
RIVER BEND ASTRONOMY CLUB

NEWSLETTER * June 15, 2003

> NEXT MEETING

The next club meeting will be:

Well, the details aren't worked out yet. But a road trip to the Greenville Observatory has been discussed. We'll fill you in later if Jamie can confirm the date.

Saturday
July 12, 2003
Meet at Kronk's
7:00 PM

> FRESH BLOOD

Gee, that sounds kind of gory. How about fresh DNA? Hmmm, that might give the wrong impression. Well, let's just say four fresh faces attended the June meeting, and we were glad to have 'em.

Mike Veith
Mike has a really neat portable setup for his Meade ETX 125.

Ray Sepanski
Ray grew up in the northeast, and he fondly remembers seeing auroras and the Milky Way as a child in the years before proliferating lights began to wash away the night sky.

Tom Schalk
Tom said he's always had an interest in science. He attended the Astronomy Day event at the Children's Museum.

George Roethemeyer
George's enjoyed his first telescope back in his junior high days. Now as an adult he's been given a new scope and wants to learn more.

Welcome, gentlemen.

> POPULATION EXPLOSION

Gary--our fearless leader, always looking ahead--noted the growth in membership and mentioned some issues we may face as the club grows. "We formed the club because we love observing," Gary said. "Our intentions were to grow." But he noted that if the club gets much bigger we may need a new meeting place... Obviously Gary hasn't seen Ed's plans for remodeling the Kronk's garage.

> BLACKOUT

Welcoming the new members, Gary promised that the club will never get political. However, Mike Veith suggested "dark sky" politics might be worth some time and attention. A discussion of this issue ensued. Perhaps the club could use a "dark sky" officer, or maybe just someone willing to research the matter and keep us better informed. Perhaps a visit to the International Dark-Sky Association website is in order.
> www.darksky.org

> LUNAR ECLIPSE

May's lunar eclipse did not disappoint. Still, plenty of clouds drifted by. Many Missourians missed it due to cloud cover. The color mutations were fascinating as ever, as well as that circular shadow which confirms the shape of the big ball we call home.

> OUR ASTRO DAY HERO

We gratefully honored Mark Brown as chairperson of the Astronomy Day held in May. Mark's unflagging enthusiasm catapulted the club's efforts into its biggest and best event ever. See Gary's report (a work in progress) on the club website.
> www.riverbendastro.org

> THOUGHTS FOR NEXT YEAR

Mark is still troubled by how best to give away door prizes. (Not that I heard any complaints from the prize winners.) As Mark put it, "You want to please everyone, but..." Mark feels strongly that entrants should be present to win. Ray seconded idea that people should be present to win, based on his experience with these sort of giveaways.

Tom appreciated that so many members were on hand to answer questions. Also, he was particularly impressed by telescope display. We told him how many more scopes we'd planned to set up had Mother Nature cooperated.

All in all, the members present seemed eager to work with the Children's Museum again.

> WHAT TO WEAR?

It was suggested and discussed whether the club should get some T-shirts or Polo shirts with the club logo emblazoned, so we can show off and help convince our families that there are other decent, law-abiding citizens similarly addicted to doing strange things in the dark. Someone also mentioned the need for a banner for display at public events. If you know of economical vendors for these items, please let me know.

> LOCAL THINK-TANKS OFFER LITTLE TO THE CLUB

We discussed the observatories at Southwestern Illinois College and Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. What a shame that these facilities are not open to the public (that being us, I suppose) but available for student use only. There is also an observatory doing research at Principia College. As one member remarked, these sites are "closely held astro secrets". There may be opportunities for the public to use these telescopes sometimes...If you know when, please let us know.

> ASTRO SURFING

Mike Veith recommended a couple of websites:

"Weasner's Mighty ETX site" -- This site is chock-full of information for anyone who wants to eat, sleep, breathe and dream Meade ETX telescopes. These small, computer-enabled scopes have been heralded as a major breakthrough in amateur astronomy.

This home-built site celebrating them seems to include everything except how to wash your ETX in the kitchen sink (well, maybe it includes that, too) so be prepared to sort through and read lots of information. Again, if ETX are your favorite letters of the alphabet, then "go-to" this website.

> <http://www.weasner.com/etx/menu.html>

"The Arkansas Sky Observatory" -- Celebrating its 32nd year in serving astronomers and the astronomical community, the ASO has a rich heritage in astronomical outreach, education and research. The site features a bevy of goodies including online discussion forums and an interactive lunar atlas.

> <http://www.arksky.org/>

> RIVERBEND ASTRO-MART

Last I heard, Jace sold some of his scopes. In case you missed out on these great deals, don't worry--

Jace is sure to buy more. Haven't heard from Jamie about whether he parted with his 10". That's a great scope, too.

> LOOK, UP IN THE SKY!

Those observing from Gary's back yard were treated to a view of the International Space Station as it reflected the sun. I was among the ones who'd never seen it before--pretty neat. We also saw an "Iridium flare." Gary explained that these are caused by some 80 orbiting satellites. Angled solar panels catch the sun and create a brilliant flare that outshines every object in the sky except the sun. These events of very short duration help meteor observers see what certain brightness levels look like. For schedules of Iridium flares, space station sightings, and more --visit:

> <http://www.heavens-above.com/>

> CLEAR TO PARTLY CLOUDY

The night sky cooperated well enough the night of June 7 to let us have some fun observing. "Newbies" and old were treated to views of the Ring Nebula (looks like a glazed donut in space, or maybe an iced chocolate donut, which goes to show what I dream about), the Hercules cluster (a gazillion summer stars in a tiny knot that's our best northern sky globular cluster), and the colorful double star Albireo.

> WORLD WAR III

You've probably heard of the legal battles between Celestron and Meade, makers of popular amateur telescopes. Our club's June meeting began looking like a showdown of these competing makes as members assembled their equipment.

No fewer than three Meade users grouped closely together near the North end of the Kronk swimming pool. Outnumbered, the lone Celestron user chose to locate his scope at the opposite end of the pool. Things were quiet for a while. Then shouting and name-calling were heard, along with rather blue comments about certain Meade users' "go-to" capabilities. Tense moments followed. No one knows what happened next, but someone threw a large star chart, and a scuffle ensued. Next thing we knew, several members were in the pool, struggling, kicking, and throwing floatie toys at one another. All the while the Meade drive motors slewed angrily away. St. Jacob riot police were called to the scene. Everyone apologized and resumed observing. No one was injured, except one member who got his hair caught in the pool filter. Next time, Celestron users should locate in the front yard, and Meades in the back, to avoid further trouble.

> Until next month, CLEAR SKIES
