

THE NOVAC CORONA

to observe and to
help others observe

THE OFFICIAL NOVAC NEWSLETTER

Issue No. 9

Volume 6

June 1986

President, Nils Thomas 323-7476

Treasurer, John Huggins 644-4331

Secretary, Blaine Korcel 256-4430 *EDITOR*

CALENDAR

call 644-4331 for further details

June 6.....BLTM at Burke Lake Park begins at 8:30pm
June 7.....BLTM at Burke Lake Park begins at 8:30pm
25. Free lecture NASM The Advent of the H. Sp. Tele. 7:30pm
July 11.....Manassas observation at sunset
August 9.....Manassas observation at sunset
September 5.....Manassas observation at sunset
October 9.....Manassas observation at sunset

THE PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Thomas

The constitution vote ended April 30th with 26 votes cast. All votes cast were yes. No no or abstain votes were cast. As per item #4, we needed 33 ballots to respond; i.e. 2/3 of 50 members, our membership as of January 1, 1986. Because we were seven votes short, the constitution could not be ratified. We are left with two options:

- 1) Start another ballot among our present members.
- 2) Accept the ballot as valid since the constitution would have been ratified if seven more ballots had been cast, irrespective of how the seven ballots were cast (A majority of 2/3 votes response was needed or in this case 33 returns with 17 yes votes). I would like to recommend the second option in order to save time and money. We will discuss this issue at the next meeting.

Happy observing.

EDITORIAL

Korcel

The *NOVAC Corona* is now published six times a year so that we may keep our members better informed of upcoming events. It will not affect membership dues. This issue is dedicated solely for the Burke Lake Telescope Meet (BLTM 86). It has been designed to give helpful information for better BLTM 86 observing. Please copy the enclosed poster and post it at your place of work or place of play - any place that offers it a potential of being read such as libraries, employee lounges, or on elevator walls. You get the message. Your participation in this ad campaign is desperately needed. Thanks.

Several years ago you may recall our participation in the *International Directory of Astronomical Associations and Societies*. We currently appear in the 1986 edition which our club is going to include in its library. This directory offers club travelers the opportunity to contact astronomy organizations all over the world when vacationing or when away on business. It costs \$12.00, postage included, and comes from the Centre De Donnees Stellaires Observatoire De Strasbourg in France. If you are interested in obtaining your own copy, contact the secretary at 256-4430 for details. It is revised annually and I assume in English.

As you may have already noticed, the newsletter is a little more compressed this time around in terms of type size. We are trying to cut the expense but not the bulk of our novel size newsletters. I hope this does not pose an inconvenience to any one. If you have trouble, you're an astronomer, get out your telescope! Just kidding folks! If it does pose an excessive inconvenience, contact the editor and we will either try something different or provide you with a copy in the standard type size.

As a further note, take the time now to check the enclosed roster to make sure your name and address are spelled correctly. We lack information on some members because it was not provided on their checks. If there is an error, please contact the secretary at 256-4430 so that if a need arises, we can contact you as fast as possible.

In early February we sent a letter of condolence and sympathy to the families of the Challenger crew, c/o NASA. On May 16 we received a return letter which follows:

Dear Friend:

Thank you for your kind expression of sympathy in the loss of the Space Shuttle Challenger crew.

The families of the seven crewmembers have issued the following statement in acknowledgement of the many expressions of sympathy.

"The spouses and families of the Challenger Flight 51-L crew gratefully acknowledge your expressions of sympathy and support. We thank the world for sharing in our pride of the Challenger crew, and it is with continued pride that we cherish the memories of their accomplishments.

From all of you, we draw the strength to bid the crew of 51-L our love and joyful wishes for an extended and exciting exploration of that dimension in space that so intrigued them. To all the people of our country and all the countries of the world, we sincerely thank you."

Please know that all cards, letters and gifts have been forwarded to the families of the Challenger crew to whom they were addressed.

Sincerely,
James M. Funkhouser
Deputy Director, Public Affairs
(Public Services)
National Aeronautics and Space
Administration

BURKE LAKE TELESCOPE MEET

Huggins

BLTM86 is coming along quite well. We now have a speaker for the slide presentation on Saturday, June 7. He is Steve Smith from the Arlington Planetarium.

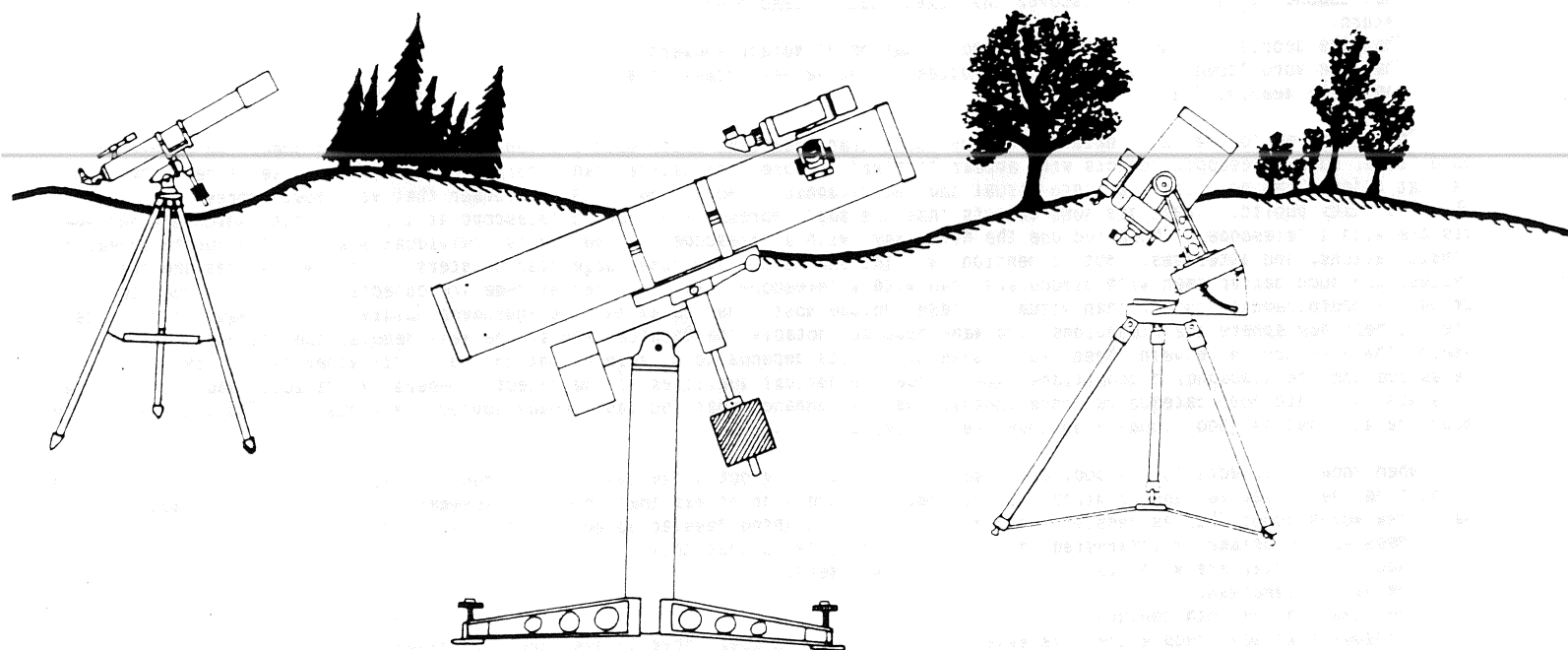
The information packet has finally been made so for those of you who requested it, you will be receiving it shortly.

THE
**BURKE LAKE
TELESCOPE
MEET**

FRIDAY JUNE 6 AND SATURDAY JUNE 7

- SLIDE PRESENTATIONS
- TELESCOPES PROVIDED

For More Information Call (703) 644-4331



Presented by the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club

I have included a poster in this newsletter that tells of this event. Please Xerox it if you can and spread it out at your place of work. Bulletin boards are a great place to put them. We need to advertise greatly because our Sky & Telescope ad did not get into any issue although it did make it into Astronomy. In the past we have relied on this to spread the word. However, we now have to spread the word ourselves. Please feel free to contact me for help.

Desperately needed are slides that you have taken of Halley's comet and other things. We need them to put into our Friday, June 6 slide presentation. Please mail them to:

BLTM Pictures
John Huggins
5608 Flag Run Drive
Springfield, VA 22151

You will get your pictures back after BLTM86. I know a lot of you out there have excellent shots. Here is your chance to show them off. During the show each picture will be credited to the photographer who took them. Your help in this matter is greatly appreciated. If you would like to get an information packet, please send a legal sized SASE to:

BLTM86
c/o John S. Huggins
5608 Flag Run Drive
Springfield, VA 22151

HALLEY'S COMET, PHOTOGRAPHIC AND VISUAL OBJECTS AND THE JUNE 6-7 BLTM (BURKE LAKE TELESCOPE MEET) OR BACON, LETTUCE AND TOMATO SANDWICH WITH MAYO

by Dr. Gerald P. Perman

Halley's Comet was a bust. People expected more. Or maybe I expected more. I have seen it in the morning and I have seen it in the evening. In the evening it was better. It did not take three days to regulate my sleep-wake cycle. Before Halley's slipped behind the sun in January, a short tail was barely visible using averted vision and but a modicum of imagination. That is, visible in my Meade 8" from Falls Church, Virginia. Perhaps it would have been spectacular from central Australia, Mount Everest or the moon. I saw no tail at 4:30 am on the clear morning of March 22, although the nucleus appeared well defined, surrounded by the coma.

Why was Halley's remembered as being so spectacular in 1910? One reason is that perhaps it was. There was much less air and light pollution. Also, the intersection of the elliptical orbit of Halley's and the earth's orbit may have resulted in the comet passing closer to the earth than this time around. Such will be the case when it returns in 76 years. Perhaps the most important reason Halley's was remembered as having been so stupendous, however, is due to the unreliability of that most fragile of our mental faculties, our memory. It has been said that we remember what we want to remember. A corollary is that we remember things the way we wish to have remembered them. Finally, in 1910 people were certainly a lot more suspicious of unusual objects in the sky and paid more attention to them.

As a photographic object, however, Halley's is striking. It's tail is sometimes splayed out, short and stubby, sometimes shooting straight on back (or forward, in its trajectory away from the sun), with knots, discontinuities, streamers, etc. And as a historical object, Halley's is fascinating. Some basic facts to point out to the public at the BLTM 86 include the following:

1. That Edmund Halley did not discover the comet, but instead predicted its return.
2. That the debris of comets results in the formation of meteor showers.
3. That the word "coma," the fuzz of the fuzball that we see, comes from the Greek meaning "hairy."

This leads me to the next topic. From any particular observing spot, with a given telescope, under specified observing conditions, some telescopic objects will appear "better" or more interesting than others. Ho hum. What else is new? My point is that objects can be classified into visual and photographic objects, and it is the former that will most impress the BLTM 86 public. There are some objects that are most impressive without a telescope at all - in fact, which are not even visible with a telescope. These include the Milky Way (with a telescope all you see is individual stars!), the Aurora Borealis, constellations, and asterisms. Not to mention twilight and dawn. And some large star clusters, like the Pleiades and the Hyades, are much better seen with binoculars than with a telescope. At the other extreme are objects that I would consider primarily photographic, rather than visual. These include most other galaxies (the Andromeda Galaxy and the Magellenic Clouds in the southern hemisphere are exceptions) and many nebulae, notably the Rosette Nebula, the Veil Nebula, and the Horsehead Nebula. Again, the distinction between these two classes of objects depends to a large extent on the light-gathering ability of your telescope and the atmospheric conditions, apart from the optical qualities of the object. Generally, galactic and globular star clusters fall into both categories since photographs will enhance what you can already appreciate visually. The planets and the moon are at least as good visually as they are photographically.

When showing objects to the public, in addition to pointing out a few basic facts about telescopes, such as the path of the light from the objective lens or mirror to the eyepiece, and a brief explanation of the movements of the equatorial mounting, I say a few words about Charles Messier, in conjunction with sighted Messier objects. Of note is that:

1. Messier was primarily interested in cataloguing objects so that they would not interfere with his efforts to find new comets.
2. He was a Frenchman.
3. He lived in the 18th century.

I assume that most people are like myself and can only remember three things about any given topic.

There will be a number of top-of-the-line deep sky objects visible for the June 6-7 BLTM 86. You will probably want to orient the public to the sky in general. I find it useful to first point out the Big Dipper which everybody knows anyway so they can start off feeling smart about themselves, then show how the pointers point to the North Star (Polaris), and then identify Cassiopeia (which, however, will be just above the horizon and perhaps not visible). I then explain how these two constellations, and in fact all the stars, seem to rotate around Polaris. It is extremely important to say that Polaris is actually .9 degrees away from the true North Celestial Pole - since you will then have achieved the status of a "scientist" for having used a decimal point. Next, point out a few of the other more well defined constellations (or, in most cases asterisms):

- The Northern Cross in Cygnus,
- Lyra, the lyre with its bright Vega,
- Castor and Pollux, the setting "twins" of Gemini (interestingly, the β star, Pollux, is brighter than the α star, Castor),
- Leo, with its Regulus,
- Scorpius and the rising Sagittarius.

I note that we are 1/3 of the way in from the edge of our galaxy in its Orion Arm, and the center of the galaxy is in the direction of Sagittarius. Hence, the Milky Way is densest in this part of the sky.

Summer is the season of the globular star clusters and two of the most impressive are M-13 in Hercules and M-3 in Canes Venatici. M-13 was first mentioned in 1715 by Halley. Globular star clusters are much rarer than open ones. We know of 125 globular clusters, compared to thousands of open clusters. They form a spherical cloud around the nucleus of our galaxy. The second largest globular cluster in the sky is Omega Centauri (the largest is M-104, visible from the southern hemisphere near the Small Magellanic Cloud), though this will be low on the southern horizon. Another good globular is M-53 in Coma Berenices, interesting also because it has a close neighboring globular, NGC-5053.

Some prominent open clusters will include M-44 (Praesepe, the Beehive Cluster in Cancer), and M-67 in the same constellation. Two of my favorite nebulae will be well situated:

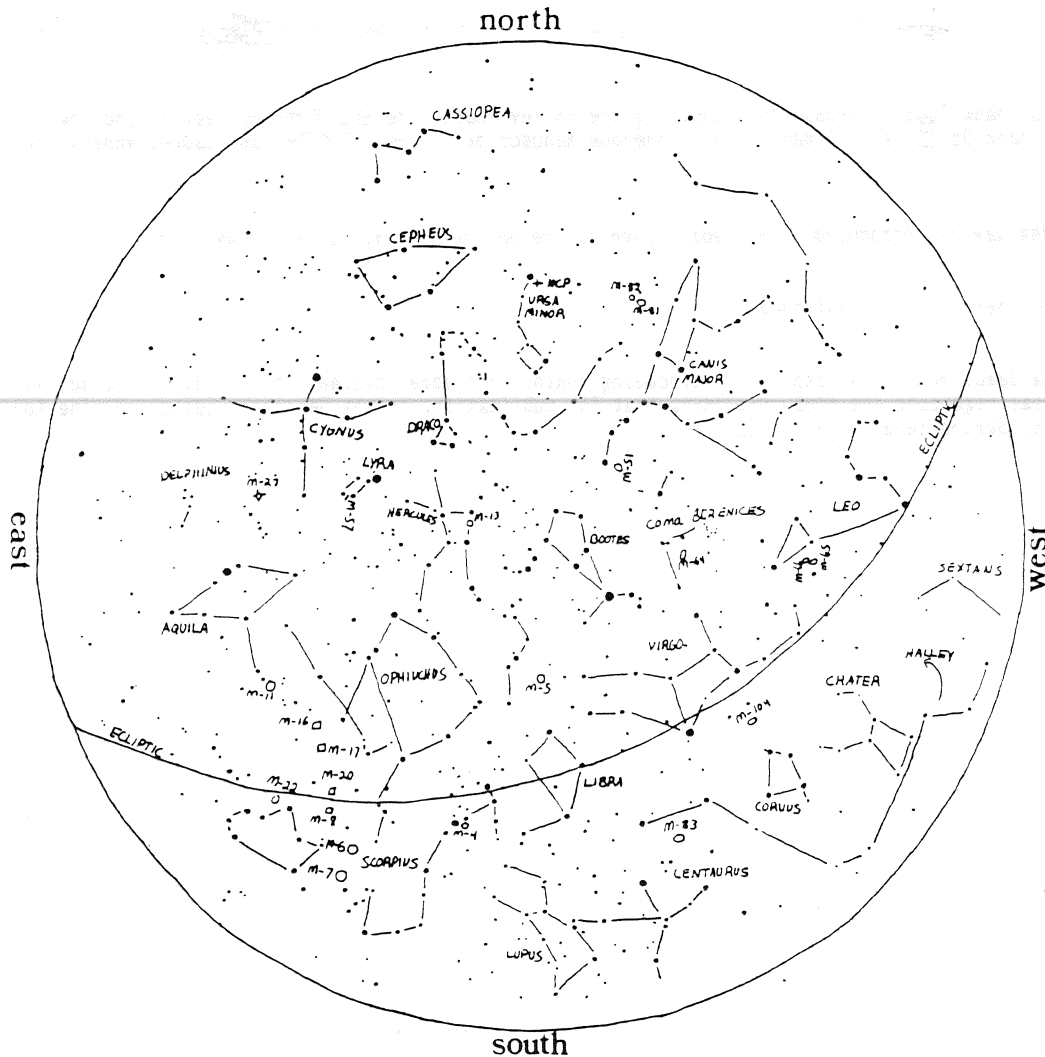
M-57, the Ring Nebula in Lyra, which is best seen at medium power (if the power is too low, you can not see the ring, if too high, the nebula fades out);

M-27, the Dumbbell Nebula in Vulpecula, also best viewed at moderate power. While your in Lyra, Epsilon Lyra, the "double double" star can be shown. Further impress your public with your knowledge that over half the stars in the universe are probably double stars, in a physical relationship with another star. Love is everywhere. Finally, as an example of galaxies, M-81 and M-82 in Ursa Major are two that are close together (in the same low power field) and close to my heart.

Mercury will be up in the sky, setting about 9:00 pm. Venus will be setting an hour later, at which time Mars will rise. Saturn will be magnificent, transiting at 11:15 pm, and Jupiter will rise at 12:30 am.

Halley's Comet may still be visible as it heads back out past Neptune, setting around 11:00 pm. Look for a tail streaking across the sky, and be sure to use a sun filter so you do not go stone blind.

I have suggested a few things to get started with at the BLTM 86. Remember my rule of three. Good luck.

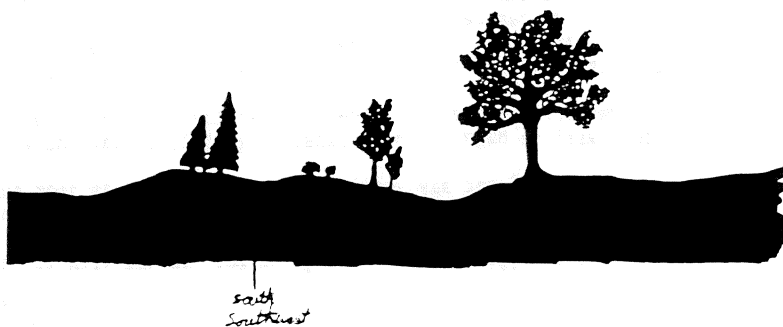
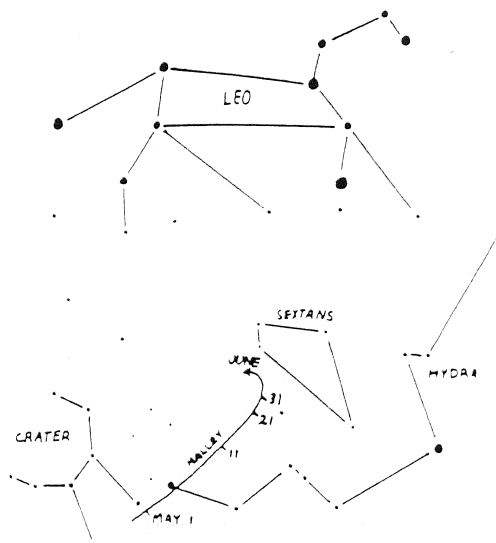


Midnight
June 1

HALLEY IN JUNE?

Korcel

I have received "billions" of calls from people asking about the prospect for June. Well, your guess is as good as mine. BAD! But for those die hards, enclosed is a Halley chart for June and the BLTM86. Halley is expected to be at a blinding magnitude of approximately 7.1 in the constellation of Hydra reaching its point of best visibility between 9:00 and 9:15pm. Little or no detail can be expected unless solar activity increases for BLTM86. Regardless, this little guy will be the prime target for public viewing since most of the public has not seen it yet. You think no one will care? Just wait! At my home observatory in downtown Metropolis, where the observing is smoggy and actually darker in the daytime, I have had unknown "strollers" come over and be utterly overwhelmed at actually seeing it even if it "looks something like a fuzzy star" or "a strange cloud" and "it's just barely visible." Some repeated comments are "is that it?, what am I looking for?" and "I don't really see anything!" But best of all are "I can't believe it. I'm looking at Halley's Comet and I'm alive!" or "Thanks for giving me the opportunity to see it. I thought I was never going to get the chance." Those who have not seen it yet will still appreciate a chance to view this bizzare and historic comet. Let's give the public one last chance to say good bye to history's parting friend and we can then ourselves make history and say "Goodbye until 2061."



I would like to thank Todd Prydybasz for supplying the Halley chart, the BLTM86 poster, and the Astrodome for June. Also I would like to thank Dr. Gerald Perman for his generous manuscript for BLTM86 and Laurel Wanrow for her technical assistance on this issue.

THE NOVAC CORONA may be reproduced with credit given to the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club.

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The Corona deadline is the 15th of the preceding month. For more information regarding club activities call 703-644-4331. Send all material regarding the club, including that for publication, to the Secretary/Editor; Blaine Korcel (703-256-4430), 5401 Danville Street, Springfield, Virginia 22151

NOVAC SPRING 1986 ROSTER

As of May 16

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A recording of pertinent info for the benefit of the members and the public.....703 644-4331

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New members are denoted by an (*)

If you are a new member and do not appear on this roster, don't worry. It is not completely updated yet.

N.O.V.A.C.
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Springfield, VA 22151

