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Skywatch
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Skywatch

“PSSG 2000”

The Peach State Star Gaze...

Rod Mollise

Spring star parties are one of the things I most look forward to during the observing year. The wondrous forest of galaxies that stretches from northernmost Canes Venatici to southernmost Virgo is riding high, and, for the observer willing to stay up into the wee hours, the burnished beauty of the Summer sky is on display well before sunrise. What a time to be an amateur! And what a time to escape the city lights and get to a dark site to see the Coma-Virgo galaxies as they should be seen.

When the chill breezes of Winter begin to turn warm (and muggy down here on the Gulf Coast), my thoughts naturally turn to the tremendous skies of the Prude Ranch and the Texas Star Party. And it's true that there's really no spot in the United States more suited to really *deep* deep sky observing than Prude's desert location. But Prude ranch is a long, long way from here. For me, with an increasingly heavy schedule, Prude and TSP seems to be evolving into an "every other year" thing. But I still look forward to *some kind* of an astronomy holiday on the "off years," and had been searching for a nice closer-in star party.

A natural for amateurs in this part of the country is the Mid-South Star Gaze in French Camp, Mississippi in the northern part of the state. Unfortunately, French Camp is located far from the Interstate, and, despite wonderful skies, friendly people, and great facilities, is a bit of a stretch for a quick weekend getaway. There's also no denying that the weather in northern Mississippi can be highly variable at best. French Camp being located just to the south of Arkansas and "tornado alley."

One star party that has been growing in stature over the last several years is the Peach State Star Gaze in Jackson, Georgia not far from Atlanta and easily accessed from I85. This year's PSSG was held from Thursday 6 April through Sunday 9 April, and was the 7th edition of the star party. Peach State began as a small, local event in 1994 and has steadily grown into a major date on the southeastern amateur's calendar over the last few years.

Since my wife, Dorothy is from Atlanta, I've made many trips up 85 to Hotlanta in the last few years, and my trip to Jackson and Camp McIntosh where PSSG is held was a familiar one. Leaving Mobile at about 6:30am, I arrived at the site in early afternoon, in plenty of time to get set up with daylight savings time in swing. My teaching schedule



made it impossible for me to attend on Thursday, the initial evening the star gaze, so I was not at all surprised to find the main observing field full to overflowing. With registrations now exceeding 200 every year, this is leaving the realm of the small regional star party and becoming a large national event. I resigned myself to having to setup on the secondary field, when a couple of my Atlanta Astronomy Club buddies noticed my plight and informed me that they'd staked out a small patch of field for old Rod! With the able assistance of old and new AAC friends, I was able to get my Ultima C8 and my 80mm Short Tube refractor ready to go in plenty of time to get settled in the bunkhouse and to travel into town for a meal.

The housing accommodations at PSSG are certainly not ritzy, but neither are they overly Spartan. The bunkhouses (one for men and one for women) are large, clean and feature clean bathrooms and showers. A big plus in my opinion is that they are within a short walking distance of the observing field.

One of the few drawbacks to PSSG is that the food situation is pretty much a catch as catch can thing. This year, star party organizers were offering (tasty and welcome) hot dogs and hamburgers for lunch, but you were on your own for dinner. As for me, I was more interested in observing than food (yes, it's true) anyway, so I settled for a Macdonalds burger in the company of Auburn Astronomical Society members Russell Whigham and Phillip Hosey. There is a decent selection of fastfood restaurants available within a 15 minute drive of the star party site, so the lack of catered sitdown meals is not really a problem.

Arriving back at PSSG, I noted several faces familiar to MAS members including Marvin Uphaus, Betsy Hopson, and Elaine Osborne. I also spent some time with PSSG

organizer Ken Poshedly, who is familiar to many of the folks in our area from his visits to our own Deep South Regional Star Gaze. Ken has done a fantastic job with PSSG and has some ambitious plans for the future.

And then it began to get dark. The main question on my mind was just how dark *would* it get? After all, Jackson really is just outside the ever-expanding Atlanta metro area. It turns out that the PSSG skies are more than serviceable for some serious deep sky observing. I'd rate them as quite comparable in quality to those of McComb, Mississippi's Deep South Regional Star Gaze, given the naturally hazy conditions that tend to afflict the southeast in the Springtime. Certainly not pitch black, but capable of revealing many, many galaxies, and undeniably better than most locations closer to the Gulf Coast.

One interesting difference at this year's PSSG was that it was scheduled to occur with a slim waxing crescent Moon in the sky. This was a conscious decision in recognition of the principal speaker and guest of honor at this year's event, Antonin "Tony" Rukl, author of the famous lunar atlas. I had the honor of chatting with Mr. Rukl, who is as enthusiastic as he is knowledgeable about Luna, and of showing him the Moon through my C8, a real thrill for me.

When the little Moon had sunk out of sight, it was time to cruise Virgo, and cruise I did, viewing the whole wonderful lineup, starting with the mindblowing Markarian's chain and wandering north and south in quest of island universe after island universe. One surprise was just how deep my tiny Celestron 80mm f/5 refractor, Woodstock, would go under these skies. Not only could he reveal many, *many* galaxies, but was able to show considerable detail in the brighter specimens. Jackson was on the bleeding edge

of a weather front, so things were touch and go cloud-wise occasionally, but the skies remained clear and I continued observing until 3am, when I was only too happy to pack it in after a busy day!

Dawn brought more clouds and the threat of rain. I spent the afternoon attending talks in the nice dining/meeting hall and visiting with old and new friends on the observing field. Naturally, I also spend some time in the vendors' hall, both window shopping and—how could I resist?—buying a few items! The gray skies cast something of a pall over the assembly until late afternoon, when it became obvious that the front *would* blow through and bring another clear evening. By the time the Moon was down, the skies were dark and clear and the field had filled with busy observers despite unseasonably cold temperatures (30s!). I just kept going for as long as my stamina (and the wonderful coffee in the dining hall) held out. By the time I shut down, the stars of Summer were whirling high overhead and I was able to retire tired but happy at a very successful star party experience.

Certainly there are darker sites than Camp McIntosh, but this is, in my opinion, offset by the good organization of the star party, the friendly atmosphere and the excellent facilities. I will certainly be back!

Deepsky 2000

CD ROM \$45.00
Registered Download \$25.00
<http://www.deepsky2000.com>

Rod Mollise

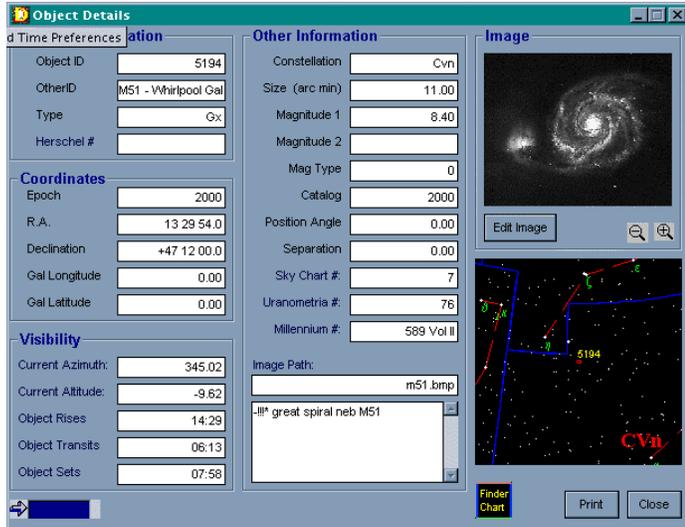
Deepsky first hit my hard drive about two years ago in one of its earlier incarnations, Deepsky 98. It was a reasonably solid and useful program then, if one with a few quirks, and I

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used it happily off and on until I heard that author Steven Tuma was preparing a substantial upgrade, Deepsky 2000. With the release of 2000 one minute after midnight on 1 January of this year, the program has gone from being something I'd occasionally bring up and play with to an application that is absolutely vital for my personal observing programs. What's changed? And what's so special about Deepsky 2000 anyway?

database in spreadsheet style fashion. Once the objects you fancy are on screen, you have numerous options available. Right-clicking on a particular object will present a submenu offering choices ranging from charting to logging to displaying object details. Exactly where you go then depends on what you want to do. But a typical Deepsky 2000 session at Chaos Manor South works something like this:

When my list is fleshed out, it's chart time. Chart plotting is accomplished with ease. Right clicking on an object in the Plan will bring up the "select" menu again, and you'll find several charting choices, including "plot selected object" and "plot all objects centered on selected object." You might want to plot your charts based on the original spreadsheet rather than your Observing Plan, actually, if you want a detailed map showing a rich selection of the deep sky objects in a given area. The way DS2000 works is that *only* the objects displayed on the spreadsheet will be plotted when you select a "plot all objects" option.



Once the program is up and running, I'll hit the "select" tab at the bottom of the screen to choose a constellation of interest. I normally work one constellation at a time, but multiple constellations can be selected if desired. Filters for magnitude and other

variables are set by using convenient "range" tabs at the bottom of the screen. Pushing the "refresh" button retrieves in-range objects from the database and displays them in spreadsheet format. The resulting spreadsheet can be sorted as desired, quickly and easily.

My next step is to choose the deep sky objects I'm interested in and put these into an observing list, or, as DS2000 refers to it, an "Observing Plan." Clicking on the Plan column with your left mouse button will add an object to your Plan. Once you've finished, you can choose "show objects in Plan" from the planner section of the main menu bar. This will replace the initial spreadsheet with one showing only the objects you've selected and "recorded" in your Plan. If desired, this Plan can be saved for future use.

However you choose to arrange your charts, you'll be very, very pleasantly impressed at the beauty and utility of the sky maps DS can produce. A recent review of Deepsky 2000 in Sky and Telescope magazine was quite favorable, but I felt that it slighted the program by neglecting to detail its mapping capabilities. Deepsky 2000's charting routines were done by Dean Williams, who also did the excellent *TUBA* atlas CD program that accompanies Phil Harrington's *Touring the Universe Through Binoculars* book. Everything that you'd expect from *any* serious astronomy program is here: excellent printing, Telrad and eyepiece field markers, and, naturally, the entire Hubble Guide Star Catalog.

Following first time installation (which is very smooth and problem free), the novice DS2000 user is in for a tremendous shock. I mean, we all know what a deep sky program does, right? You run the thing, a star chart appears onscreen, you arrange field size to suit, locate objects you're interested in, and print charts when you're done. All the popular programs—Megastar, Skymap Pro, The Sky and on and on—use this simple metaphor of a desktop star atlas. Which is fine. But it's not necessarily the best way of helping you plan and conduct deep sky observing sessions. Unlike its peers, running Deepsky 2000 results in a boring-looking spreadsheet-style display greeting the user. Boring, maybe, but very, very powerful.

Instead of manipulating a representation of the night sky, you display desired objects from the DS

After I've printed my charts, I'll often return to the Observing Plan spreadsheet and print "object details" for those deep sky treasures that are new to me. This display, accessed from the right-click menu, includes most of what you'll want, including RA/DEC, NGC codes, magnitude if available, and an image if available. The one thing I missed on the info screens was galaxy morphological types. At this time of year, the Spring, I'm observing many galaxies and need to know whether a specific example

is an "E" or an "S" or an "SB," etc. This is not a fault of the program, but a reflection of the data available in the source version of the NGC used. This is not really a problem, though, since a few mouse clicks can bring you *all* the information you desire.

Deepsky 2000 is "Internet aware." Bringing up your Internet service (if you use dial-up), or just clicking on a menu item (if you have a LAN Internet connection) delivers a wealth of professional-level data. For galaxies, one of the most useful features is direct access to *NED*, NASA's Extragalactic Database. Selecting this option opens a window in the program displaying the NED website. You can then enter your object ID and in a minute or two you will have all the background information (or likely *much* more than) you'll ever need. It's often helpful to obtain a POSS (Palomar Sky Survey) plate to help in object location and identification. DS offers this facility, retrieving the plate for your selected object from the Space Telescope Science Institute's Digital Sky Survey site with a single click.

Almost ready for that run. All I need now is a form to record my observations. Looking at the top menu bar's logging options choices reveals a "logsheet" selection, which causes a custom log page to be printed for your selected object. This will be filled in with pertinent data and will feature a couple of "field circles" at the bottom of the page in case you want to draw the object of your desire when you have it in view.

After a nice long night of productive observing, I always log my objects for future reference. And DS2000 makes this incredibly easy. Bring up the saved observing plan, click on an object with the right mouse button, and select "view/edit logbook for selected object." Here, you'll find forms to accommodate all the data from your observing run. You can

also attach a drawing or CCD image of the object to your entry. Believe it or not, DS2000 features a pretty full-featured image processing program to help you do this.

All you have to do is bring up the image processing program module, select the Twain option to enable your scanner, put your logsheet in said scanner, bring your drawing into the program, and process as desired for best appearance using the image processor's many tools. When you're satisfied, it's surprisingly easy to attach the image to your log entry. If you've made a CCD image of the wonder, you can append that to the log in much the same way. You can access the completed log entry in the future using tabs at the bottom of the screen when the object is onscreen and selected. Individual log entries can also be retrieved using the main program menu's logbook selector. Mr. Tuma has helpfully included many log files from accomplished observers like Barbara Wilson to get you started.

That's the way I use DS2000, but there's really a lot more to the program than that. After using it for five months now, I still feel that I've only *barely* scratched the surface of its features. Following are some of the program's options along with comments about the ones I've used:

- 413,000 deep sky objects from 49 catalogs. This must be some kind of a record. Sure, most of these are frighteningly dim galaxies, but it gives me a warm fuzzy to know I can look up just about anything in the sky. If this ain't enough, it's easy to import more catalogs from the Internet.
- What's Up Wizards. These allow you to easily display spreadsheets containing categories of objects, the Messiers for example, that are visible from your site at a given time and date.
- Quick Searches. If you just want a quick "read" on a particular

object, DS2000 can do that too. Click the little binocular icon, enter object catalog number and catalog, and away you go.

- LX-200, Nexstar and Ultima 2000 support. If you're the proud owner of one of these goto scopes, you can use Deepsky to control your baby in the field. Imagine telling passerby that your little NS5 can "goto" any one of 413,000 objects!
- Solar System support. Complete Ephemeris information for the Moon, Sun, planets and asteroids. You can, naturally, plot these objects on your charts if you so desire.
- Plot detailed star charts. Since this program uses the GSC, you have access to stars down to magnitude 15.5. It will also print custom finder charts including beautiful tri-panel finder charts showing three different field sizes to help you easily track down a deep sky denizen.
- Charts include shapes for many nebulae and Milky Way outlines. Custom eyepiece fields for specific eyepieces and telescope focal lengths can be superimposed on charts.
- Atlas printing. This is a feature peculiar to DS2000 as far as I know. It allows you to print a range of RA and dec if you want to develop your own customized hard-copy star atlas.
- Internet features include direct access to many astronomy-related sites and utilities from within the program and the capability of synchronizing your PC clock with Internet time services.
- Night vision mode.
- Hundreds of included deep sky images.

But no program is worth a tinker's damn, no matter what it's features, if it doesn't run right. I always had good luck with the program's predecessor, Deepsky '98. But some folks apparently weren't as lucky, reporting difficulties with

stability and bugs. 2000 has cleaned up just about all these issues and is now a very robust application. Of course, any program this complicated is bound to have a few lurking problems. I, for example, found that accidentally right-clicking on an attached logbook image would cause a program crash. Luckily, Steve has been very diligent about exterminating bugs and issuing updates frequently. I have no doubt that this minor problem will be quickly eradicated. In any event, none of the minor bugs and rough edges has caused me to lose data.

The program's user interface has also been considerably improved in this release. It all seems very intuitive now. It must be admitted, though, that this is a *big honking program with countless features*, and it will necessarily present a marginally steep learning curve for the novice user. I found Steve's documentation to be thorough and understandable. Performance-wise, the program did very well with my far from state of the art 300Mhz PII and 48x CDROM. While the entire program can be loaded on the hard disk, performance using the CD was more than acceptable.

No one program will ever do it all, but DS2000 comes awfully close. And at less than 50 bucks for a CD copy (even less for a download), the price is terrifically attractive—it's less than half what's charged for most of its competitors. There is certainly no reason that a cash-strapped young amateur couldn't be happy with this program for *all* her observing needs. I know I've used this single application more than any other astronomy app on my computer over the last 5 months. My hat's off to Steve Tuma. He had a new and different idea for a deep sky program, and his professionalism and persistence are paying off for us all with the release of DS2000!

Down Memory Lane with Sky and Scope

Rod Mollise

Ah Spring's finally here! With the sun shining and the birds chirping, it seemed an appropriate time to do a little Spring cleaning, starting with putting Chaos Manor South's astro-mag archives in order. Reaching into the recesses of one particularly dark closet (where astronomy magazines older than about 5 years go when they retire), what should I pull out but the November 1967 issue of *Sky and Telescope*. I hadn't gone this far back in a while, so it was quite a jaunt down memory lane to page through it. The ads were particularly amusing and instructive. What would these advertisements for all the equipment I could never afford in my youth look like today? Would they engender the same unbridled lust they had when this was cutting edge stuff?

The first thing to catch my eye was an ad by Tinsley. They had a full page in this issue picturing a 36" Ritchey-Chretien cassegrain being operated by the usual serious-looking goober in a white coat. The slogan for this ad is, "*Chances are, Galileo had Never Heard of Quality Assurance...*" Turning over a few pages, Tinsley has *another* advertisement--in the back of the issue, the more 'amateur oriented' part of the magazine at this time. This shows a *lovely* pier-mounted 12" Cassegrain, and the blurb: '*Designed for Professionals, Perfect for the Serious Amateur.*' Hmm...guess "serious" really meant "wealthy," since I knew some pretty serious amateurs back then, but nobody who could afford one of *these* (or any store bought 12", actually)! Haven't heard anything about Berkeley-based Tinsley in a while. Anybody know what happened to them?

Moving back a few pages (to 335--when was it that S&T ended the useful "volume-style page numbering scheme?), we see that the still famous and fondly remembered Cave-Astrola was also hawking Cassegrains. This Cave beauty, also a 12", looked really cool. Also cool (to my puberty-stricken self) was the Pretty Girl in 60s clothes standing there smiling and holding the corrector hand paddle. Unlike Tinsley, Cave lists the price for this permanent-pier-mounted giant--\$3995.00 (have to mow a LOT of lawns for that, bubba!). At the bottom of the page are the more *realistically* dreamed about scopes, with a 6" Cave "Student" model going for a *mere* \$200.00 (how much would that be in 2000 dollars?).

Quite a few manufacturers building amateur scopes offered classical Cassegrains and sixties-style equatorial newtonians (with big but shaky mountings) at this time, and their blurbs and tiny black and white pictures are sprinkled through the pages of the magazine. But their day was nearly done. They were dead meat and didn't even know it—yet. On page 307, we see one of the earlier ads for their nemesis—the Schmidt Cassegrain. Here, Celestron Pacific is showing off the Celestron 16. And man does it look great! Permanent pier, massive fork, OTA finished in a pearly white and adorned with chrome

CAVE-ASTROLA NEW 12 1/2" CASSEGRAIN

American Made—Available Nationally on Extended Payments



counterweights. In the accompanying copy Celestron tells

us that the base price for this instrument is \$11,500.00 (shudder), and that this price includes “on site instruction.” We all admired this scope, but none of us *dreamed* that Celestron (Pacific) would put many other long-time scope makers in the ground in just a few years. I run across CP’s C10s fairly frequently, but I wonder how many 16”ers were made and where they are now?

Of course, if the Tinsley, the Cave and the Celestron didn’t fit your pocketbook, you could always turn to the inside back cover and take a look at a scope you COULD have (well, maybe). The ubiquitous Criterion RV-6 6” f/8 newtonian. According to Criterion, your \$194.95 RV-6 would be “*Engineered for the Last Word in Breathtaking Performance,*” and was “*Fully Equipped with Many Extra Features*” (like a high-tech ac powered clock drive and a pair of eensy-beensy setting circles). But all that bold faced copy really was TRUE, TRUE, TRUE! It took me a few more years (and a job—I was 14 in ‘67) before I got my hands on one, but the RV-6 was JUST GREAT! I even still feel a bit sorry that I let an 8” f/7 Cave turn my head a couple of years later and convince me to trade in the RV-6!

That’s about it for this issue—there really weren’t many folks in the astrobiz back then compared to today. Oh, musn’t forget that impressive outside-back-cover spread, which features one of Unitron’s adverts for a *beautiful* 60mm equatorially mounted refractor. Old timers out there will remember that in the mid to late sixties, *every* back cover of Sky and Telescope was reserved for Unitron, while the prized inside-front-cover was perpetually claimed by Questar for its...well...*enthusiastic* spiels for the admittedly beautiful Questar 3.5. We didn’t dare to even think about owning a Questar, and Unitron wasn’t much more attainable, asking \$275.00 for their 2.4” refractor (remember these 275 SMACKERS are in BIG SIXTIES DOLLARS), so I never came close to owning one

(much less the 3” or 4” which was what I *really* wanted). Sigh. Maybe I’ll run across a mint condition 3” Photo-Equatorial one of these days!

G8/C8

The Celestron SCT Today... It just keeps going and going and going ...

Pat Rochford

Like the on going debates of the upcoming presidential race, the world of amateur astronomy equipment is fraught with truths, half truths and a hell of a lot of opinion. One thing that really can’t be debated though is this – the Celestron C8 is the most common, serious telescope found in the world today.

When introduced in 1970 it was hailed as a technological wonder in the then dull world of amateur astronomy. As I recall it was usually referred to as just a ... *Celestron*. The word spoken with a sense of awe and wonder. Year in and year out, the same ads in Sky and Telescope had come to blend into the background. Then came the ... *Celestron*. The orange color said it was something different. The name in itself was mesmerizing. You knew the world of amateur astronomy was about to be changed forever.

For many years it enjoyed extreme popularity. It had large (for the time) aperture, it was compact, it could be easily used for photography and a multitude of accessories had become available. Celestron soon developed other sizes of this design, known as the Schmidt-Cassegrain, followed by Meade and Bausch & Lomb with similar models as well.

Not until a decade later, when the large, inexpensive Coulter

Dobsonians hit the market, did the Schmidt-Cassegrain begin to feel the competition. And by the time the short focal length apochromat refractors of AstroPhysics came along in the late 80’s the C8 began to, for not altogether valid reasons, fall out of favor. It was hard to match the deep sky capability of a very large mirror or the aesthetic quality of pinpoint stars in the apo refractor. Criticism of its optical design seemed to become more prevalent. It had, after all, a rather large central obstruction - about 35%. This couldn’t *possibly* allow you to see much in the way of planetary detail. Was this the beginning of its demise?

Not quite – another decade later and once again we find the C8 just as popular as ever. This is due in no small part to our own Rod Mollise, who has championed its cause (and all SCT’s) like no one else in recent years. As it turns out, with accurate collimation, an SCT *can* produce very sharp, contrasty images. The recent introduction of the Nexstar8 (a light & inexpensive GO TO version of the C8) is going to set the amateur market on fire once again.

I recently purchased my second C8. Comparing it to the first, a Super Polaris version acquired in 1984, I find the optics to be even better. Starbright coatings on the mirrors and corrector plate definitely produce a brighter image and the removable secondary allows the use of Celestron’s Fastar optics which make ccd imaging at F/2 possible. The rear casting is different also and perhaps this has something to do with less image shift now than with the 1984 version during focusing. Probably the most astounding thing of all is that one can still buy at least one version of C8 for about a thousand dollars, just like thirty years ago. And it (the optical tube) is still made in the USA.

The version I’ve purchased at \$999, is called a G8. It’s mount, a German

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equatorial, is a Chinese clone of the Vixen Great Polaris. While the fit and finish is not quite that of the Vixen, it is in every respect an exact replica. I spent an afternoon disassembling, de-burring and replacing the sticky, glue-like grease the Chinese use (with white, synthetic grease) and the mount operates just as smoothly as it's Japanese counterpart. The most recent version of the CG5 (which I have) uses ball bearings on the right ascension axis, providing a much smoother movement than the earlier version. At the time I purchased it, Astronometrics was running a special so I got a free dual axis drive system with it. Can't beat that with a stick.

In order for Celestron to keep the price at a thousand dollars, the accessories have become less both in quantity and quality. A hard case for the optical tube isn't included anymore. The supplied eyepiece is no longer an Orthoscopic, but a modified 25mm Kellner (actually not a bad eyepiece). The star diagonal is a prism type and although adequate, certainly not anything to get excited about. The tripod is no longer made of wood. Today's version uses aluminum legs, which by no means have the same damping quality of wood. But then Vixen doesn't use wood anymore either.

Taking all this into account, it's still a great deal. After all, more than likely you will want to acquire a good set of quality eyepieces for a wide range of magnification. You may also want to get a 2" diagonal to take advantage of the wide field eyepieces available today. A trip to Home Depot can get you wooden legs and a trip to Walmart will take care of the case.

If there is such a thing as a general all-purpose telescope, the C8 probably comes as close as anything. It truly excels as a visual or photographic/imaging scope, is genuinely portable and the number of accessories available is nearly

infinite. I intend to use this C8 with a ccd camera and GoTo mount (the CG5 is currently being retrofitted with high speed stepper motors & computer) in my observatory for supernova searching. Watch for the progress of this scope in future issues of Skywatch, as I hope to have it up and running soon.

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My Back Pages



Editor's Musings: Once Upon a Midnight Dreary

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Dianne Martin and her colleagues, it appears that the position of the Environmental Studies Center in the Mobile Public School System budget is assured—at least for now. I'd guess that a big impression was made by the outpouring of public support represented by your letters, faxes and attendance at board meetings. This is certainly no time to rest on our laurels, however. The school system faces a huge operating deficit and must make cuts *somewhere*. This, given the seeming indifference of a large part of the local population to the fate of our schools and the quality/value of education, means that this ESC crisis will no doubt reoccur on a periodic basis.

Just got off the phone with Peach State Star Gaze organizer, Ken Poshedly. Ken reports that registrations at this year's PSSG hit 290, an all time high, and maybe the limit of what the site can support. He also says that he's laying the ground-work for next year's event. He's hoping the featured guest-speaker next year will be **Dutch celestial cartography wizard Wil Tirion**, the artist responsible for the charts in *Sky Atlas 2000* and *Uranometria 2000*.

In discussing our club's Astronomy Day program, we are beginning to come to the conclusion, that the booth-in-the-mall concept is just not effective, and that a public star party on some level might be more of a draw. What do you think?

Do you love Schmidt Cassegrain Telescopes (SCTs)? If so, my Internet mailing list, **sct-user**, may be just what you are looking for. I began this users' group in July of last year, and it currently has nearly 600 subscribers, many of whom are very knowledgeable about SCTs and other Catadioptric telescopes and can easily help with your problems/concerns.

To join, drop me an email or go to the list home page at <http://members.aol.com/RMOLLISE/index4.html>.

Ahhhh...Summers' here...and we all rejoice in the prospect of an endless stream of warm and pleasant days and (we hope) at least marginally clear nights. Summertime also means that school's out and that certain delinquents—namely those two poster boys for de-evolution, Beavis and Butt-head—are free to hurl hermetically sealed mayonnaise jars right at your friendly old editor's noggin. Mayo jars which contain ever more....

Rumours

*What will Meade do now? What **will** they do?* Celestron's making a big splash with their latest SCT offering, the Nexstar 8. Like it's little brother, the Nexstar 5, early indications are that this is a well-designed, effective, and reliable telescope. The Anonymous One had the opportunity to try one out at the Peach State Star Gaze near Atlanta recently and can testify that despite its use of the same single arm fork mounting as the NS5, the 8 is surprisingly steady and accurate. As for Meade...a Little Bird chirped that they'll soon introduce a budget 8 inch goto scope which is essentially an Autostar enabled LX-10. Also in the wings may be a line of technologically sophisticated and computer-laden telescopes that will replace the aging LX-200 line.

And yes, hard to believe as it may be, "aging" is the word for LX-200. These pioneering goto scopes have been on the market for nearly a decade now. But they are still good performers and with Meade's recent price reduction on the whole series (except the 16, that is, which is really a completely different bird), they are very good values. Of course, you'll kick yourself if you buy a 200 and Meade replaces it with a 21st century LX-400 tomorrow!

Celestron? They plan to continue their winning Nexstar streak by introducing several additional models, including

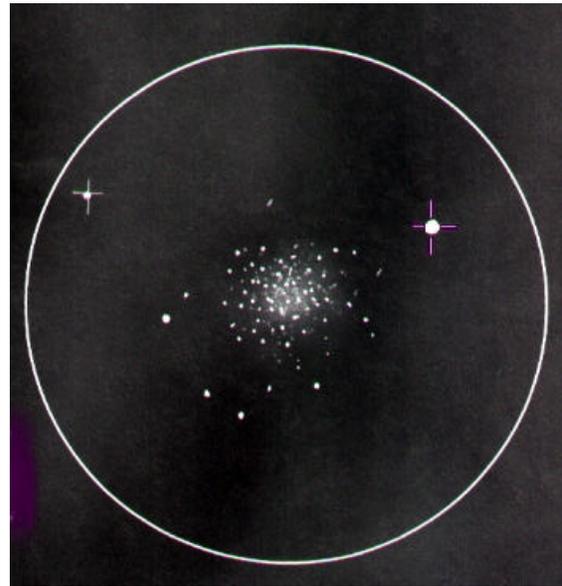
Skywatch

smallish refractors and MCTs. How about an 11 inch or 14 inch Nexstar? Said to be in the works, but an 11 inch Ultima 2000 was also supposedly in the works for quite some time, and never did appear.

Wanna APO? Don't wanna pay a lot for it? Salvation may be at hand. Several vendors are supposedly poised to offer corrective Petzval-style optical elements for the popular Chinese refractors that seem to be everywhere these days. One of these corrector sets can supposedly remove color from a medium focal length achromatic telescope to the extent that it is *very* competitive with APOs or at least "semi-APOs" in terms of chromatic aberration. Drawbacks? For these correctors to be effective, your telescope's optics must have a good figure to begin with. Apparently this is not a huge problem, though. Most seem to have good optics, maybe due to the objectives being (according to Roland Christen) machine produced. The corrector elements will also be fairly expensive, with a top of the line set adding 800-1000 to the price of a 6 inch refractor. On the other hand, a 6 inch APO class refractor with a mount (albeit a light one) for about 2300 bucks is an almost unbelievable bargain. Look for these corrector sets to be included in specially modified Chinese refractors to begin with, and maybe later as do-it-yourself kits.

You SCT fans out there may have heard that the PEC circuitry in the current Celestron Ultima 2000 and Celestar Deluxe telescopes is essentially non-functional. This was uncovered by Georgians Phillip Hosey and Mike Covington. Celestron was informed, and should have replacement electronic chips ready to go shortly. What's surprising to the ol' AA is that nobody, including Celestron, knew about this until Phil and Mike pointed it out to them late last year. The Celestar Deluxe has been on the market how long?!

The Anonymous Astronomer



M13 can still look good in a C8 from the light polluted ESC...drawing by Rod Mollise