

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, January 13, 2010, Meeting

In attendance:

- Barton Billard
- Jim Baker
- Scott Busby
- Don Clark
- Brenda Conway
- Joe and Sherry Francis
- Rob Friedel
- Leigh Gettier
- Glenn Holiday
- Mike Masters
- Tim Plunkett
- Clement Pryor
- Chris Reed
- Debbie Sandler
- Javier and Ruby Valverde

President Mike Masters opened the meeting at 6:45 p.m. with introductions around the room. Fifteen members and two visitors were present. Scott reintroduced the 50/50 raffle that was held the year before last. At the end of each meeting, half the proceeds collected from the tickets sold that evening goes to the holder of the winning ticket and the remainder goes toward purchase of prizes to be awarded at the Club picnic.

The meeting program time was devoted to show-and-tell of members' equipment with emphasis on grab-and-go telescopes. Leigh led off with a Celestron C90 on a "pan-tilt" head camera tripod. To astronomers, it is an altitude-azimuth (alt-az) mount. It includes knob adjustments of angle for fine-tuning with clutches for coarse aiming. Scott showed a high-end grab-and-go telescope: one of his apochromat refractor telescopes that he also uses as a finder and guide scope with his larger telescope. He had it on a Televue grab-and-go alt-az tripod that includes angle encoders and a computer that can read out what object is in view.

Mike showed a pair of image-stabilized Canon binoculars and a 66-mm refractor telescope that he also uses as a finder. To get the largest field of view from a 1-1/4 inch eyepiece, he uses the 24 mm Televue Panoptic. He said this helps show off larger targets like the American Nebula. For his grab-and-go mount, he uses his nature photography tripod: a Gitzo carbon fiber tripod with a Wimberly gimbal mount. The gimbal mount lets you balance larger lenses and telescopes so that when you loosen the clutches on the axes, you can easily track or move to a target. You do not have to fight with gravity making it swing away again.

Rob showed Google Sky Map on his cell phone. It uses the cell phone's GPS and position sensing to show what is in the sky as you hold the phone up in that direction.

Don showed us the Club PST telescope for viewing the sun in the daytime. He pointed out that it is a nice compact telescope suitable for grab-and-go viewing. We talked about how its hydrogen alpha filter allows viewing without glare and reveals prominences and granularity of the surface.

Joe showed us his astrophysics 10.5x70 mm binoculars. He also showed another pair of Canon image stabilized binoculars, 18x50 mm. Glenn brought his 10x50-mm binoculars that he bought on impulse at Walmart for \$20. He said it turned out to be an excellent buy.

Mike recommended a "rich field" telescope that can get to 100 power is a good choice for grab-and-go viewing. Scott brought the Celestron "Comet Catcher" that was donated to the Club last fall by the Taylors. He pointed out that it could be used as a grab-and-go scope.

Treasurer's Report

Tim Plunkett gave the report for December 31, 2009. The Club has 27 paid members as of the end of December, and has collected 2010 dues from 6 members. Tim said that he needs to determine whether dues from new members collected near the end of the year should apply to 2010 or 2009.

Old business

- Star party reports and upcoming business—The Club has cancelled the last few star parties because of weather. That included January 9, which cold weather caused us to abandon. The weather for the backup on January 16 was also unpromising. The February star party dates are February 6 and 13, with the Club meeting on February 10. David Abbou gave an astronomy program at Dahlgren School December 17. It was a well-attended success. Chris Reed requested support for an event at Fredericksburg Academy on January 15. Myron has a public outreach event at Curtis Memorial Park scheduled for May 22. The dates we proposed for Westmoreland (June 19 and July 17, corresponding to first quarter moon phase) were fine with the Park representative. Mike reminded members that at the December meeting, we moved star party dates in November and December to Friday evenings, November 5 and December 3. The moves were necessary because of conflicts with Caledon events on the original Saturday dates.
- Alternate meeting locations—Scott is to check on the availability of the church near Stafford Court House for the May meeting. Lone Star Steak House in the Westwood shopping center has a meeting room that could serve for the November meeting. There is no charge for the meeting room if meals are purchased. Some other possibilities were suggested, including the Pizza Hut near Four-Mile Fork and ordering out pizza and meeting at the Library.
- Club library and loaner assets—The members who had the PST, Celestron, and Orion equatorial telescopes brought them to the meeting. Rob checked out the PST, Brenda the equatorial telescope, and Don Clark checked out the Celestron. Scott brought in the Universe DVD on alien moons and dark matter. Two other members said they each still had one of the other DVDs. Rachel and Brad Hertzog still have the Club Dobsonian. James Bingham still has the Club CCD camera.

New Business

- Night Sky page for Club website—Mike described a new page he added to the Club website with resources for observers. It includes guides with suggested objects for viewing. Some include checklists or forms for recording your observations.
- PBS 400 Years of the Telescope DVD—Mike proposed buying this DVD for the Club library. He offered to purchase the \$25 DVD for the Club in exchange for a \$20 donation to the raffle fund from Club funds. Scott made a motion for the Club to contribute \$20 to the raffle fund in return for the purchase and donation of the DVD to the Club library by Mike. The motion was seconded and passed.
- Chris Reed's request for support at Fredericksburg Academy— Mike and Leigh volunteered to support Chris Reed's request for support at Fredericksburg Academy January 15. Bart said he hoped to be able to help but left his status as tentative.
- Member telephone/ mailing list—Scott asked about making member contact information available. He expressed concern about members who have not attended meetings in a while and wanted to be able to call and ask if they are ok. A concern was raised that some members would not wish their information made public. Two members expressed a preference to only have e-mail contact information listed. Bart asked those present to express their preference for information they do not want listed and noted the responses on the attendance sheet. Bart will send a scanned copy to Tim so that he can compile a list from Club records in accordance with the individual preferences expressed.
- Club 35-mm slide projector—Scott said that he has had the projector for some time after obtaining a carousel for it. It needs a new lamp. Scott said he could donate the carousel to the Club, but asked whether the Club needs a slide projector. He suggested alternatives if the Club chose to dispose of the projector. Mike made a motion seconded by Bart to sell the projector to Scott for \$20 with the stipulation that Scott agree to lend it back to the Club if needed. The motion was approved by a show of hands vote. Scott paid Tim for the purchase.

- 50/50 Raffle award—Chris did the honors of drawing the winning ticket. Leigh was the winner of half the proceeds.
- Current astronomy news and member interest items—Mike recommended the website <http://www.atlasoftheuniverse.com/>. It includes maps to help visualize the universe at different scales, starting with the sun and nearby stars and progressing up in approximately factors of 10 in scale.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for February 10, 2010, 7:00 p.m., at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library, 1201 Caroline St., in Fredericksburg. Introductions will begin at 6:45 p.m.

Submitted by Bart Billard, Secretary