

# Rappahannock Astronomy Club

## Minutes, December 8, 2010, Meeting

In attendance:

- Barton Billard
- Scott Busby
- Don Clark
- George Clarke
- Brenda Conway
- Joe & Sherry Francis
- Leigh Gettier
- Ranny Heflin
- Glenn Holliday
- Mike Masters
- Tim Plunkett

President Mike Masters began the meeting at 7 p.m. Ten members were present.

## Program

For this month's program, Glenn Holliday reported on his experience attending Astronomy Camp at the University of Arizona (UAz) in October. UAz has run the camp since the 1970s. The session Glenn attended was organized for training Girl Scout leaders to provide astronomy programs for Girl Scouts. The site where they stayed was the UAz Sky Center on Mt. Lemmon, which has 12 buildings with telescopes. Glenn noted the site gets 200 inches of snow a year, in spite of the dry climate below in nearby Tucson. There were some adaptations in the buildings, such as an extension of the dormitory entrance to put it by the road where snowplows can reach.

Glenn had pictures to compare the afternoon sky at Caledon with that at the Sky Center. Because of the altitude, the blue at the Sky Center was much deeper, illustrating the reduced amount of air scattering sunlight overhead. He reported the night sky was better, but not a lot better than Caledon. He was able to see M31 unaided for the first time. Some others said they could see M33, but his eyes were not able to pick it up. As he showed with light pollution maps, light from Tucson and Phoenix affect the site.

The Astronomy Camps get some time on the telescopes to provide observing experience for attendees. The opportunity to visually observe through the telescopes is also an attraction for some of the researchers who volunteer to help with the camps. The amount of time a researcher gets on a telescope for his work does not allow for casual visual observing. Astronomers have to use their time to record as much data as possible with their instruments and then spend their time analyzing the data they recorded while the next researcher uses the telescope. The group made an excursion to the 61-inch Kuiper telescope. NASA built the telescope for Kuiper to study potential landing sites for the Apollo program. Glenn said the telescope actually let him see colors of planetary nebulae. He saw the Blinking Nebula in full color, and the Ring Nebula in somewhat muted color. The group at the camp also toured the Steward Observatory Mirror Lab located under the UAz football stadium. The facility can make mirrors up to 8.5 meters in diameter and is currently making seven for the Giant Magellan Telescope in Chile. Spinning the mirrors gives them their initial shape.

## Old Business

- Tim presented the Treasurer's report for November 30, 2010. The balance was unchanged from October. Tim brought checks to hand out covering reimbursement for pizza and drinks for the November meeting. He also gave Don the check covering the purchase of the second tripod. He said he had mailed the first check to Don.
- Club loaner equipment status—Joe brought the 8-inch Dobsonian for Scott to take as custodian. Joe said it had been stored somewhere that allowed it to get dirty, including some spider webs inside near the primary mirror. He had done some cleaning of the outside and replaced the Teflon. Scott said he would be able to handle the rest of the cleanup. David Abbou had requested the Comet Catcher,

which Don brought to the meeting, but David did not make it. Mike is replacing the star chart package for the Orion XT6 loaner. He brought up the proposed additional purchase to supplement the packages. Joe moved, seconded by Scott, to purchase five copies of *Bright Star Atlas* at \$10 each to add to the packets. The missing slow-motion knob has still not turned up. Ranny thought it might have been mixed in with the Personal Solar Telescope equipment. He had it in his car and was able to go check, finding it was not. Brenda volunteered to contact Orion about the possibility of purchasing a replacement knob.

- Events—The November 13 backup star party and the outreach event on that day were cancelled, as was the December 3 star party. Several people still showed up December 3. Mike said he heard from Caledon about the would-be visitors. When they asked why the star party was cancelled, the response was, “Did you look at the sky?” Bart asked whether better wording in the Free Lance-Star announcement might help. One suggestion offered: “if the sky is clear.” The backup date (December 11) weather was also doubtful. Glenn said the Girl Scout solar observing event was postponed, until the spring break (tentative). Mike is looking forward to using his Lunt solar telescope for an outreach event. Glenn also mentioned plans shaping up for teaching scout leaders, possibly a training session in February and observing in April.
- Next meeting program—Dave Bentz is on tap with the topic: “Building a Home Observatory.”
- Star party calendar for 2011—Mike discussed trying to work Scott’s new place into the schedule. The backup dates on February 5, May 7, and October 29 are possibilities. Scott said they do not need to be backups. In other words, we could go even if the primary star party takes place the week before. Scott also suggested Mike or someone else should pick a list of challenge objects for each star party. Mike liked the suggestion and will try it. He also reminded us of the [Object Lists on the Night Sky page](#) of the Club website. For next year’s picnic, Scott proposes barbecuing chicken and making it a potluck. He said inclement weather would be an issue unless he gets a tent.
- Club mailing lists—in addition to the general notice to cease operation of the raclub@m31.us mailing list, Mike has sent email about its termination to individuals on the list who have not yet signed up for Yahoo. There is currently no solution to being on the Yahoo list without having a Yahoo account. For the transfer of ownership of the raclub.org domain name, Don has sent Tom the information but has not received a response yet. Tim reported Tom has said he has the information but has been busy and has not got to it yet. It appears Don could let it ride for a while.
- Astronomical League individual memberships and *Sky & Telescope* discount—Mike reported updating the Club website to reflect the optional \$7.50 dues supplement for members wanting an individual membership in the Astronomical League in addition to Club membership. Tim reported he has activated the *Sky & Telescope* discount. Mike asked Tim to clear up possible duplication of Ranny’s subscription. Ranny had followed the suggestion to go ahead and subscribe rather than waiting for the activation.
- RAC presence on Facebook—Mike reported that Facebook rules have changed, and Glenn Faini has to rework our Club presence.
- Stratford Hall outreach—Mike showed us the outreach star party (October 1, 2011) at Stratford Hall is now on their website.

## New Business

- Mike said he had placed the draft of the annual report on the Club website for issue in December. He solicited comments from members willing to look it over.

## Next Meeting

The next meeting is January 12, 2011, 7:00 p.m., at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library Headquarters, 1201 Caroline St., in Fredericksburg. Introductions will begin at 6:45 p.m.

Submitted by Bart Billard, Secretary