wil Tirion, the cartographer/uranographer who's given us *Sky Atlas 2000*, *Uranometria 2000*, and a host of other well-loved sky maps, was also on-site. Wil had been scheduled to appear at last year's Peach State (9/13/2001), but the events of 9/11 prevented him from flying in from Europe. Mr. Tirion more than made up for our disappointment last year with a pair of interesting talks that covered the evolution of the sky chart and—most interesting to me—the process he uses to design and produce his wonderful sky maps. Several other very good presentations were made throughout the star party, including one by Rich Jakiel with his usual excellent program on deep sky fuzzy-hunting.

The only irritant concerning the speakers was the size of the hall. It's small, and trying to pack over a hundred people into it for the major presentations was a bit hopeless. Some stood at the back. Some stood outside the windows. Some gave up and wandered off. There was no air-conditioning, so even in the relatively mild mountain weather the room quickly became a bit warm.

There's one ultimate way to determine whether a star party has been a success with me. It's *not* the speakers. *Or* the vendors. *Or* even the quality of the skies. It's: *"Am I anxious to come back next year?*" In the case of the "new" Peach State, the answer is a resounding Y-E-S. I very much look forward to PSSG X. It seems that In the case of PSSG you *can* apply the More Better without destroying the Good Enough.

A Wedge of Wood?

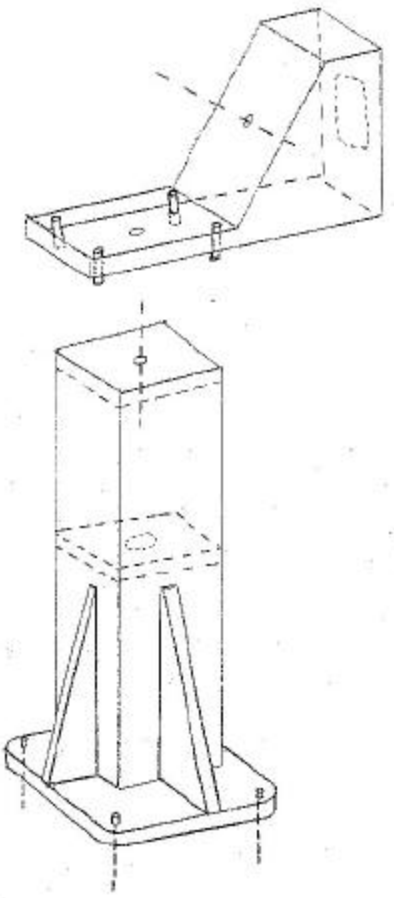
Pat Rochford

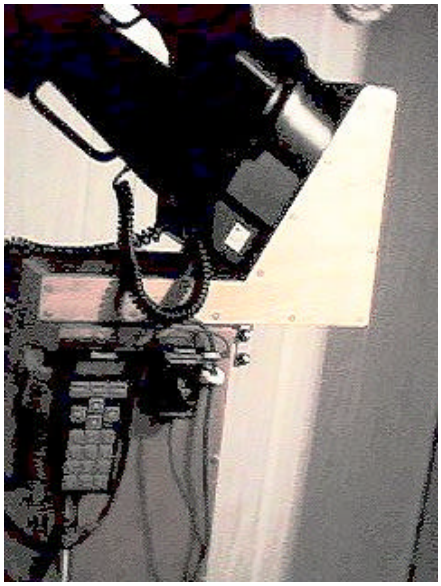
Along with DNA for blue eyes and brown hair, it would appear that my father passed on the "desire to build things gene" as well. This particular "gene" began to surface in early grade school with the building of model airplanes, but in recent years has manifested itself in the construction of *wooden astronomical things*.

Wood has proven its use for several years in the construction of very large, portable and nearly vibration-free Dobsonian telescopes. This has certainly been true for me, as my home built 24" Dob is easily set-up by yours truly, and damps out in under a second (when giving a good thump to the upper cage assembly).

I was so impressed with the characteristics and affordability of plywood (in the Dob), that I decided to try using it in another application: as a permanent pier and wedge for the 8" LX200 I purchased to use in my search for supernovae.

Now, before I go any further, I should explain that this set up is intended to be a permanent fixture, as the design will not lend itself to portability. But for someone intending to build an observatory it is quite cost effective, as it allows more money to be put into the observatory structure itself.





Before I ever began building the pier, I poured a concrete footing to place for it. The height of the footing is dependant upon how high the floor of the observatory will be above ground. In the case of my observatory, the floor is a few feet above ground so I actually built-up from the footing with concrete blocks and then capped it off with a few inches of cement. Four ½ bolts were set into the cap for use as anchors for the pier. (keep in mind that no part of the observatory floor should ever come in contact with the footing or pier.)

The next step was to purchase the wood. I like the look of birch plywood with a golden oak stain, hence most of my projects use this material. The pier (see diagram) is built with ½ plywood, and all pieces are glued and screwed. (¾ may be easier to find--for some reason Home Depot does not carry ½). The base plate, gussets, middle and upper plates are double thickness, using good waterproof glue. The dimensions of my pier are as follows: base, 20" x 20" (concrete footing, by the way, is 24" x 24"); height, 40"; width, 9" (square) and gussets, 18" x 5 ½ There is a 4 ½ square opening near the top of one side of the pier to allow tightening/loosening of the drive base mounting bolt. This size works well for an 8" LX200. Scale accordingly to your instrument.

When building the pier, I was fairly certain that vibration would not be an issue, based on the fact that its construction is very similar to the rocker and mirror boxes of my Dobsonian. However, just to cover all the bases, I cut a 3" hole in the middle plate to allow the pier to be filled with sand. It turned out not to be necessary at all.

The wedge is a bit more complicated, but not a lot. I decided to use ¾ plywood in

this case, as I wanted it to be as stiff as possible. Since this was going to be a permanent installation and would only require a small amount of adjustment in altitude (a degree or two), I cut the side plates for my location, which is 30 degrees north. Adjustment up and down is accomplished by four 7/16" bolts (two north and two south of the center mounting bolt) turning through t-nuts mounted in the base plate. Leaving just enough slack in the center-mounting bolt, we (myself and astro buddy Rod Mollise) turned the wedge a little in azimuth, elevated it slightly in latitude and began to drift align the LX200. An hour or so later, no drift could be detected over ten minutes of tracking time so we tightened down the center bolt. Now a one minute, unguided exposure with the CCD camera shows structure in galaxies and nice round star images. Just exactly what I had hoped for. (The dimensions of the wedge by the way are 18" long, 8" wide and 12" high. Again, this works well for an 8" SCT, but should be sized accordingly to your instrument.)

So far there has been no detectable change in the alignment due to shrinkage or expansion of the wood. I suppose that after some period of time it may become necessary to make a small adjustment, but for the money saved (compared to a custom-made steel pier and Meade wedge) I'll take that chance. For now it works quite well and doesn't look half bad either. I'll report back in about a year with an update.

Which Eye Do You Look Through?

Eye Dominance in Astronomy

Angelos Kiosklis

Summary of Findings

A sample of 390 amateur astronomers from all over our planet revealed the following:

Visual observation is primarily done with the use of the right eye (at a 60.8% rate) as only one out of three amateur astronomers has a natural tendency to use their left eye. [For comparative purposes, more than four out of five astronomers (82.8%) from our statistical sample are right-handed, and accordingly less than one in five (17.2%) are left-handed].

Some 6.2% of our sample stated that they make use of either eye for visual observation. Astronomers who are indifferent when it comes to choosing an eye to place at the eyepiece, are almost invariably right-handed (5.9% of the total sample) with only one left-handed user (representing just 0.3% of the sample).

Analysis of Findings

The majority of amateur astronomers make systematic use of their right eye for visual observation, at an average 60.8% rate among all types of telescopes. Sub-groups of different types of telescopes produced only slight variability from this mean value, with the notable exception of ETX-Astro user whose natural tendency to use the right eye reached 80%. Among all users of their right eye, right-handed amateur astronomers account for an average 84.8% of the sample, the balance (15.2%) being the left-handed. But among right-handed users of Nexstar and ETX-Astro scopes, there is a much higher proportion (around 25%) of left-handed users who prefer to use their right eye for visual observation.

Amateur astronomers using their left eye for visual observation are right-handed at an average 76.7% rate, with left-handed users accounting for 23.3% of the sample. It is worth noting however that the percentage of left-handed astronomers preferring to use their left eye at the eyepiece is slightly higher among the large sub-group of Schmidt-Cass scopes.

Amateur astronomers who have no preference on using a particular eye are by far the smallest sub-group of the statistical sample, making up just 6.2% of the total. Users of either eye are almost exclusively right-handed, with only one such person being left-handed in the entire sample (0.3% of the total) who uses a Schmidt-Cass scope –but not an LX200 or Nexstar).

The above-mentioned findings indicate a clear preference of the right eye for visual observation purposes, standing at 53.7% for left-handed and 62.2% for right-handed astronomers. An interesting point is that left-eye preference is higher among left-

handed astronomers (23.3% on average), with a strong representation among refractor and Schmidt-Cass users.

The sample's ETX-Astro sub-group gives noticeably different results from other sub-groups, though its population of 30 is admittedly not very sound from a statistical point of view. ETX users tend to use their right eye at 80%, their left eye at 6.7% and are indifferent regarding the use of either eye at 13.3%. The percentage of right- and left-handedness does not differ significantly from the mean values found in other scope categories.

POINT TO NOTE

Even without complete awareness of the appropriateness of their action, many amateur astronomers are making systematic use of their so-called 'dominant' eye for observing faint objects while reserving their 'non-dominant' eye for use on very bright objects, like the Moon and major planets, thereby preserving their dominant eyes' dark adaptation.

The term 'dominant' eye refers to the eye that the brain subconsciously uses as the primary receptor for the analysis of images, reducing the role of the image received by the 'non-dominant' eye to the supply of secondary information needed to acquire a three-dimensional perspective.

The image formed in each eye is split equally between the brain's two lobes for the purpose of processing, the end result being that each lobe processes one of the two sides of the image. This image processing split between the brain's two lobes allows one-eyed persons to maintain full vision, albeit with a loss of perspective which cannot be fully compensated for by the brain's adaptive capabilities. It also permits to maintain the same 'qualitative' characteristics of vision (such as perception and resolution) at all times despite the fact that some aspects of overall vision are better processed in one of the two lobes. And this despite the fact that 'dominance' of either brain lobe (and consequently the overall processing capacity of some aspects of the basic senses) is shifting between the two lobes every approximately 90 minutes, giving rise to different reactions to the same stimuli at different times.

Statistical Sample
(See Figure 1)

Characteristics

The statistical sample comprises a population of 390 amateur astronomers from around the globe, but particularly heavy on astronomers from the U.S., participating in Yahoo!Groups with the following focus: Refractor (78), Dobsonian (73), ETX (30), Schmidt-Cassegrain (209). Schmidt-Cass scopes have a large representation due to their popularity in the U.S.A. and their active use of the respective Yahoo!Group. Those ranks include 72 users of LX200 and 52 users of Nexstar scopes.

The data were acquired through similarly-titled open polls in each discussion group from mid-December 2001 to early April 2002. Contributing members did not have access to the provisional results.

The Great Goto Wars!

Uncle Rod

Don't *need* goto? Don't *need* one of those new-fangled telescopes that points itself at objects in the sky? Well, surely not. It's a luxury, no doubt about it. I will admit that at this point in my life I REALLY *like* luxuries, though. **Rebel Yell** is fine, but now that I can afford the expensive scotch, I do indulge in it once in a while! But there is no doubt that goto IS a luxury and not a necessity. You don't need goto. But is it--goto—Satan's tool to lure unsuspecting novice amateur astronomers to their doom and final damnation? *"No" to that as well.*

I'm beginning to think the debate over computer-pointed scopes is just getting started. There's obviously a lot of pent-up emotion on the subject; that's clear from what you see on the Internet—on s.a.a. and the Yahoo lists—every day. What I'm ALSO beginning to think is that it's the *choosing sides* that's harmful, not goto or lack thereof. Who remembers the Great Morse Code Wars?

OK, you guys and gals out there: how many of you are active or former **hams** (if you don't know what I'm talking about, you're excused for a moment)? Good. Now, think back to the Morse

code debate that went on for at least 20 years. Get the picture?

Alright, you non-hams can come back now. For the uninitiated, "ham radio," **amateur radio**, suffered from years and years of an ongoing debate over the value of Morse code. The code, or "CW" as it's also called, was, it was obvious, a dying form a communications from the time SSB ("single side band" an efficient voice communications mode) hit the ham scene in the 1960s. The new digital communications methods of the 80s were just the nail in the coffin. Dying as a practical or necessary mode of communications. But some hams insisted you couldn't *be* one without the code.

In some ways Amateur radio is a markedly different kind of pursuit from amateur astronomy despite both being "scientific hobbies." You have to pass a test and be licensed by the government to even *do* ham radio. The amateur tests during the height of the code wars involved varying levels of CW proficiency, and the traditionalists swore to keep the tests as they were: 5wpm for the new/young folks, 13wpm for the rabble, and a rather difficult 20 for the anointed.

Despite the differences imposed by licensing, though, the following should sound very familiar to today's amateur astronomers:

"REAL hams use CW. It's more efficient."

"I don't have time to learn the code, I just want to communicate!"

"CW encourages hams to build their own equipment."

"Learning this basic skill does you good. Look at the Technicians (class of license that required minimal Morse code facility), they are NOT really hams! They'll drop out of amateur radio after only a year or two. They did not have to *suffer* for their art."

"More hams drop out due to problems learning the code than any other cause. Learning the code teaches you nothing about electronics and radio."

"I only work CW, that's what I love, and everybody should feel just like I do."

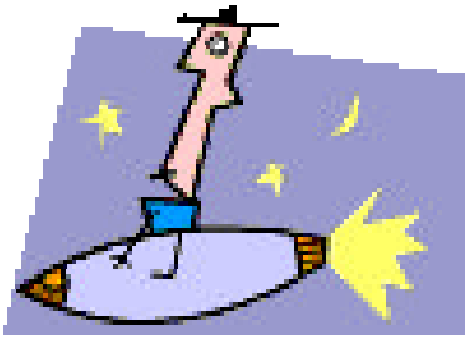
And on and on ad nauseum. If you've followed the exchanges in the telescope goto wars, I don't have to point-out that changing a word here and a word there in the above would make these little pearls of wisdom very much at home on sci.astro.amateur!

The point? All this debate *ever*, EVER did for ham radio was cause hurt feelings and a general exodus from the hobby by bright kids who were not interested in dah-dih-dah-dih/dih dah dah. The kids who might have contributed a lot. It also drove many CW-loving old-timers, who could have taught the novices a thing or two, off into self-imposed virtual ghettos. The whole thing did ham radio a LOT of harm, a TREMENDOUS AMOUNT OF HARM, and did not fade away until the FCC finally de-emphasized the Morse code in its licensing structure a few years ago, long after CW was extinct in the world of commercial radio.

We should take note and learn from what happened there. If you like goto, use it. If you don't like it, don't use it. But don't drag out a soap box. One thing that led me away from ham radio (though I still maintain my license and stay at a minimally active level) and toward an ever-deeper commitment to amateur **astronomy** was star-gazing's generally forward-looking and non-traditional nature. And its value on the lone individual who's got a good idea. The herd mentality has never ruled with amateurs (amateur astronomers), let's not get it started.

If you like your 20" DSCless dob, ENJOY IT. Offer the young woman set up next to you a look through the eyepiece, accept a look through *her* LX200 12, and...**ENJOY IT!**

...de AC4WY (who got his Extra Class Ham License a goodly while back when you had to do code at 20wpm!).



NASA's Space Place

What Space-age Inventions Have You Touched Today?

Exploring space is not easy. Space engineers and scientists have invented many new devices to make it safe and not too expensive to go into space. Some of the inventions are used to help humans live in space. Showers and toilets that work without gravity are examples of inventions used on the Space Shuttle and International Space Station. Other inventions are used on spacecraft going to Mars and beyond.

Many devices invented for space are also very useful right here on Earth. New inventions or new uses for things invented for space are referred to as "spinoffs." For example, special materials were developed for space suits to protect astronauts from the harsh environment of space. These same materials are used in the special clothing that fire fighters wear to protect them from the harsh environment of a building on fire! Cordless tools were invented for the Apollo astronauts to use on the moon. Cordless drills and vacuum cleaners are examples of spinoffs from these inventions.

Doctors can now take amazing images of people's insides to find out exactly what is wrong with them. These images are possible because of technology developed to process pictures from space. And what about the TV satellite dish you may have on your roof? Space program technology helped to make those pictures and sounds crisp and clear.

If it weren't for the space program, some of these incredible inventions might never have come about! Find out about more space program spinoffs at http://www.sti.nasa.gov/tto/ and share the fun of spinoffs with kids by playing the Memory Game at The Space Place, http://spaceplace.nasa.gov/spinoffs.htm/ .

This article was provided by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, managed by Caltech in Pasadena.

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IMAGE CAPTION:

This computer game joystick, made by ThrustMaster, uses technology developed for a Space shuttle hand controller. The design for these toy gliders (AeroNerf Gliders), made by Hasbro, Inc., benefited from NASA wind tunnel and aerodynamic research

STATISTICAL SAMPLE ANALYTICAL DATA (FIGURE 1)

Skywatch	Refractors		LX200		Nexstar		Other Schmidt-Cassegrain		Dob-sonian		ETX-Astro		Total	
Right Eye, Right-handed	38	48.7%	35	**48.6%**	25	48.1%	49	57.6%	36	49.3%	18	60.0%	**201**	51.5%
Right Eye, Left-handed	8	10.3%	4	**5.6%**	8	15.4%	5	5.9%	5	6.8%	6	20.0%	**36**	9.2%
Left Eye, Right-handed	24	30.8%	19	**26.4%**	14	26.9%	16	18.8%	24	32.9%	2	6.7%	**99**	25.4%
Left Eye, Left-handed	7	9.0%	7	**9.7%**	3	5.8%	8	9.4%	5	6.8%	0	0.0%	**30**	7.7%
Either Eye, Right-handed	1	1.3%	6	**8.3%**	2	3.8%	7	8.2%	3	4.1%	4	13.3%	**23**	5.9%
Either Eye, Left-handed	0	0.0%	1	**1.4%**	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	**1**	0.3%
	78		**72**		**52**		**85**		**73**		**30**		**390**	
Total Right-handed Users, preferring	63		60		41		72		63		24		**323**	
Right Eye	38	60.3%	35	**58.3%**	25	61.0%	49	68.1%	36	57.1%	18	75.0%	**201**	62.2%
Left Eye	24	38.1%	19	**31.7%**	14	34.1%	16	22.2%	24	38.1%	2	8.3%	**99**	30.7%
Either Eye	1	1.6%	6	**10.0%**	2	4.9%	7	9.7%	3	4.8%	4	16.7%	**23**	7.1%
Total Left-handed Users, preferring	15		12		11		13		10		6		**67**	
Right Eye	8	53.3%	4	**33.3%**	8	72.7%	5	38.5%	5	50.0%	6	100.0%	**36**	53.7%
Left Eye	7	46.7%	7	**58.3%**	3	27.3%	8	61.5%	5	50.0%	0	0.0%	**30**	44.8%
Either Eye	0	0.0%	1	**8.3%**	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	**1**	1.5%
Total Users - Right Eye	46		39		33		54		41		24		**237**	
Right-handed	38	82.6%	35	**89.7%**	25	75.8%	49	90.7%	36	87.8%	18	75.0%	**201**	84.8%
Left-handed	8	17.4%	4	**10.3%**	8	24.2%	5	9.3%	5	12.2%	6	25.0%	**36**	15.2%
Total Users - Left Eye	31		26		17		24		29		2		**129**	
Right-handed	24	77.4%	19	**73.1%**	14	82.4%	16	66.7%	24	82.8%	2	100.0%	**99**	76.7%
Left-handed	7	22.6%	7	**26.9%**	3	17.6%	8	33.3%	5	17.2%	0	0.0%	**30**	23.3%
Total Users of Either Eye	1		7		2		7		3		4		**24**	
Right-handed	1	100.0%	6	**85.7%**	2	100.0%	7	100.0%	3	100.0%	4	100.0%	**23**	95.8%
Left-handed	0	0.0%	1	**14.3%**	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	**1**	4.2%
Total Users	*78*		*72*		*52*		*85*		*73*		*30*		*390*	
Right Eye	46	59.0%	39	**54.2%**	33	63.5%	54	63.5%	41	56.2%	24	80.0%	237	60.8%
Left Eye	31	39.7%	26	**36.1%**	17	32.7%	24	28.2%	29	39.7%	2	6.7%	129	33.1%
Either Eye	1	1.3%	7	**9.7%**	2	3.8%	7	8.2%	3	4.1%	4	13.3%	24	6.2%
Total Right-handed Users	63	80.8%	60	**83.3%**	41	78.8%	72	84.7%	63	86.3%	24	80.0%	323	82.8%
Total Left-handed Users	15	19.2%	12	**16.7%**	11	21.2%	13	15.3%	10	13.7%	6	20.0%	67	17.2%
	78		*72*		*52*		*85*		*73*		*30*		*390*	

My Back Pages

"Crimson flames tied through my ears
Rollin' high and mighty traps
Pounced with fire on flaming roads
Using ideas as my maps
"We'll meet on edges, soon," said I
Proud 'neath heated brow.
Ah, but I was so much older then,
I'm younger than that now."

Club Notes

Mobile Astronomical Society (MAS)

Minutes of November 2002 MAS Meeting:

The November meeting of the Mobile Astronomical Society was called to order by MAS President George Byron at 7:20pm at the ESC. Officers Present were MAS Treasurer Greg Thompson, ALCOR Judy Anderson and Recording Secretary Rod Mollise.

George reminded the membership that the December Meeting will be held on 5 December, and that the next Members Only Star Party will be held at the ESC on December 7.

The discussion then turned to the annual MAS Christmas Dinner/Meeting held after New Year's. The item was opened for discussion, and it developed that a number of members were unhappy with last year's venue, Michelle's, and wished to hold the dinner at a new location. Several options were discussed, with The Original Oyster House on the Causeway drawing the most interest. It was decided to table the issue until next month, with George promising to discuss the possibility of holding the dinner at the Oyster House with restaurant representatives. He will report back at the December meeting.

It was further decided, via a motion, that the dinner be held on 9 January 2003 rather than the first Thursday after New Year's Day. The first Thursday will be the day after New Year's day and not convenient for some members.

Following the discussion of the annual dinner, ESC representative Dianne Martin presented a well-received PowerPoint presentation on aurorae. Dianne asked for comments, and the consensus was that, with the exception of a couple of minor typos, this was an excellent presentation.

Next on the agenda, George Byron demonstrated his new Coronado Hydrogen Alpha solar telescope for us. Those of us who had had the chance to use George's new scope at the just completed 2002 DSRSG commented on how excellent its images of solar prominances are.

The last item of the program was Taras Wertlecki's presentation on his newly built f/4 4.25" dobsonian. The membership was impressed by the quality and attractiveness of this home-build rich-field scope.

The MAS November Meeting was adjourned at 8:10pm and we repaired to the ESC grounds to do some deep sky observing with Taras' new scope.

HO, HO, HO and Mistletoe and jolly times for one and all! ***Almost all****. YOU wouldn't feel so jolly if you had to look forward to a couple of unwanted holiday guests in the form of* ***BEAVIS and BUTTHEAD*** *besmirching your holiday tables year after year after year ("Cranberries SUCK!" "YEAH! SUCK, SUCK, SUCK"). Ah well...at least we can depend upon the terrible two to leave one worthy gift...that hoary and hallowed mayo jar (left on Funk and Wagnals' back porch for a fortnight, hermetically sealed) containing the very latest...*

RUMOURS

Good-bye Lumicon. Things hadn't looked too good for our favorite astrophotography supplier lately. Since founder Dr. Jack (Marling) sold out a few years ago, some of the spark seemed to have gone out of the company. Customer service declined, with deliveries of Lumicon gear taking longer than ever. So I was not entirely surprised to hear that Lumicon had **gone down the tubes** recently.

I'll admit I was in denial for a while, though—Lumicon's great line of LPR filters and their excellent astrophoto accessories (try to find something like the **Cassegrain Giant Easy Guider** from someone else at a comparable price) had made them an institution. But gone they are. And what an ignominious end: a brief blurb on the web site stating that they were closing their doors permanently due to "...the economy and 9/11." I don't know how much the terrorist attacks had to do with the company's problems, but this sputtering and stalling economy no doubt is beginning to cull the astro-merchant herd. I shall miss Lumicon, and hope someone sees fit to pick up their wonderful line of filters, if nothing else (I'm guessing that with CCD and digital camera imaging in the forefront these days their ain't a *huge* market for the hypering kits anymore!)...

Who'll be next? The truth is—could be anybody. Small astronomy merchants (and most astronomy vendors and manufacturers *are* small) just naturally come and go whether the economy's good *or* bad. Leaf through a copy of *Sky and Telescope* or *Astronomy* from 1985 and scan the ads to see how many of the smaller players are still in business today. Not many...

Speaking of which…where's TeleHoon gone? Canada's favorite source of Synta scopes at good prices has suddenly disappeared from the web. Though his web site was minimalist at best, Hoon provided good service and was one of the few sources for U.S. amateurs for the Skywatcher branded Chinese gear. One day the website was there, and the next <POOF!>. Server problems or something worse? The scuttlebutt is that Mr. Taxman was involved. Hope that ain't true.

In happier news, we're told that *Cartes du Ciel* author Patrick Chevalley has announced a new direction for everybody's favorite freeware astronomy program. Patrick, it seems, has determined that CdC, to which he's been adding features for years, needs a complete rewrite. No doubt the code is getting a little messy by now, and there's little doubt that a rework would probably improve the program's execution speed on older machines (and many of us like to run our astro-software on older "observatory computers" we've scrounged or demoted from general use). The OTHER good news is that in the course of this Patrick will be developing a Linux version!..

What's your most dreaded thread on s.a.a.? The *continuing* Nancy-Planet X-Lunacy? Valery's windmill jousting at...one and all? The never-ending discussion of the depredations of our favorite troll, **Shawn** (who hasn't posted a thing in weeks...guess they miss him)? Maybe another round of the APO wars? No, it *never* ends, but compared to **most Usenet Newsgroups**, the signal-to-noise ratio is *very* good on sci.astro.amateur. And many, many beginners are being helped there, day in and day out. But apparently Terrence Dickinson and Alan Dyer don't think so. Their website to support the new edition of their undeniably wonderful book*, The Backyard Astronomer's Guide*, contains this pearl of wisdom concerning s.a.a.:

"The main forum for amateur astronomy, but beware... lots of flame, fringe, and misinformation here. We find little of value in such groups, but some people thrive on them."

Well, Mssrs. Dickinson and Dyer clearly know their stuff when it comes to *most* things amateur-astronomy-related. But the Anonymous one and *many* others think they are clearly way **off-base** here. Occasional reading/lurking on a newsgroup doesn't give you much of a feel for it—at all. You need to *wade-in* and really *participate*. D&D certainly haven't done this to my knowledge...if they did, they might get a better idea of the true worth of s.a.a*., warts and all...*

Thinking about a BIG SCT? Really big? *A 14 incher with full goto and a fork mount for a very reasonable price?* Lots of Kats and Kittens have been looking longingly at the advertisements for the recently announced **Meade LX200 GPS 14**. This scope, due out after the first of the year, would be remarkable both for its surprisingly modest price (about $4295.00 U.S.) and its capabilities—large aperture and a sophisticated GPS-aided goto system. There appeared to be some flying insects in the ointment, however. A 14" fork mount SCT is a **huge beast**. Remember the Orange Tube C14? It was one-man-portable, *barely*, but only because the OTA could be removed from the fork mount, and we were being *told* that the OTA would NOT be

removable from the mount on the 14 GPS. AND...we were being warned (by people whose only contact with the scope, like us, was seeing the Meade ads in the magazines) that the fork mount and drive base and electro-mechanical systems were the ***same*** as in the GPS 12 LX200, and would undoubtedly be **stressed-out** by the weight of a 14 inch OTA. Did not sound too good. BUT...We've now heard that a certain **"Meade Doctor"** of renown does have some ***real inside information*** on the scope that indicates:

The fork arms are significantly beefed up.

The OTA CAN be removed from the fork.

The motors/clutches/gears are beefed up as compared to the smaller scopes.

Contrary to what Mr. and Miss Knowitall have been opining on s.a.a. and the Yahoogroups, this scope is, for once, ahead of Meade's promised release date.

Chew on all that for a couple of months, my little chickens...Ta-ta!

--The Anonymous Astronomer

Why'd I print this ancient ad? Well, just cause I like to meditate on the zen of amazing old scopes that everybody else has forgotten and want y'all to have that pleasure, too. Do I need to tell you what Valor changed their name to later?!

March, 1964, Sky and Telescope 175