Exploring the Final Frontier….

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"A Newsletter for the Truly Outbound!"

Skywatch

Inside this Issue:

Skywatch
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U.S.A.

"Astronomy, A Game for the Patient," or: "Washouts Happen," DSRSG '99

Rod Mollise

It had to happen eventually, I guess: a Deep South Regional Star Gaze where few of us were able to do any observing. Not that we were that surprised. Disturbed weather in the Gulf of Mexico made it clear several days before the start of the star party that prospects weren't good. Marvin Uphaus and Betsy Hopson were able to be on site Tuesday evening and report that they enjoyed a couple of good nights. But after Wednesday, it was torrential rain which rarely let up and which turned the observing field to mud. This was all very unfortunate, since this was the first year for the DSRSG to receive Astronomy Magazine sponsorship and registrations were approaching 200! Not that we didn't have a fun and productive time. The MAS made out very well in the star party contests. Marv Uphaus took first place in the "gadgets" competition for his wonderful artificial star device. Pat Rochford won second place in the ATM contest for his beautiful 8" f7 Dobsonian, and Rod Mollise also came in second in the astrophoto contest with his shot of the Prancing Horse dark nebula. Of course, the whole thing was a little depressing because of the weather despite our efforts to "put on a happy face" (aided by some "adult beverages" on the field on Friday night at the

informal sct-user group meeting!). We're anxious for a better year in 2000, after a so-so year (1997) a poor year ('98) and an almost total washout ('99)...

My Astro Diary:

Travels with Little Bird

Rod Mollise

A New Scope at Chaos Manor South….
Celestron FS80WA EQ
$228.00 (Eagle Optics model)

(http://www.eagleoptics.com)

Thursday, September 9, 1999

My little Eagle Optics Celestron 80mm f5 refractor arrived this PM. Actually, it was waiting for me when I got home from work (balky TACAN unit on a destroyer delayed me for a while). The delivery driver had left it with the neighbors. As I trotted it back across the street I was somewhat pleasantly surprised about how heavy--at least 20 pounds--new baby was. Almost in spite of himself telescope-jaded old Rod was getting excited--over a 3 inch refractor! Before long, I had this little bird unpacked and assembled (20-30 minutes, tops). I must say I was impressed. I've used Orion Short Tube 80s before and am quite fond of them. But the extras in this package make it a really nice deal.

For example, the scope doesn't attach to the mount with the plastic under-tube-mounting block like the Orion and other versions. Instead, it is mounted via a pair of nice metal crackle-finished tube rings. The forward tube ring even sports a ¼ 20 tpi bolt for mounting a piggyback camera. But it gets better. Eagle has also included an adapter block that allows mounting scope and rings on any ¼ 20-tpi device. Remove the tube rings from the GEM, attach them to the block via the provided holes, and *voila*, the scope can ride piggyback on a scope or be attached to a camera tripod.

What the all-important mounting itself? And the accessories? The 80's GEM mount is a typical small German-style model. As Ed Ting states in his review of this telescope (at http://scopereviews.com), it's almost overkill for this little scope. The tripod's made of wood, and, while a mite spindly, it's definitely OK. A nice 30rnm finder is also included. I've heard that some

Celestron (and other) "Short Tubes" are being sold without finders. I've yet to see an 80 being sold without a finderscope, but I did notice that the telescope pictured on the box my 80 f5 came in does not possess a finder. The finder does feature a tube baffle which stops it down slightly, but this can be removed if desired (I don't notice much difference before/after, though).

The main scope's included 90-degree Star diagonal appears to be the same inexpensive unit included with the other current and less expensive Celestron telescopes. I decided to give this plastic bodied diagonal a try, but I was prepared to replace it if necessary (given what I've heard about cheap star diagonals). I've got a good Celestron 1.25 or two around here.

The final accessory in this package is an eyepiece, a Celestron 1.25" 25mm "SMA." SMA, if you haven't heard, is Celestron's name for its inexpensive Kellner design line of eyepieces. Holding this one up to the light, though, did show that it had a substantially larger apparent field of view than some of the better Kellners I've seen (including a Vixen manufactured 25mm Kellner from the 1980s that I have around here).

Later that Evening…

As you CAN CERTAINLY IMAGINE, the act of carrying a new scope into the backyard, even a rather small one, brought a sudden flood of clouds into the sky (no kiddin'). Despite what you may have heard, the "new scope curse" is very real! I *was* able to give the 80WA a quick once over, since Vega and the Double Double *were* in the clear near the zenith. The little scope easily split the DD at 120x. Nice and sharp at this magnification, too. I did note, however, that one of my good diagonals provided a substantially better image. With the stock unit at this power, a bit of flaring (a sign of misalignment) was noted. Vega did, of course, show a bit of in-focus false color, but certainly (and rather suprisingly) not a distracting amount by any means. And remember, this assessment is coming from an SCT user (fanatic) who hasn't touched many refractors since *you know what* rolled off the Celestron assembly line in 1970! Nice airy disk and diffraction rings were visible at 120x, and the in and out of focus diffraction patterns looked good.

Dislikes? Other than the diagonal (come on, wadda ya want for a couple hundred bucks?) not much. With a bit of adjustment the focuser was smooth and easy enough. The little GEM does its job, with 'the shakes' dying out in a second or two at 120x. I haven't used many GEMs in recent times, so I spent a large amount of time hunting the 'a little too small' locks for both axes. The

25mm Kellner did a good enough job that I didn't trot inside for a Plossl (I used an old University Optics Abbe Ortho and an Orion 2x Shorty Barlow for high power, however). Slow motions on both axes worked well with minimal backlash.

In just a few minutes this little refractor gave me a great deal of joy. It really takes one back to get out in the backyard with a little GEM-mounted scope and spend the evening moving it around the backyard looking for breaks in the trees (and clouds). Above all, let me emphasize as Ed Ting did in his review, that this is a REAL telescope, capable of real work. I think that for me it's certainly the beginning of a beautiful friendship! This is a lot of telescope for $228.00. Maybe there *is* such a thing as an *almost* free lunch.

The Very Next Night....

My stepdaughter, Beth, is in her high school's marching band, and as usual, Dorothy and I spent our Friday evening at the Big Game. Strangely for down here, a COLD FRONT had passed through, moderating the temps and cleansing the sky. By the time we got home it was around 11pm. Jupiter was well up, Saturn was tagging not far behind, and there was a real and unmistakable hint of Fall in the air. Naturally, I grabbed my new little friend, the 80mm "Short Tube," and headed for the back yard. What a joy to be able to grab a scope on the spur of the moment and trot it to the backyard!

In short order, I had the little GEM set up and the scope pointed at Jupiter. Based on my experiences the night before, I used a good Celestron star diagonal, the *1.25"* which came with my 1995 Ultima C8. Didn't know quite what to expect. Would the little refractor recreate that Jimi Hendrix oldie-but-goodie, *Purple Haze?!* Well, there was *some* color, but it was, amazingly enough, quite unobtrusive. And at 120x (6mm Orthoscopic, 2x Barlow), MUCH detail was on display. Including, by 1 a.m.--could it be?--the Great Red Spot! The GRS, being as pale as it is, was noticed more as the "hollow" until it had rotated well onto the planet. But it was then easily recognizable, especially with filters, which helped reduce the glare (and eliminated *The Color Purple*). Earlier on, I'd watched a shadow transit of Io. Nice! Little, hard, black BB crossing Jove's face. I also noted that the moons showed as tiny but recognizable disks. I hadn't expected a heck of a lot on the planets from an inexpensive 80mm f5 achromat, but I was seeing an image that looked pretty good. About as good, I'd say, as what you'd see in any scope in this aperture class--this side of a TV85, anyway.

On to Saturn. Sharp. Cassini's Division was easy, with some banding on the planet obvious. Considerable other detail--brightness variations in the rings, etc.--was also visible when the seeing really steadied down (not that it was *bad* at any time this evening). As an experiment, I replaced the 'good' diagonal I was using with the stock unit. YUCK! At high power, the image really suffered with this unit.

Before I knew it, it was 2a.m., and I was feeling a bit weary. As a last treat, I turned Little Bird (I name all my telescopes, and this seems to fit this tiny mite) toward M45. How wonderful to find all the Pleiads framed in one field! Edge sharpness was more than adequate, especially considering the f5 speed of this telescope. I compared the included SMA 25mm Kellner to a good Celestron black-top Plossl, and concluded that it's (the SMA) not a bad eyepiece at all. Better, I thought—much better--than the "MA" eyepieces Meade used to include with many of their scopes (I've got several of these 'wonders' floating around here). I wound up staring at the Sisters for some time.

Any other issues than the diagonal? Only thing so far has been the RA gear. It worked fine most of the time last night, but would occasionally tend to bind. The worm is adjustable, so I fiddled with it a bit the next morning, and managed to eliminate the binding without much trouble. I could probably adjust it a bit further to eliminate a bit of slop, but it is now working well. Again, this small GEM is well suited to this scope, with a sharp rap dying out in about 2 seconds at 120x.

I was, in summary, bowled-over by the scope's planetary performance. Unfortunately, a user who didn't know to change-out the el cheapo diagonal would never realize this. I suppose it's possible that I just got a bad one, but from what I'm hearing from the purchasers of a number of Celestron's scopes, poorer star diagonals now, unfortunately, seem to be the rule rather than the exception.

And the following night…

The skies were not perfect last night, but I did get out with my little C80WA for an hour or so. Earlier in the day I'd finished adjusting the RA worm on the little German mount. It needs to *be just right.* Too tight against the gear and the RA slow motion will bind. Too loose and RA slow motion becomes sloppy with lots of backlash. With the gear overly loose, a small turn of the control will occasionally send an object "coasting" right out of the field In this small GEM design (which has been around forever in small imported mounts), the worm engaging the RA gear also provides stability. If the worm is too loose against the gear, the mount will develop play in its RA axis. Nevertheless, a few minutes with the mount, a ratchet set and a cup

of coffee were sufficient for me to get things close to 'just right.'

As I carried the scope outside, I was again struck by how nice it is to travel light--once in a while, anyway. The scope, a couple of eyepieces, an Orion "Deepmap" star chart and a miniature version of David Chandler's planisphere could be carried out in one trip. Amazing! There's something to be said for minimalist “QRP” astronomy! This being a work night (I have to get up at *5:25am every* morning), Jupiter and Saturn were out of the question. That left double stars and deep sky objects. In addition to living in the *extremely* light polluted historic Garden District in Mobile, I also have the area's prime attraction (in addition to the Victorian/Ante-bellum homes), towering oak trees, to contend with. The 80 is really proving its worth here. I can move it around the yard to take advantage of the few open spaces available to me.

Being in the clear, Beta Cygni was an obvious and beautiful target! I never tire of looking at this golden/sapphire duo! And the C80WA didn't disappoint! Colors were beautiful and the pair displayed nice airy disks/diffraction patterns at 116x. I stared at the pair for quite a while, using a variety of powers to admire their majesty. Again I was impressed by how nice a combination the scope and mount make. Without being too heavy, it's nice and stable.

What else to see? Not much around tonight. Oh, M15 was lurking in the east, but it was in the midst of a light-pollution 'enhanced' layer of haze/fog growing in that direction. But I wanted to try my small wonder on a real deep sky object. Well, *M57,* near the zenith couldn't be much better placed. I slewed over that way. Located the position in the finder (my scope’s little 30mm finder's nice and bright, by the way), and then refined my position with the main/scope 25mm SMA combo. Being able to use such a wide field for object location was a pleasant experience, for sure.

In the right place, and able to make out a wee and fuzzy star which I knew was *M57,* I went to higher power, *57x,* using a 7mm Orthoscopic. There it was, faint, but unmistakable. Hmmmnm. Since it was looking this good, I wondered what an OIII filter might do on this little telescope (OIIIs usually seem at their best with larger apertures)? In it went. Nice job. M57 with the help of the OIII revealed itself as a little smoke ring (no, I DIDN'T see the central star). Again, I stuck with the object for quite a while, trying a variety of eyepieces. With the tripod fully extended and the C80WA pointed near zenith, the eyepiece was at just the right height for comfortable viewing while seated in a handy lawn chair.

When I finally pulled my eye away from the eyepiece it was clear that the conditions had degraded further. Seeing was very good, but the haze and fog was thickening dramatically. I was also being eaten by Asian Tiger Mosquitoes, despite having sprayed myself with OFF (be very careful with DEET repellents around scopes). It was definitely time to shut down before I keeled over from anemia.

Interesting if short evening...I'll be out there again tonight if the sky gods cooperate.

And, FINALLY, Little Bird flies to a semi-dark site…

Even though there was a mess of tropical weather sitting in the Gulf, the skies way down south here were reasonably clear last night, Saturday October 2. Some drifting fog-tendrils occasionally, but not too bad. I had promised my friend and observing companion, Pat Rochford, that I'd come by and help him do some rewiring on the cooling fans of his 24" dob, so, Little Bird (my Celestron 80f5) and I headed for Fairhope, Alabama. Fairhope is a 30-minute drive from Mobile and is a small bedroom community on the eastern shore of Mobile Bay. It ain't exactly "dark" anymore, but it is tremendously better than home, with the Milky Way being at least faintly visible on average nights. I set LB out on the observing floor of Pat's Stargate Observatory to cool down while I tended to rewiring the big 24's fans. That finished, and with the Sun gone, it was time for Little Bird and me to start touring the deep sky:

M22: This fantastic, large glob was gettin' awfully low, so this was our first stop. At magnitude 5.1 and 24' across this big thing ain't exactly hard to find, and it wasn't long before I had it in the field of a 15mm TeleVue Plossl. While M22 looked nice at this power, boosting things to a bit over 100x with a 7mm ortho and a 2x barlow provided definite resolution (not much of a challenge, really, since in addition to being big and bright, this glob is also quite loose). Can't wait to try this from the dark skies of the Deep South Regional Star Gaze next week!

M13: Over to M13, which was still nice and high at this fairly early hour. Sorry. M22 wins in an 80f5! 13 is bright and easily visible in both the 80f5 and its 30mm finderscope, but it is really just a bright BLOB! It's attractive, but its tighter nature prevents the 80 from providing even a hint of resolution from these skies.

M11: Back south for this treasure, the Wild Duck Galactic Cluster. This object was simply outstanding. I looked at it for a very long time, Little Bird flapping along with those distant fowl. What makes it so nice in this little scope is that it shows off both 'sides' of its nature. At low power with a 26mm Celestron Plossl, it takes on that famous triangular 'flight pattern' shape. At higher magnifications it assumes the appearance of an incredibly loose globular, with the reddish star at the

heart of the cluster being very prominent.

M27: And what a treat the Dumbbell Nebula was. The "apple core" shape was blatantly obvious to me at 15x, and a terrific view was provided by a barlowed 15mm Plossl. An OIII worked very nicely with this combo as well. I did think that the view was better without than with the OIII filter in a 4.8mm Nagler.

M31: Was climbing now. Not bad, not bad at all. The less than perfect skies prevented it from showing its full extent. But there was 'a lot of galaxy' visible at 15x. M32 was extremely prominent. I even convinced myself that I could see M110 (which was very apparent in Pat's 8"f7 Newtonian).

Double Cluster: Stupendous! Looked best in a 15mm Plossl. For once, I thought really low power (26mm Celestron Plossl or 32mm TV) gave this pair too much 'space.' The 15 also brought out some additional stars.

M45: The Pleiads were up. Pat and I marveled at how well this little scope did at low power on the Sisters. Many, many pinpoint sparklers, and they were reasonably sharp to the edges of the field.

M57: Looked much more 'Smoke Ringy' than it does from the city, OIII or no OIII.

M15 in Pegasus is a very tightly-wound glob with a strange, bright core. No hint of resolution in this aperture, but beautiful nonetheless!

Jupe and Saturn were very nice when they climbed a decent height into the skies. Just to make sure I wasn't foolin' myself, I called out to Pat: "Hey Pat, GRS just now rotating onto the disk?" Pat: "Yep!" While the little scope provided very pleasing amounts of detail on both worlds, I must admit that one of the best looks at Saturn I've had in a long time came from Pat's 8" f7 with a binoviewer cranked to about 300x. Whoa!

Back to the little bird for one more look at Jupe and M31 (it was around 2 am by now, but I was still goin' strong). What's this? Jupiter suddenly looked like you'd THINK it "ought to" look in an 80 f5! M31...not so good either. What the hey?! A look at the objective showed that dew was stopping me down to about 40mm. I had neglected to bring a dewzapper gun or my 3" Kendrick heating element. Pat, who mainly uses Kendrick heaters, had an old gun handy, but plugging it into one of the observatory's 12 volt receptacles brought only a bad smell as the old windshield defogger bit the dust. But it had been a wonderful evening, and it had at least given me a taste of what's possible in an 80 under dark skies.

And how was YOUR Saturday night?

The Lastest Little Bird News:

I still haven't gotten my brave little 3-inch refractor to really dark skies. I had been looking forward to our area's big star party, the Deep South Regional Star Gaze, as an opportunity to find out how the 80 would do under black skies, both visually and photographically (piggybacked on my C8). But clouds and torrential rains prevented me from getting in even a minute of observing this year. I'm hoping to get my "littlest Celestron" to a local darksite this month (November), however. I also had the opportunity to check out the poor performing star diagonal which was supplied by with my 80f5. It turned out that the bad views were due to miscollimation of the diagonal's mirror. I disassembled it and fixed most of the misalignment by the simple expedient of reinstalling the mirror with it rotated 180 degrees from the original position. It's still not 100%, but is now capable of delivering nice views, even on the planets at fairly high powers.

Light Pollution Update

Pat Rochford

Since the last issue of Skywatch, progress on the Outdoor Lighting Ordinance for Baldwin County (AL) has continued on a slow but steady pace. I did meet with the Planning and Zoning Commission on September 1. The presentation given (using transparencies & overhead projector) was well received and the board members have asked to see a proposed ordinance. As it turns out, one of the board members retired recently from a GE lighting plant, so his knowledge of lighting can't help but be an asset. Using the International Darksky Association's website, I was able to obtain several samples of outdoor lighting ordinances from around the country. These are presently in the hands of Tom Williams (president of the Pensacola club and attorney for P&Z) who will develop a proposed ordinance to meet the needs of light pollution as it affects Baldwin County. When this initial draft is ready, we will present it to the Commision.

The Fairhope Courier (Fairhope, AL) ran an enlightening article on light pollution in September. The content was well worded and all the facts were stated correctly. I always hold my breath when giving an interview, never really being sure of the eventual outcome in print. As a result, a gentleman mailed me a copy of the outdoor lighting ordinance for the City of Madison, AL. I don't know if there are any other such ordinances in the state of Alabama at this time or not.

While at the Deep South Regional stargaze this past month, I met the gentleman who was responsible for developing the outdoor lighting ordinance for Mandeville, LA. This town (located on the north shore of Lake Ponchatrain) has a population of around 10,000 but is growing at an alarming rate. Their ordinance passed without a lot of difficulty, but the problem of enforcing the law has become an issue. It seems inspectors don't work at night. Something to consider as we work on our own.

The Lure of Amateur Astronomy

Pat Rochford

Have you ever actually thought about why you have an interest in the stars? Is it a casual thing that pops up from time to time, particularly when there is an event that makes news headlines? Do you have a pair of binoculars or small telescope that you take out into the backyard once in a while for a quick peek at the Moon? Or are you like me?

Outside of my immediate family, no other *thing* occupies more of my interest … including my job. For almost as long as I can remember (with the exception of a couple wild years in my early twenties), astronomy has been my passion. Why? It's difficult to answer that question with only one reason. This hobby seems to fill a number of needs in my life.

First and most importantly, the desire to know and understand just what's up there is almost overpowering. One of the biggest thrills of observing, be it the festooned belts of Jupiter or a tight cluster of galaxies in Virgo, is to try and comprehend what I'm actually seeing. The size, the complexity, the distance … I can never quite get over the feeling of just how insignificant our little corner of the Universe is. How can anyone ever view sights like these and be unchanged?

Secondly, I like to design and build things and this hobby continues to provide me with new challenges each year. I usually have an idea for something else before I complete the project I am currently working on. To date I have built or modified nearly a dozen telescopes, built three observatories and countless astro gadgets. By building something myself, I have a better understanding of just what makes it tick as well as saving a considerable amount of money. I also end up with the telescope that's right for me. Good buys can be had commercially, but you never really get it just the way you like it.

Then there's the collecting aspect of amateur astronomy. Almost everyone likes to collect something; stamps, butterflies, beanie babies, you name it. Eyepieces are just one collectible for me. I currently have sixteen TeleVues; Plossls, Panoptics and Naglers. Then there are books and charts. Old ones, new ones, a couple of rare ones … all treasures to be used and admired. And let's not forget telescopes. Even though our houses are getting a little more cramped these days, Rod Mollise and I have decided never to part with another telescope again. Studies have proven that they experience a longer life with just one owner.

Finally, I have the desire to teach or pass on information to others. Again astronomy gives me a way to accomplish this by showing the stars to others, especially children and most especially to my son Breandan. There is nothing quite like the look on a child's face when he or she sees the rings of Saturn for the first time or a beautiful globular cluster at high power. To have passed on just a taste of what drives me is very satisfying. I could do it almost every clear night.

So what is it about astronomy that draws you to it?

My Back Pages

Astropoem

Lines From a Rained-out Star Party

Leaden skies
Bring a quick end
To our year-long
Nurtured hopes
And dreams.
Yet still we
Chant: “Maybe it
Will clear.”
As if supplicating
Some God of Thunder.
To no avail.
Dreams end
But hopes never.
We know this
Is a game for
The patient.

--Rod

Editor’s Musings: Once Upon a Midnight Dreary

*I’ve received the following from the PAS’ Barry Simon, chairman/organizer of the Deep South Regional Star Gaze, concerning possible **changes** in DSRSG. If you’d like to respond to this, Barry can be emailed at BSimon615@aol.com….*

Greets all!

Before I get to the real meat of this communication, let me first do a little housekeeping -

As most of you know, the DSRSG this year was impacted greatly by the lousy weather. While a number of attendees did pull out early, and a number of registrants never did show up, we still had good attendance at the time of our raffle on Saturday afternoon. We did have a pre-stargaze registration of 179 and we had 12 more register on site. As best as I can determine, we did have 61 “no-shows” for a final “attending” registration of 130. Had the weather been like the clear blue skies we had this past weekend, we would have easily gone over 200, and then some.

This brings up an important point - the Deep South Regional Stargaze is not all about observing. While an important facet of astronomy, it is not everything. I have to really say that I was disappointed in the weather this year, but I was even more disappointed in the departures we had as well as the no-shows. I say this because we did have programs scheduled, Friday afternoon and Saturday. In addition, David Eicher, Managing Editor, ASTRONOMY Magazine, was in attendance. He did a truly great job in helping us out at our Friday P.M. session on the “Impact of the Internet on Amateur Astronomy” as well as leading a discussion on Saturday afternoon on the “Timeline of Humanity on the Planet and our Eventual Fate”. In addition he was one (of two judges) for our photo and telescope contests. The point I am trying to make is we had other activities, people should not have been so quick to leave. We will make every attempt to make the DSRSG even more multi-faceted in the future.

This brings me to the real purpose of this communication. In striving to make the Deep South Regional Stargaze better, we have to try new things and/or expand what really works well. We do not jump in different

directions without careful thought being given to proposals or suggestions. One idea that will be enacted next year will be the abandonment of raffle ticket sales - in it's place, we are going up on registration to help subsidize the purchase of really good raffle items that everyone will have an equal shot at winning. One thing that helped prompt this decision was the purchase of $400.00 worth of tickets by one individual. A bit crazy, and a big gamble. Unfortunately for the purchaser, he did not win any of the top prizes this year. (Last year he won 10x70 binoculars, and the previous year he won the meteorite.) This did leave a bad taste in the mouth of some. As every prime registrant will now have an equal chance (1 ticket for each registrant or family registration), and there will be far fewer tickets, many should view the raffle with a lot more anticipation.

The other idea that is being kicked around and to date is only known be 3 people may be favored by some and not by others. Let me say before I present this idea that this idea will be explored further only if a majority of the charter members who respond back want to proceed further in exploring this idea's feasibility. (I am defining a charter member as one who has attended the DSRSG at least 10 times.)

Here is the idea - alternate DSRSG sites. Every other year we are at the original site (Percy Quin State Park). In alternate years we are at a location in Alabama, such as a state park like DeSoto or Chehea or Lake Gunthersville. Here is the rationale:

1) While more attendees come for the Pontchartrain Astronomy Society (New Orleans) than anywhere else (typically about 40 percent of total registration), we do have a good contingent from Alabama (Mobile and Auburn are generally well represented at the DSRSG). Therefore there is some validitiy in rewarding this good attendance with something that may be a bit closer to home.

2) To make the DSRSG, truly regional, we need to broaden our base. By doing what is proposed, we create a greater likelihood of attracting attendees from Atlanta, Birmingham, Chatanooga, etc. Many of these new people may very well begin to "follow" the DSRSG, wherever it is held.

3) It gets tiring doing the DSRSG every year. By alternating sites and alternating management responsibility, the current management team gets to observe some new concepts, fresh ideas, etc.

4) A new site gives the event some freshness to the regulars. The Pontchartrain Astronomy Society used to alternate meeting sites between 3 locations. Frankly that was a lot of fun. Given that we can find a second site that offers the same amenities that we now enjoy and perhaps something a little different would be good.

5) A new site would get more involved in the management process.

6) In the Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Arkansas, Tennessee area, the DSRSG is the major stargaze during the fall. This will help ensure that this prominence that we enjoy continues (greater exposure and broader base.)

Downside -

1) I can already anticipate some within the P.A.S. (New Orleans) and the B.R.A.S. (Baton Rouge) being against this idea because of the increased hardship of increasing driving time from 1 to 2 hours to 5 to 7 hours. Attendance from these areas will fall.

2) Expenses may very well go up at a new location.

3) Appropriate site at an appropriate price may not be available.

4) Inevitably there will be increased problems, at least during the 1st year at a new location.

5) Difficulty in recruiting competent volunteers to organize and run the stargaze at the new location.

6) It may be more difficult to obtain the Percy Quin facilities by doing so every other year.

There you have it. Please read this proposal, then read it again. Carefully consider it, and then get back to me.

Regards,

Barry Simon

"Huh-huh, huh-huh, Trick or Treat, man!"

"Yeah-yeah, you'd better give us treats dillweed...heh-heh-heh-heh."

Who else could it be than those two misspent youths, Beavis and Butt-head? Opening the door did indeed reveal the two most peculiar youths standing on the porch of my Selma Street home, goodies bags (actually they appeared to be tattered and empty nacho trays) ready for candy. Taking pity on the boys, I let go of a a few Mary Janes. Yet I was still the recipient of a trick in the form of a hermetically sealed mayo jar, which had been kept for a fortnight on Funk and Wagnall's front porch and which undeniably contained the latest spiel of….

RUMOURS

Whither the ETX 125? The long-awaited big brother to the ETX90, the ETX 125/EC was recently released with much fanfare. This was followed by the undeniable sound of a THUD as an apparent turkey hit the ground. Many folks had high hopes for this telescope, and, based on both the popularity and admitted efficacy of the 90mm version, your

Anonymous Correspondent assumed that the 5 inch would be a big and immediate hit. But two things happened to thwart Meade's best laid plans. First, the ETX 125, it was obvious from the beginning, had some real problems—huge focus shift, poor QA, and an overlarge central obstruction. But more hurtful was the surprise release by Celestron of a goto C5, the Nexstar 5. This scope was both more robust in its construction and, apparently, more reliable (though we're beginning to hear reports that the N5 isn't exactly problem-free, either)….

Where do things stand now? Meade stopped shipping the 125 for a while and also apparently issued an "informal" recall. The company attributed all of the telescope's problems to damage during shipment due to poor packing. It is questionable in the Anonymous One's opinion that all or even most of this scope's problems were the result of shipping damage. It seems clear that the majority of the telescope's difficulties are the product of trying to upscale the 90 without making enough changes. The secondary mirror baffle tube that reportedly could come unglued and fall to the bottom of the 125 OTA (!) is a good example. While the glue worked OK on the 90 (it was not unknown for the baffles on the 90s to shift under certain conditions), the larger baffle of the 125 was just too much for it. But there is *also* no question that the refurbished/new 125's coming out of Irvine are greatly improved. My prediction is that Meade, in usual Meade fashion, *will* eventually get this telescope right—or mostly right, anyway—and that this will turn out to be a nice little scope. The question is whether its birthing pangs will hurt its popularity. One help, as noted above, is that it's now obvious that the Nexstar 5 ain't perfect either. Like, who expected 1000 buck goto computerized scopes to be perfect, anyway?….

Just what the world needs: big cheap refractors. Larger than 4 inch achromatic refractors are beginning to pour off the Chinese assembly lines now. Following the success of the 4 inchers (sold by Celestron and others), 5 and 6 inch instruments are poised to hit our shores. In fact, one, a 5 inch offered by Orion, is already here. Celestron plans on marketing a 6 inch which may be for sale by the time you read this. What's truly unbelievable is the prices—about $600.00 for the 5s and about $1000.00 for the 6es! Never in living memory have big refractors been so cheap in real dollars! What's the *catch?* The "catch" is twofold. These are achromats, and these are relatively short focal length achromats—less than f10. This means that we can expect quite a bit of color on bright objects, that is, anything much brighter than about magnitude 2. Exactly how much is "quite a bit"? That's still not clear. Some reports are indicating that the 6 inch is "only good for deep sky objects" (the 6 is already on sale from a number of importers including Canada's Telehoon). Respected German telescope importer/manufacturer Markus Ludes, however, reports that the 6 inch OTA he checked was both *surprisingly* good color wise *and* figure wise. The 5, naturally, should be somewhat better than the 6. The 5 and the 6 are both offered on the now ubiquitous import Vixen-clone mounts no matter who the importer is (the two so far seen are the ones called the CG4 and CG5 by Celestron). This calls into question stability, since, in the judgment of the Anonymous One, the CG4 was just "OK" for the 4 inch C102 OTA. Having wanted a 6 inch refractor since he was a child, your Anonymous buddy will, you can assure yourself, be watching developments concerning these big refractors with interest and will report on the verdict once it becomes clear!

The Anonymous Astronomer

The Holidays: Time for Ho, Ho, Ho and Telescopes!

Now *here's* a scope ad! Say what you will about this little scope, Meade sure knows how to advertise 'em! This example is from a recent issue of Yahoo Magazine.

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