

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

Minutes, May 20, 2015, Meeting

In attendance:

Bart & Linda Billard
Don Clark
George Clarke
Ron Henke

Glenn Holliday
Scott Lansdale
Mike Spraggins
Tom Watson

President Ron Henke called the meeting to order shortly after 7 p.m. Nine members were present.

Program

Ron Henke and Scott Lansdale practiced dry runs of the talks they had prepared for the England Run Library outreach planned for June 6. Ron's topic was buying a first telescope. He included discussion of various considerations that might influence the choice of equipment to buy: types of observing, whether planetary or deep sky; whether the telescope is for the backyard or needs to be more portable; whether photography is an interest, and how complicated a setup is suitable; and, of course, budget. Ron then explained the three types of telescopes. He said the refractors can run from a decent 80-mm Orion for about \$200 up to pricy. They are the "sports cars" of the bunch. Ron said reflectors come in a variety of sizes, are known for their light-gathering capabilities, and are the "pickup trucks" of telescopes. Schmidt Cassegrains are the "minivans" of telescopes. He said they can do a bit of everything and tend to fall between refractors and reflectors in price.

Ron emphasized that the choice of tripods and mounts is an important consideration in the purchase of a new telescope. Manual mounts can save money and have less that can go wrong, but are of limited use for photography. At the other end of the cost scale, computerized mounts allow for photography but can be heavy. Ron also briefly discussed radio astronomy as a less well-known alternative. It doesn't have to be expensive, and you can observe in the daytime as well as at night. The last part of his talk was about where and how to learn more, starting with England Run Library. Ron included websites such as Cloudy Nights and Astromart, and said he found "so much good stuff on YouTube." The advice in his final slide was "Go to a star party!" and listed our June 13 Caledon star party.

Scott had two presentations. First was "Our Own Star," about the Sun, and the second was on the planets in the solar system. He had excellent images for his slides, but many were filled with data. We discussed how much of it he should talk about and leaned toward simplifying what he said. Some highlights from Scott's second presentation—Mercury is smaller than Jupiter's moon Ganymede. Venus has a 900-degree Fahrenheit temperature because its atmosphere is 96-percent carbon dioxide. The atmosphere of Mars is mostly carbon dioxide, but the planet is much colder because its atmosphere is so thin. Uranus has rings and rotates "on its side." One of Scott's Uranus pictures showed an aurora.

Old Business

- Treasurer's Report—Tim's report showed one dues payment during April. The club now has 16 paid memberships this year and 1 paid through 2016.
- Public Outreach Event for England Run Library June 6—Scott said he bought some items for the event: some solar posters, a tablecloth with galaxy pictures, and a ball with astronomy questions for children's games. Ron said he should request reimbursement from the club. The official time period is 2–5 p.m., and we can set up starting at 1 p.m.
- Update on the next Newsletter Status—Linda Billard said there would be plenty of outreach event items. She wanted Scott to provide a report on the England run event. Jerry Hubbell was on tap do a different article about the Moon, and she was looking for an article from Bart Billard that was deferred last time.
- Communications Committee—Glenn said he had nothing to report. Tom Watson mentioned seeing a period recently where the website had a data source problem. He thought it was probably a WordPress problem.

- Educational Star Party Report—Ron said Scott joined him and David Abbou at Garrisonville Elementary School, and they had about 150 people show up for the event. It lasted until 9:30. David received and shared a letter of appreciation.
- Renaissance Faire Report—Glenn said about 3,000 people a day went through the Faire and quite a few stopped to ask questions. He plans to be there three more weekends.

New Business and Astronomy News

- Astronomy on the Mall—Ron said hundreds of people came last time, and lines formed as soon as he took the cover off his eyepiece. (He plans to eat something before doing so this year.) Currently, Ron Jerry, Linda, and Bart are planning to be there, and Scott may be able to go.
- Support or Awards for Science Fairs—Ron said he had brought this topic up last month and since found it was too late to do something this year. Ron found that in addition to many school districts that have science fairs in the area, there is a University of Mary Washington STEM summit. Ron raised some questions for us to consider. Should we develop criteria and select some events for next year? What if we commit to awarding a prize but there is no appropriate entry. Would we limit it too much if we try to select an astronomy-related exhibit? Scott suggested we might do better by offering to mentor an entrant.
 Glenn suggested we should plan on doing it over a period of years to build interest. We then discussed whether we might have to raise extra money for awards, along with the probable need to obtain tax-exempt status as a charitable or educational organization if we do.
- Additional Discussion for England Run Event—Scott said he wanted to email people about the England Run outreach event and have an announcement on the club website. The “Don’t Miss” item seemed appropriate, and he agreed to send details to Linda who would do the editing and modify the website, including a post encouraging attendance.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, June 17, 2015, at the Central Rappahannock Heritage Center.