



STARGAZER

Rappahannock Astronomy Club

August 2002

RAC to Host Regional Star Party

The Big Meadows Star Gaze star party will be held on Friday and Saturday, September 6-7 at Big Meadows in Shenandoah National Park. All of the details can be found on the RAC web site at <http://www.raclub.org>. Please contact Myron Wasiuta at (540) 972-3290 if you plan to attend.

The 67th Annual Stellafane Convention An Awesome ATM Experience!

Myron Wasiuta

August 9-10 2002 marked the 67th annual Stellafane convention- held each year on the top of Breezy Hill just outside Springfield , Vermont. As my family and I neared the top of the dirt road to the summit, I could feel the Adrenaline pumping. After all, this small piece of land is the birthplace of the amateur telescope-making movement and home to the famous pink clubhouse and 12-inch f/17 Porter turret telescope-both of which were built by Russell W. Porter and other members of the Springfield Telescope Makers in the lean years of the Great Depression. Being somewhat of an Amateur Telescope Maker (ATMer) myself, I knew this was going to be a visit I would enjoy.

There are two main observing areas at Stellafane- the original field surrounding the pink clubhouse and turret telescope, and a newer, much larger series of fields below Mc Gregor Observatory and it's 13-inch Schupmann refractor. This newer field is also where all the camping and RV sites are, as well as the food, swap tables, and mirror grinding demonstrations. Most attendees set their scopes up in this field as well; however, those of us with telescopes that were entered in

Big Meadows Star Gaze September 6-7	
Next Meeting August 14, 2002 @ 7:00 September 11, 2002 @ 7:00	
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Rappahannock Astronomy Club P.O. Box 868 Spotsylvania, VA 22553	

optical or mechanical judging were allowed to set up in the original fields! For two nights I stargazed with my 16-inch telescope on ground trod by Russell Porter and with the silhouettes of the clubhouse and turret telescope on my northern horizon!

Anyone who has made their telescope is highly encouraged to enter it in the judging-so I figured I would enter my 16-inch f 4.5 in the “mechanical” competition. This category covers every aspect of telescope construction, design, or performance except optical quality. Participants register their scope, and set them up in the field near the pink clubhouse, and judging commences on Saturday and can last most of the day depending on how many scopes were entered. The group of judges from the Springfield Telescope Makers then asks questions about the scope while inspecting its overall construction, looks, movement, or any other aspects brought to their attention by the owner.

The optical judging takes place at night, and is ONLY open to people whom have made their own mirrors-no commercial optics are allowed! On Friday night the judging was done, but high clouds hampered the testing for awhile-consequently it was not completed until after midnight. The judging was very critical, with many scopes not making the cuts despite having very pleasing images!

There were approximately 20 scopes entered in the optical judging, and about 30 entered in mechanical. They could be identified by colored tags, and walking around the fields during daylight looking at these scopes was very interesting. However, I had to say I was somewhat nervous at the thought of competing with these people-many that are far more skilled than I compete. Many of the scopes were works of art, with furniture quality construction, or machining that was very professional. Some of the scopes had innovations such as spherical mirrors being tensioned into parabolas, lightweight foam core composite construction, and split-ring direct drive mounts. My scope, while nicely built, is a “by the book” truss dob with no particularly original or innovative features (or so I thought). When the group of judges arrived and started going over the scope with a fine toothed comb, I suddenly felt relaxed-afterall, this was the moment of truth. Soon it would be over, and I could stop worrying. They moved the scope around, looked at the truss, and seemed interested in the curved cutout design of the altitude bearing which allowed the truss pole to pass through the bearing. I mentioned to them I had actually gotten the idea from fellow club-member Arondo Holmes. They also seemed to really like the “feel” of the scope as they moved it. After completing the judging, they asked a bunch of questions, and made a short video of my 7-year old daughter Amber and myself talking briefly about the scope. Upon completion, they thanked me, and promptly moved on to the next scope.

Amber and Addison had fun playing with the numerous other “Stellakids” on the judging fields, but soon were getting hot and tired. We decided to go to some shade in front of the pink clubhouse. Sitting there was the “Father” of the dobsonian revolution, John Dobson and the most prolific discoverer of comets-Carolyn Shoed12xasmaker! I got a picture of my kids sitting between them, and had an opportunity to talk with them. What a thrill!

Of course the other half of the fun at Stellafane aside from looking at all the cool telescopes was observing. Friday night was a disappointment. We had high cirrus clouds coming through off and on, and the sky finally clouded for good around 2:30 AM. Saturday night was another story. The sky was very clear, and the seeing was spectacular. After looking through the porter telescope at the sun during the days (via projection), it was a treat to finally look at objects like M57, M27, and the Omega nebula. During the day I had linked up with a group of observers from Montreal, and we went back to my scope and began an

all-nighter. Some brief highlights included seeing the central star in the Ring Nebula, the protoplanetary NGC 7027 at 720X, and numerous pre-peak Perseids! The naked-eye views of the MilkyWay were very nice, and I could see M31 as a large spindle about 1.5 degrees across!

A highlight of Stellafane for many people is the talks on Saturday evening. These feature prominent people such as David Levy giving his annual Shadowgram. . This year it also featured Carolyn Shoemaker talking about her comet-hunting years on Mt. Palomar with her late husband Eugene and David Levy. The program also featured announcing the winners of each competition as well as the video made of each winner talking about their telescope. Short video segments of each winner is also shown. I was looking forward to attending these talks, but was unfortunately unable to do so. It wasn't until later that that night that a friend told me I had won 4th place! My scope has extremely smooth, backlash-free movement and is very well balanced with respect to the force needed to move the scope in altitude and azimuth. Perhaps this was what impressed the judges! I am deeply honored to have my telescope and workmanship recognized at Stellafane

Some highlights of Stellafane include seeing the sun with a classic 4 ¼ -inch f 13 Brashear refractor using a Herschel wedge. There were two beautiful 2/3 scale reproductions of Herschel's 7-foot telescope used to discover Uranus in 1781. They were made of beautiful mahogany and brass. I actually had the opportunity to observe with these scopes, and found them very easy to use despite being on altazimuth mounts. I also found out why the clubhouse was painted pink. During the Depression, members of the Springfield Telescope Makers had very little money. Word was put out for paint donations. Two gallons of white, one gallon of orange, and one gallon of red were donated, mixed, and applied to the clubhouse. The result was the pink we see today!

Stellafane 2002 is now over, but my family and I plan on going again next year. I would highly recommend the same to anyone interested in an awesome experience, even if you are not an ATMer

RAC Amateur Telescope Making Group

The RAC Amateur Telescope Making (ATM) group meets once a month to provide club members a forum for sharing telescope making tips and ideas. The ATM meeting for August is on Saturday, August 17 at Jim Burtle's home. Here are the directions to Jim's house.

Go west from four-mile-fork (intersection of Courthouse Rd. and Rt. 1). Proceed over I-95, go through the first two lights and to the third traffic light. There will be a Food Lion on your left. Turn left at that light onto Breezewood Drive. Take the third right turn off of Breezewood Drive onto Bradbury Circle. Bradbury Circle is a very small cul-de-sac with five homes on it. Jim's address is 2 Bradbury Circle and his phone number is 898-3536.

Club Telescope Available!

This is a reminder to everyone that the club has an 8 inch dobsonian telescope along with various eyepieces available for members to check out and use. If you are interested in using this telescope, contact Myron Wasiuta at (540) 972-3290.

Newsletter Articles Requested

If you have any astronomy related articles or reviews which you want to contribute to this newsletter, just send them to me, Tom Pendergrass, at mesg4tom@hotmail.com.

Club Calendar	
Aug 14	Club Meeting
Aug 15	<i>First Quarter</i>
Aug 17	ATM Meeting
Aug 22	<i>Full Moon</i>
Aug 31	<i>Last Quarter</i>
Sep 6 – 7	Big Meadows Star Gaze
Sep 7	<i>New Moon</i>
Sep 11	Club Meeting
Sep 13	<i>First Quarter</i>
Sep 21	<i>Full Moon</i>
Sep 21	ATM Meeting
Sep 29	<i>Last Quarter</i>

<u>Treasurer's Report</u> July 10, 2002
Bank Account: \$1,539.50
Members: 24

STARGAZER is the monthly newsletter of the Rappahannock Astronomy Club, a non-profit organization for amateur astronomers. Information can be obtained by writing:

Rappahannock Astronomy Club
P.O. Box 868
Spotsylvania, VA 22553

Society members build telescopes, observe the celestial heavens, contribute to scientific research, and provide opportunities for the public to do the same.

Visit our web site at:
<http://www.raclub.org/>

President: Arondo Holmes
Vice-Pres: Jeff Anderson
Secretary: Tom Pendergrass
Treasurer: Bill Steward



Fredericksburg Library
Wednesday, August 14 at 7:00 PM
Wednesday, September 11 at 7:00 PM

Central Rappahannock Regional Library
1201 Caroline St
Fredericksburg, VA 22401
(540) 372-1144