



The American Astronomer

THE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF
THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS

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Crux, the Southern Cross, and Carina are prominent constellations in the southern Milky Way. Also note the Coal Sack dark nebula just to the left of Crux.

Ed Flaspoebler Receives Southern Skies Certificate!

That's right. Our own Vice-President and Editor, Ed Flaspoebler of Dallas, TX, earned his Southern Skies Binocular Club Certificate. When Ed went to observe the February 26 Total Solar Eclipse in Venezuela, he made a side trip to Angel Falls. There he took advantage of those southern skies and dark nights to observe 50 southern hemisphere objects using 10X50 binoculars. As you can see, Ed is one who practices what he preaches. Way to go, Ed. We love it.

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NGC 6712 was the target of Mark Dahmke's SBIG ST-7 CCD camera during NSP4, last summer. NGC 6712 is a small globular cluster in Scutum, near M11 and M26. Mark used a Meade LX200 8-inch telescope for this 10 second exposure shot at f/6.3. This photo can be found on the NSP web page at <http://www.4w.com/nsp>.

Nebraska Star Party July 18-25, 1998

If you have never gone to a big star party, plan to go to this one. The Nebraska Star Party is one of the best big star parties in the country. Each year it gets bigger and better. And this year, during the week of July 18 through 25, it will be the best ever.

People from all over the U.S., and other countries, come for the darkest skies available in the Midwest. Skies are so dark at the Nebraska Star Party site that the Milky Way shines brightly enough to cast shadows, you can see colors in the middle of the night, and you can read your star chart without turning on your flashlight.

Nebraska Star Party is held at Merritt Reservoir, near the town of Valentine, Neb. The reservoir is very close to the South Dakota border and is a short drive to the Rosebud Reservation. Valentine is about 30 miles from the reservoir and its lights cannot be seen from the observing site.

Daytime activities during NSP include a 1/2 day canoe & tubing trip down the Niobrara River for those daring enough to try it; contests of skill, luck, and intelligence; door prizes; vendor displays; a beginning observers' field school; talks by fellow astronomers; a special talk from Tippy D' Auria, and Observing, Observing, Observing...

It is not too late to register for Nebraska Star Party and all its activities. Just contact Tom Miller, 3400 No. 102nd Street, Lincoln, NE 68527 (phone 402-466-4170), or check out the web site at <http://www.4w.com/nsp>. You can use the e-mail address also: nsp@4w.com.





AAAA

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THE AMERICAN
ASSOCIATION OF
AMATEUR
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A Member
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AAAA Expands Services

President's Notes

Hello, everyone.

I hope you all got a copy of the new Urban Club observing program that we sent out. Now you can do serious astronomy right from your own backyard. No need to travel great distances to achieve dark skies. Just set up and start observing. I am looking forward to seeing some of our AAAA members' names on these new certificates.

In a continuation of our promotion of amateur astronomy, especially to those that are new to the hobby, we are developing information booklets for the beginning stargazer. Every new club member automatically receives the new AAAA publication *A Primer for the Beginning Astronomer*. Next month, we will mail out to each member the *Sky and Telescope Magazine* glossy flyer "Getting Started in Astronomy". And we are working on another publication for the intermediate amateur that will cover various observing programs and projects. Finally, we will expand our inter-

net activity to include more astronomy oriented newsletters and information packets. We want to be able to deliver the news about astronomy in a timely manner to those that have access to e-mail and the internet.

So, as you can see, your club is moving forward in making this wonderful hobby of ours accessible to everyone who wants to be a part of it. We want to make this organization one that makes amateur astronomy as enjoyable as possible. So if you would like to share something with your fellow club members, whether it is a story, an article, or even a random thought, just mail or e-mail it to us and we will be glad to publish it. Our addresses are on the cover of this newsletter. As we bring more services to the forefront, we will be sure to include you in our activities.

Until next time, clear dry skies and bloodshot eyes.

John Wagoner - President
American Association of Amateur
Astronomers

Magazine Subscriptions

Subscribe to Astronomy or Sky & Telescope magazine. Both magazines have regular monthly star charts, plus a calendar of what to view each month. A regular subscription to S&T is \$36.00 per year, but you can get it at the club discount through the AAAA for only \$27.00 per year. A regular subscription to Astronomy is also \$36 per year, but you can get it at the club discount for only \$24.00. To subscribe to either, or extend your current subscription, send a check for the correct amount, made out to AAAA, to:

AAAA

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ASTRO-POETRY CORNER

Milky Way Astrologer

They called me an astrologer
in the newspaper today.
I shook my head in disgust
as I threw that rag away.
They said I shot a photograph
of our very own Milky Way!
I was disappointed and upset,
but what else could I say?
You would think that the media
would try to get it right!
To take that photograph would require
intergalactic flight.
But since an astrologer
I am supposed to be,
the date of that development
should be known to me.
Fortune teller, I am not
nor do I plan to be,
but intergalactic traveler
seems just right for me.
I could shoot photographs
of all the things in space
and come back home to share them
with all the Human Race.
There is a problem I foresee
to shooting photos like that.
I wonder where I would go
to find a one-hour Fotomat?

— BC

Please send your poetry so we may all
share your experiences in rhyme

Space Day

Space Day in the Heartland

What is Space Day?

Space has always fascinated humankind. So way back in 1997, some people got together and created a tribute to those endlessly engaging phenomena which constitute our universe -- and to the people who, through their space-related work, have contributed so much to science, medicine and everyday life.

Thus, every year, Space Day is celebrated on the Thursday prior to the anniversary of U.S. President John F. Kennedy's 1961 challenge to "land a man on the moon and return him to the Earth."

Space Day '98 marked a first in the life of this young holiday: a live all-day Webcast called "Cyber Space Day." There were also events in Washington, D.C. as well as activities in schools and communities throughout the world. So the bar has been set pretty high for the next Space Day, which is coming in May of 1999. Stay tuned to the Space Day Web site for details the minute they become available.

Space Day on the Web

The Space Day Web site is the on-line hub for Space Day organizers and enthusiasts. Visit often, poke around (there's plenty to see), make your Space Day plans -- maybe even play a game or two.

<http://www.spaceday.com>

A scale model of the solar system, components to make your own astronomical telescope, planetarium programs, club representatives, and much more. What do these things mean? They tell us that Space Day is occurring.

Yes, Space Day is another day set aside to participate in astronomical activities. Tecumseh High School in Tecumseh, Kan. held its Space Day activities on May 21 this year. Mr. Mark Jarboe, a science teacher at the high school, sponsored the activities which ran from 7 to 10 p.m.

Although fewer than 100 people attended, those who did were treated to a planetarium program which highlighted the Jupiter encounter of Galileo. Jarboe is the Jupiter ambassador at THS, and promoted the project throughout the Space Day activities. People could make a Jupiter replica by using a cookie and various colored frostings, they could observe Jupiter post cards through the telescopes they built on the spot, and, they could look at a wide range of photographs of Jupiter, taken by a number of local astronomers.

Representatives from several astronomical organizations were in attendance during Space Day activities, to help people with questions about which organization to join. The organizations

represented were: Northeast Kansas Amateur Astronomers' League (NEKAAL), Heartland Astronomical Research Team (HART), International Occultation and Timing Association (IOTA), Warner & Swasey Refurbishing Project, Physics and Astronomy Department of Washburn University, and the American Association of Amateur Astronomers (AAAA).

As people came around and looked at the displays, they asked many questions. The main questions were, "What is in it for me?" and "I don't know much about my equipment. Is there someone who can help?" The AAAA display provided membership forms, as well as past issues of *The American Astronomer* and copies of a few of the Astronomical League observing programs. Most were eager to have more information about the AAAA, which they received readily.

Astronomers, star gazers, moon watchers, and the like always seem to find each other. Space Day provided the time and place for the current gathering. Perhaps we will see an increase in membership as more of these beginners and loners find that they can have association through the AAAA.

— Brenda Culbertson
stargazr@mail.holton.k12.ks.us



Space Day 98 may be over, but the cosmic adventure continues. Launch your plans for Space Day 99. After all, Space Day 99 is just a solar revolution away!

Late Summer Observing

by Brenda Culbertson

Mayetta, KS

stargazr@mail.holton.k12.ks.us

Summer is so much more comfortable for most of us than winter. Nights are warmer and we have more of a desire to be outside. However ... insects are out, the opportunity for thunderstorms exist, and the nights are much shorter than in the winter. The smell of Deep Woods Off lingers in the air and the buzzing sounds of small blood suckers fill the ears. But we love to observe during the summer because we do not have to bundle up in layers upon layers of clothing just to keep us warm enough to get a glimpse of a celestial treat.

Summer observing is hit and miss in the Midwest. Thunderstorms appear without notice and winds blow continuously. But, when a clear night occurs, you bet the scopes go up and the red lights come on.

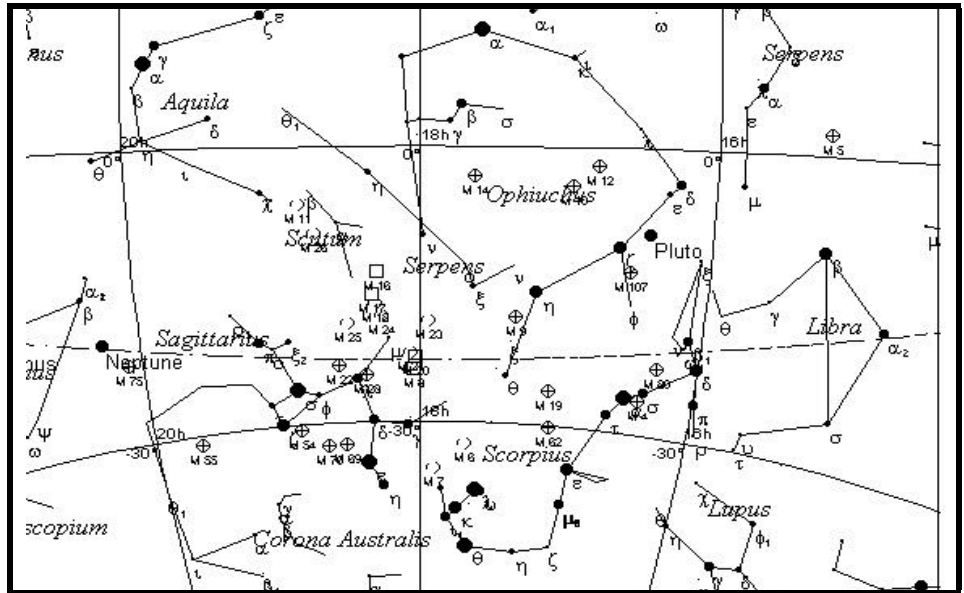
Here are some objects you might want to try during your summer sessions.

Have you made it through the Virgo Cluster yet? Better get it done since you will not have much time. See the previous "The American Astronomer" for information on the Virgo Cluster.

Easy Objects:

Easy objects are quite the find during this time. All you need is a pair of binoculars and a clear sky to observe some marvelous celestial treats. A low powered telescope will work fine as well. Begin by scanning the summer Milky Way from end to end. Sweep back and forth as you climb to the zenith, then keep going to the other end. You will come across clusters, nebulae, and groups of objects you may want to look at a little closer.

The southern Milky Way holds some great objects that are easy to find. You may want to begin in Sagittarius, which is found



on the eastern edge, southern end of the Milky Way band. Here you will find such things as M 8 (NGC 6523), the Lagoon Nebula. It is a fifth magnitude, half degree area that can be seen with the unaided eye (remember, I'm not saying "naked eye"), but you should look at it through a telescope and see all its great intricacies.

Just above M 8 is M 20 (6514), the Trifid Nebula. The Trifid can be seen easily in binoculars, but with increasing optical power, an observer can see great detail in the wispy areas of the nebula.

Also in Sagittarius is M 17 (6618), the Swan (or Omega) Nebula. In low power this nebula appears in a swan shape floating in the sky. It is an easy object and is quite a sight for the beginner.

There are many, many easy objects to see in the summer sky. Just start scanning along the Milky Way and before long, you will have an abundant list of things to look at.

Moderately Difficult Objects:

Just to the south and slightly to the west of M 17 is a small star cluster, M 18 (NGC 6613). This object contains a few loosely fitting stars. You may see only about a dozen of the brighter stars in this group, but there are many more members.

A nice round, but faint globular cluster can be found in Ophiuchus. The cluster, M 9 (NGC 6333) can be seen in an 8" telescope without too much difficulty. It is about 7th magnitude and appears to be round with a 5' diameter. Using averted vision may show a larger, nebulous area surrounding the cluster.

Also in Ophiuchus is M 14 (NGC 6402), another globular cluster. It is about 8th magnitude and has a 6' diameter. The larger the aperture, the better this one is resolved. It appears like a round, fuzzy patch in smaller than about 17 inch aperture telescopes.

Difficult Objects:

In this case it is a group of objects. The Corona Borealis Galaxy Cluster is for those who have a good eye for distant, faint objects. According to Burnham's *Celestial Handbook*, "In the cluster are more than 400 galaxies, all concentrated in an area of the sky half a degree wide, about the apparent width of the Moon." The brightest members are around 17th magnitude. A most difficult group of objects to see.

Something often unnoticed are the dark nebulae. Sagittarius holds one of particular interest. This is B86. B86 borders NGC 6520 and is 4.5' X 3'. You might take the opportunity to look at this one on a dark night.

If you are tired of the southern sky, go north to Draco and find M 102 (NGC 5866). It is a spiral galaxy of about 12th magnitude and 2' X 1' size. It is one of the "missing" Messier Objects. See if you can find it.

Hey, Brenda! Check it Out!

Speaking of treats, did you know that most female astronomers like to eat Oreo cookies when they are taking a break from observing? The guys seem to prefer crunchy, salty things like Gordetto's. Gordetto's uses anchovy oil as part of their flavoring. (That ought to curb the guys from eating many more of them.) But Oreos put on the pounds if you eat too many of them. (Hey gals, I don't know of any low cal Oreos yet.)

Why do I talk about food in a summertime observing article? Here is my answer. Every time I go out observing, whether it be in the winter or summer, I get



hungry. My hubby, Mike, says that all I have to do is see a star and I want to eat. I went to a planetarium program once, and had to stop for a snack on the way home. I don't know why. It just happens. And, no, I don't weigh 200 pounds ... yet, anyway. If I get much more observing in this summer, though, I may get close.



M8 - the Lagoon Nebula, M20 - the Trifid Nebula, NGC 7293 - the Helix Nebula, and M17 - the Eagle Nebula.

Photos by Roy Hermann, Shawnee, Kansas



Twin globular clusters in Sagittarius. Herschel objects NGC6522 and NGC 6528 can be found just north of gamma Sagittarii

Observing Report

June 20, 1998

by Ed FLaspoebler

When I left Dallas at 6:00 PM, after buying a new battery at Sears, and putting my "sick" computer back in the shop for the third time, it was 103 degrees according to the thermometer in my car, and clear. When I arrived at the Atoka site in Oklahoma two hours later, it was 93 degrees, and there were clouds looming on the northern horizon. Even though advance promises from the Weather Channel were for clear skies, there were less than 20 people at the site, a mix of old friends and newer club members I did not know. I guess the heat scared everyone else off.

The most pleasant surprise of the evening was seeing Kathy Nix from Memphis. "What," I exclaimed to myself, "is SHE doing here!". Kathy is the founder of the Society of Low-Energy Observers in Memphis, a most informal astronomy club. Seems she had come down to Dallas to visit Roger Kaspar and Peg Pearson, and they brought her up to the site for the weekend. Kathy is a regular attendee at TSP, the Okie-Tex Star Party, the Mid-South Star Gaze, and other star parties. She runs the IMAX Theater in Memphis, and even knows my friend Carolyn Malish, who now lives in Memphis. Carolyn and I used to sing together in Dallas Opera Chorus, back in the 70's, before I got involved in astronomy.

I had a good night observing, although the sky conditions could have been better, and there was a more than light breeze blowing my charts all around. I was able to find 13 Herschel objects throughout the evening, bringing my total to 155. Still a long way to go!

I started the evening up in Canes Venatici, looking for those "elusive" galaxies. This was a bit tricky, since those lurking clouds from sunset decided to come on down, as a small northern front went through. So there was a very light haze making observing difficult.

At midnight, I got very tired, from all the computer/battery stress, I guess, and took a short nap. Then, Mike Planchon came up, and as we talked about TSP and spread Astronomical League gossip, the sky cleared and the Milky Way "popped out." So I got to work again, and aimed my telescope, this time toward Sagittarius, looking for globulars and open clusters. Then, by 3:30, new clouds started to develop, and I went to bed. The moon was coming up soon, anyway.

The next morning, when I woke up, it was very pleasant. I guess that front that went through cooled things off a bit. I even remember pulling up the sheet as I slept in the car. But I bet it is still hot in Dallas!

Meteor Showers

July 28 is the Delta Aquarid Meteor Shower. This date is just after New Moon, so go out after the sliver of Moon sets and start watching those meteors.

August 11 - 14 is the Perseid Meteor Shower. These dates are between Full and Last Quarter Moon. Not too great for meteor watching. But you may see the bolides.

Occultations:

If you are in the right place at the right time, watch the Moon occult Jupiter on June 17 then again on July 14 and August 10. Another chance will be September 7 to see it. Watch as the Moon occults Aldebaran on June 22, July 19, August 15 and September 12. It occults Regulus on June 28, July 25 and September 18. Ceres will be occulted by the Moon on July 18, August 15 and September 12.

Planets:

Saturn is just to the north of the Moon on June 19, July 17, August 13 and September 9. **Venus** is just to the north of the Moon on June 21st and August 20. Mercury is just north of the Moon on June 25. On July 21 **Venus** and **Mars** are just north of the Moon. Another great photo opportunity. Venus is 0.8 degrees south of Mars on August 4. **Mars** is just north of the Moon on August 19. **Mercury** and Venus are 3 degrees apart on August 25 but only 0.4 degrees apart on September 10.

Other dates

Summer solstice / Father's Day is June 21. Independence Day is July 4. Do not plan on observing much this weekend! **Lunar Eclipse** occurs on August 7 and another on September 6. **Solar Eclipse** will be glimpsed on August 21. **Labor Day** is September 7. Autumnal Equinox comes on September 23.

Check your local information on each event for sightings in your location. Not all locations will see each event. Times should be checked for each location as well.

July 18 - 25 is the Nebraska Star Party. Don't miss it!

If you need help on determining whether or not you will be able to see any of these events from your location, just e-mail me. Send me your geographical coordinates (longitude and latitude) along with the names of your city and state. I will put them in The_Sky astronomy software and find the exact time an event occurs for your location. My e-mail address is listed below.

I would also like photographs that you would like to share of anything you have shot lately. Send these to me at the AAAA address listed elsewhere in the newsletter. I would like to use members' photographs along with the observing articles. Written permission to use them must be included in a letter along with information about the shot, i.e. time exposure, film, lens, etc.

More next time!

Brenda Culbertson

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