

SIDEREAL TIMES

The Official Publication of the
Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton

Director

John Miller

Treasurer

Michael Mitrano

Program Chairman

Ludy D'Angelo

Assistant Director

John Church

Secretary

Ron Mittelstaedt

Editors

Bryan Hubbard and Ira Polans

Volume 37

March 2008

Number 3

From the Director

I felt like Charlie Brown, on the mound, at the baseball field. There you are, raring to go, with a few drops of precipitation (now sloshing at your knees), but nothing to get upset over. And where are your players? An empty rowboat drifts past first base. Where's the team??



OK. So there were a few flakes of snow in the air during last month's meeting (a 1992 Dodge slides sideways down Washington Road as you wait to cross at the light). Certainly nothing to put off hearty astronomers! But alas, the meeting was cancelled. Hats off to those stout yeomen..

er.. yeopersons who made the dinner at Sotto. Our guest speaker, Jerry Sellwood made it, and a handful of members, reciting the mail-carrier's creed, appeared at Peyton Hall. Professor Sellwood decided to reschedule, and Ludy is working on a date for either the end of this season, or the beginning of next.

Foul weather was predicted for Central New Jersey, threatening the February 20 full lunar eclipse (like the falling tree in the woods, or Schrodinger's Cat – if clouds obscure the eclipse, does it really occur?). However, the famous Jaworsky effect held true again, and the Moon displayed its myriad metamorphosis, undisturbed by clouds. Resident astrophotographer Brian Van Liew has some eclipse images in this issue.

The deadline for the April issue is:

March 28, 2008

Send your submissions to:

editors@princetonastronomy.org

Spring is not all that far off; which serves as a reminder that our Simpson Observatory, located in Washington Crossing State Park, begins its public open house season April 4th. These events are very popular with the general public, and provide the AAAP a great opportunity to promote the club, astronomy and science in general. We are always in need of member support at each of these Friday night gatherings. Members can help scheduled observatory keyholders by bringing telescopes, binoculars or just their enthusiasm for the sky. Visitors enjoy being shown constellations and hearing about various aspects of astronomy, as much as peering through an eyepiece. Please mark your calendars (the web site calendar is also annotated). The open house schedule is also on the web site (it runs each Friday evening, weather permitting, April through October).

Congress, in its infinite wisdom, is handing out money soon as a "stimulus". As a reminder to undertake our civic duty and spend this windfall, remember the Northeast Astronomy Forum. This year, the annual gathering at Suffolk Community College (NY) is slated the weekend of April 26th. Princeton's Neta Bahcall and AAAP member Dr. Mary Lou West are part of the speaker roster. Pieces of your check from DC can be divided amongst the dozens of vendors from around the globe. If you've never visited NEAF, it's well worth the hour drive.

Cheers—*John Miller,*
Director

Editor's Note: Some of the usual features are not included in this issue because the regular talk and club business meeting was not held in February due to the bad weather. We hope to reschedule the talk in the future.

My Star Party Calendar for 2008

I will be attending several star parties this year. Several of these star parties I have attended before except one and would like to share my experiences.

The year starts off in April 2-6 at the Fourteenth Star Gaze Star Party at Tuckahoe State Park near Queen Anne, Maryland. This star party is hosted by the Delmarva Stargazers. The Delmarva Stargazers are a very friendly group. The event provides soda and hot-dogs for a fee. There is usually free soup and coffee at all times. On Saturday evening, there is a free fish fry southern style with hush puppies. An added attraction is that Washington D.C. is just forty-five minutes by car and train. The train stops right in the center of the mall, walking distance to all the museums.

On April 26-27 will be the Northeast Astronomy Forum, a must for amateur astronomers. This event is about one hour and fifteen minutes away by car and has generated into the biggest astronomy show in the world. I will be participating in my fourth NEAF Solar Star Party. Started by Barlow Bob Godfrey six or seven years ago, Bob would singly man his 3.5 angstrom TeleVue/Coronado refractor where attendees were treated to views of solar prominences and surface features of the sun. Four years ago Bob invited other solar amateur astronomers to bring their solar interests and viewing equipment to share with the NEAF attendees. This event has grown larger each year. I have helped with this event from the start using Barlow Bob's first solar filter, a Daystar 4.5 angstrom T-scanner. This filter works well with my TeleVue 102 refractor. I will arrive on Friday afternoon, help set up, participate in the NEAF Solar Star Party, attend the NEAF Solar Star Dinner, and leave on Sunday. Accommodations provided by the Rockland Astronomy Club, sponsors of NEAF.

My next Starparty is sponsored by the Amateur Observer's Society of New York on May 30-June 1. This event is held at the Stone Tavern Farm near Roxbury, NY. This is located in the heart of the Catskill mountains. Last year was this events first year and proved to be a very enjoyable experience. One of the reasons the A.O.S. planned this Star party is that they heard that AAAP Starquest moved to October. They thought there would be a void of astronomy events in June without Starquest.

The skies were great, the attendees friendly, and the food plentiful and good. After the Starparty, operators of the event sent out questionnaires on ways it could be improved. The distance to the bunkhouse was a bit of a hike and the A.O.S. operators have said that would improve on it, but I don't know how unless they give us use of a horse to ride back and forth.

This year will be my first visit to what is boasted as "The Largest Optical and Radio Astronomy Star Party in the Nation". This is the Greenbelt 2008 Star Quest, located in West Virginia. It is held on the grounds of the national radio telescope on July 2-5. I will be attending with past member George Walker. I have visited George each summer for the last two years. The first year we visited the site of the national telescope and took a tour of the facility.

George attended this star party in 2007 and had a pleasant experience. One of the lectures George relayed to me was from three of the original "Rocket Boys," which is the name of Homer Hickam's book and later inspired the movie "October Sky." He enjoyed hearing the experiences of Homer Hickam, Quentin Wilson, and Roy Lee Cooke, when the only way to get a college education out of their West Virginia coal mining town was on a

football scholarship; most ended up working the mines. All three entered the national science fair in 1960 where they earned the gold and silver metal for their rocket designs. All received college scholarships.

August 3 thru 5 hopefully finds me at Cherry Springs. I would have gone on Friday the 1st but the annual Woodman's Show is scheduled for that weekend.

Cherry Springs is truly the dark sky site of the Northeast and designated by the state of Pennsylvania as such. It's about a five hour drive from Princeton. I have been there three times before. The sky is black and the stars bright. At night, the clouds show as dark patches, not as in NJ where the clouds show white from reflected light. The cost is \$4 per night. They are still working on flush toilets and showers and should, hopefully, be completed by the end of the summer.

My annual Stokes Star Party will be held on September 26, 27, 28. This would be my fourth year of sponsoring this star party. This event is held at the site of the New Jersey School of Conservation, near Branchville, in northwest, N.J. This location is somewhat darker than the Hope Conference Center, the site of Jersey Starquest. There is indoor bunking and showers. I offer a free breakfast on Saturday morning and all day and night free coffee.

I advertise this event as an avid observer's star party; meaning that you should show up with a telescope. This is not an outreach event where the observers cater to those who attend just to be entertained. There is much sharing of observing techniques and equipment usage. This is a very informative event for the novice who has just acquired a scope and would like some help with it under dark observing skies. More information will be coming in the near future.

Rounding out the year is Jersey Starquest. This is the AAAP's premiere observing event on October 24-26. All I can say is that I have been attending this event since before it was Starquest; back when it was called Beemerville, and was held at the Rutgers 4H camp near the town of Beemerville. After the 4H camps closed this event moved to several other locations until settling at the Hope Conference and Renewal Center. Good company, good accommodations and great food. The skies may not be as dark as the other star parties I attend, but the activities more than make up for it. I have participated in Bill Murray's Deep Sky Challenge since its conception, and have found it challenging and fun to find the objects on the list. With the amount of observers pins I have, eBay maybe my next move.

This year I may not be able to attend until Saturday night. My son has planned his wedding on Friday night Oct. 24. I hope to make it in time to enjoy Ludy's delicious lasagna.

Ron Mittelstaedt, Secretary

Treasurer's Report

A written appeal to last year members who had not renewed brought us some renewals. As of February 24, the AAAP has received \$3,840 in dues payments for the current fiscal year.

Expenses during the last month have been minimal. So far through our fiscal year that began on July 1, we have a surplus of \$2,865.

The Association's cumulative surplus is \$15,272

Michael Mitrano, Treasurer

From the Program Chair

February 12th... It snowed... there was a pre-meeting dinner...and although our speaker, Jerry Sellwood, was willing, he did not want to give his lecture to a hall of 6 participants.

So after waiting about 20 minutes, we packed up and headed back to the train, but he will come back some other time in the future.



On March 11th, our guest speaker will be Orsola DeMarco of the American Museum of Natural History. The title of her talk is “**Stellar Duets: how companions shape the lives and evolution of stars.**” Orsola DeMarco received her PhD in Astrophysics in 1997 from the University College London. Her current research

concentrates on observational and theoretical work on close evolved binaries. In particular, she works on planetary nebulae and their central stars, and the hypothesis that they may be the result of binary interactions, rather than, as is traditionally believed, post-giant single star evolution.

Please join us in Peyton Hall on March 11th. Prior to the meeting, as always, there will be a pre-meeting dinner at Sotto’s restaurant. Please contact me to reserve a spot and as always send any comments and suggestions to me at

Ludovico D’Angelo, Program Chair

Picture This—The Lunar Eclipse



So as the Eclipse approached and the forecast was for overcast skies during the evening of the eclipse, I didn’t have much hope in capturing anything this time around. That evening as I was out walking the dog, I could see just a glow beaming through the clouds with a now and then partial glimpse of the moon as it rose. As the magical hour approached I would peek out every so often to see how things were progressing but figuring as if got closer the totality the clouds would have the last say. But each time I looked out the skies got better and better! At about half way through I threw caution to the wind and scrambled for something quick and simple to set up on my back deck. I grabbed my little refractor and small GEM (no clock drive and no counterweight) and attached my Canon DSLR on to it. I roughed polar aligning the mount using a compass to aid in my positioning of it on the

deck. Using the camera viewfinder, I played around and took some test shots to see if I had it in focus and the right exposure setting. Once everything was ready I snapped off a shot at about 66% coverage and then waited a bit and took another one just before totality. And after awhile into totality I took the final shot, leaned back and stared up to enjoy the view for a few minutes before deciding to call it a night. For starting out the evening thinking I was going to have nothing to getting this I would say the evening was a pleasant surprise.

Brian Van Liew

Interested in keyholder training?

Contact:

cell phone

or by

More Member Lunar Eclipse Photos



Stephen.Krisocki used eyepiece projection to take these images with his 102mm f/9.8 refractor (no motor). This limits exposures to under 1/2 second.

Community Outreach

Our calendar was empty for this past month. There are still plenty of opportunities to help out in the upcoming weeks though. We currently have 3 events planned:

- Friday March 14, from 7:30PM until 9:30PM, at the Upper Freehold Regional School in Allentown.
- Saturday March 29th, 10AM to 3PM the Princeton Cotsen Children’s Library will be hosting their annual Princyclopedia event in the Dillon Gymnasium on Princeton Campus. This is a daytime indoor event, although if conditions work out, we ought to be able to set up a scope or 2 outdoors for solar observing. We worked this event last year and it was a lot of fun.
- May 17th and 18th (Saturday and Sunday) from 11AM to 4PM each day, is the New Jersey State Museum’s Super Science Weekend. This has become a staple event for us. This is a daytime outdoor event for solar observing. Because it is two days, and because each day is 5 hours long, we really need your help with this one; if we have enough volunteers, we can break each day into 2 shifts.

If you are at all interested in helping out with these events, please let me know as soon as possible at

As other events are scheduled, you can find out about them here, or on the calendar that is on our web site.

Jeff Bernardis

20 Years Ago In Sidereal Times...

SIDEREAL TIMES

Newsletter of the Amateur Astronomers Association of Princeton, Inc.

(Address: P. O. Box 2017, Princeton NJ 08540)

EDITOR: Art Esposito

MARCH 1988

DIRECTOR: Art Esposito

AAAP CALENDAR

- March 8-----Meeting at 8PM, Peyton Hall/Princeton University. The guest speaker will be Dr. Ted Williams of Rutgers University and his topic will be "Evidence of Black Holes in the Centers of Galaxies."
- April 12-----Meeting at 8PM, Peyton Hall/Princeton University. The guest speaker will be our own John Simpson and his talk will be on astrophotography.
- May 10-----Meeting at 8PM, Peyton Hall/Princeton University. This will be Members Night, so please contact Program Chairman Don Monticello if you want to present a short talk on whatever you are doing in astronomy. The business meeting that follows will include the election of new officers for the upcoming year.
- June 14-----Meeting at the New Jersey State Planetarium in Trenton. This is our annual planetarium show, hosted by former AAAP Director Dick Peery.

NOTE: All premeeting dinners will be held at the TIGERS TALE restaurant at 545PM. The restaurant is located near the junction of Routes 206 and 518, near Rocky Hill. All are welcome to attend. However, there will be no premeeting dinner in May.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

It seems our club's "travel guide" is starting to grow. One such opportunity that has arisen is a weekend field trip to the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, DC and maybe (if we are lucky) reserve a weekend around the time Mars reaches opposition. According to Jay Albert, who did the "advance work," tours can be arranged of the observatory at 34th Street and Massachusetts Ave. (in DC) and would include observing through the same 26-inch refractor used in 1877 to discover the moons of Mars. A visit to the NASA Museum can also be included. Group tours of the Naval Observatory are only on weekends and only by reservation. After we decided whether to take advantage of this opportunity, we should start hunting for a nearby hotel to get a group rate for the weekend.

As far as I know, our invitation to visit the Sproul Observatory at Swarthmore College is still open. This is a trip that is available during August or September and hopefully will not conflict with our annual trip to the Rutgers 4-H Camp in Beemerville, slated for August 19-21. Other available "tours" include Stellafane, which will probably be around August 12 (the date of the new moon) and Stella-Della-Valley, which is sponsored by the Bucks-Mont Astro Association. That event is scheduled for October 14-16

at Camp Onas, near Ottsville PA.

Before I close ~~this~~ column, I would like to welcome another new member to the club. She is Laurie Dinnerstein-Kurs and she has signed up for a family membership.

DUES STRUCTURE

Family----\$35 Student----\$21 Senior Citizen----\$21 Single---\$30

On your membership rosters you will notice a column of numbers on the right. The number after each name indicates what month your membership is up for renewal so if there is a "3" after your name in that column, your membership will expire at the end of this month.

OBSERVATORY NEWS & DUTY

3/12----Art Esposito, Kurt Goepfert
3/19----Dennis Hicks, Lee Geiger
3/26----Pat Kane, Don Monticello
4/2----Helen Marrotte, Dick Sivel
4/9----Larry Smith, William Murray

For those of you who would like to become keyholders, call Noah Levy (Observatory Chairman) for a training session. Noah will also coordinate any work parties that might be needed.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE

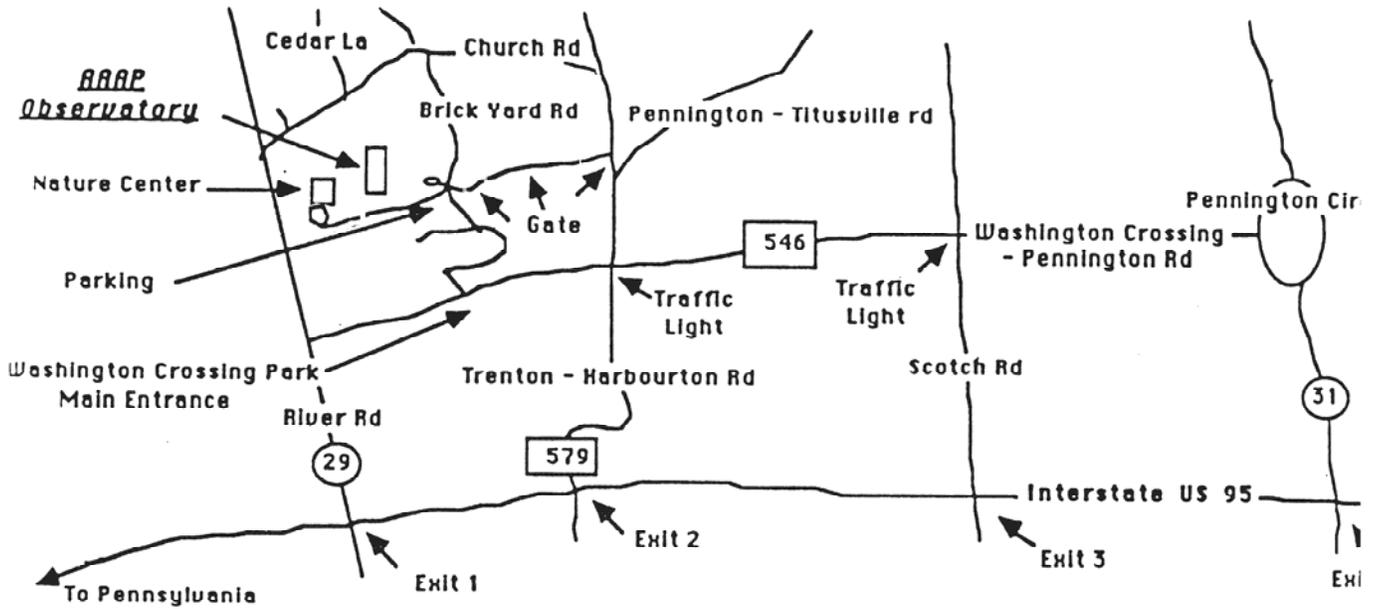
Coming up soon will be the elections for club officers. Therefore, I will need volunteers to serve on the Nominating Committee, which has the job of soliciting candidates for the offices of Director, Assistant Director, Secretary, Treasurer, and Program Chairman. An extra item for this year will be the naming of a new editor for the Sidereal Times.

The Nominating Committee will present the slate of candidates for voting at the May meeting. Since club directors serve only two consecutive one-year terms, a new director will be selected in this coming election.

ANOTHER OBSERVING BLURB

For those of you who are new to observational astronomy, there is one thing you should remember about the coming Mars opposition. Observing Mars requires a trained eye and knowing what to look for on the planet's surface. If you are like me and will be looking at Mars for the first time in two years, do not expect to see much except for an orange-red dot. However, if you keep observing Mars constantly over the next few months, you will begin to see more and more surface features.

Another item that I have noticed is the 1988 paths for Uranus and Neptune. It seems that they will be floating around some deep sky objects in Sagittarius so at least they will be easier to find. The only problem will be to sort through the abundance of stars to find them. However, Uranus is a little greenish in color so it should stand



The best way to get to the observatory is to take Interstate 95 South towards Pennsylvania. Then take Scotch road at Exit 3 and proceed north (this amounts to right). Then, at the third traffic light take a left onto the Washington Crossing-Pennington road (County Route 546). Take this road to the first traffic light and take a right onto Trenton-Harbourton road (County Route 579). Take this road to the first driveway on the left, this is the Phillips Farm/Soccer Field entrance to the park. There is a series of three gates with club combination locks. If the gates are not open, you will need the lock combination to open the gate or be accompanied by a Keyholder member. The Simpson (AAAP) Observatory's phone number is (609) 737-2575.

See us on the Web: www.princetonastrometry.org

Amateur Astronomers
 Association of Princeton
 PO Box 2017
 Princeton, NJ 08543

March 2008