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NOVAC

The Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club

Issue Number 27

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January/February, 1990

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The star is not extinguished when it sets
 Upon the dull horizon; it but goes
 To shine in other skies, then reappear
 In ours, as fresh as when it first arose.
 - *Horatius Bonar, Life After Death*

Board of Directors:
 Brent Archinal
 Al Boldt
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Programs for NOVAC Meetings

by Brent Archinal

An astronomical tour is also the topic of the January 17 meeting, with Brent Archinal presenting "Some Astronomical Views of England and Scotland", showing us the sights, astronomical and a few otherwise of Edinburgh, Scotland and southern England. The Royal Observatory of Edinburgh, the old and new Royal Greenwich Observatories, William Herschel's house, and Stonehenge will be the primary astronomical points of interest covered.

For our February 21 meeting, we shift back again to what could be called an "observing aid" topic, with Steve Robinson telling us about his "Yale Bright Star Catalog Query and Viewing Program". Steve plans to give us a live PC demonstration of his program, which allows searches by SkyAtlas 2000.0 chart through the very useful Yale Bright Star Catalog. Those present at the meeting will be welcome to try out the program.

We plan to continue to try to schedule programs for all our regular meetings. Those so far have been very well received by those attending. But we need to hear from you! If you have any

comments on what topics you'd like to see covered or how our programs have gone, or would like to do a program yourself, let us hear from you. Leave a message on our information hotline (256-8359) or give one of the club officials a call. Currently, all meetings are held the third Wednesday of the

January 26 & 27: Observations at C. M. Crockett Park.

February 15: Board of Directors Meeting.

February 16 & 17: Observations at C. M. Crockett.

February 21: General Membership Meeting at the Arlington County Planetarium.

February 23 & 24: Observations at C. M. Crockett Park.

March 15: Board of Directors Meeting.

March 16 & 17: Observations at C. M. Crockett Park.

March 21: General Membership Meeting at the Arlington County Planetarium.

March 23 & 24: Observations at C. M. Crockett Park.

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month, at 7:30 PM at the Arlington County Planetarium. Admission is free and open to the public.

Coming Attractions

January 11: Board of Directors Meeting.

January 17: General Membership Meeting at the Arlington County Planetarium.

January 19 & 20: Observations at C. M. Crockett Park.

What's New In NOVAC

by Bob Ridgley

NOVAC extends a warm welcome to those people who joined the club in October, November, and December. They are:

- Charles Yoder
- Timothy Whitter

Ian Dix
 Thomas Shinal
 John Somiak
 Doug Fraser
 J. Douglas Mistler

We hope to see you at our observations and monthly meetings. Please contact any of the club's officers with questions or suggestions which you might have.

NOVAC membership has reached 118. Of that number 98 are current in their dues, 3 are past due, and 17 are complimentary members (other clubs and organizations, etc). As of January 12th the NOVAC treasury balance is \$359.00.

All six seats on the Board of Directors will be up for reelection at the February General Membership meeting. To nominate a candidate please contact Blaine Korcel or post a message on the BBS, or on the Information Hotline. Nomination may also be made at the January General Membership Meeting.

1990 Observing Schedule

January:

19, 20, 26, 27

February:

16*, 17*, 23, 24

March:

16*, 17*, 23, 24

April:

20, 21, 27, 28

May:

18, 19, 25, 26

June:

15*, 16*, 22, 23

July:

13*, 14*, 20, 21

August:

17, 18, 24, 25

September:

14, 15, 21, 22

October:

12, 13, 19, 20

November:

9*, 10*, 16, 17

December:

14, 15, 21, 22

The Northern Virginia Telescope Meet will be held on Friday and Saturday nights, October 19th and 20th. All of these observing sessions will be held at the C. M. Crockett Park unless otherwise noted on the NOVAC Hotline and on the NOVAC BBS.

NASM Special Events

by Bob Ridgley

February will bring several interesting events to the Smithsonian's National Air & Space Museum (NASM). Plan a trip to the Mall to see them!

The Monthly Sky Lecture will be "Star Laws: What Are the Rules in Space?". The lecture will be given by George Robinson, Associate General Counsel, Smithsonian Institution, on Saturday, February 3rd. at 9:30 a.m. at the Einstein Planetarium.

Exploring Space Lecture Series selection will be "The Search for Dark Matter in the Universe", by Lawrence Krauss, professor of astronomy at Yale University. It will be held at the Langley Theater on Wednesday, February 14th. (call the numbers below for the time).

The Space Telescope Lecture will be by Robert W. Smith, historian NASM Space History Department, on Wednesday, February 21st. at 7:30 P.M. in the Langley Theater.

The Albert Einstein Planetarium will be closed February 5th. thru March 11th. for renovations

The National Air & Space Museum is located at Independence Avenue and Sixth Street, S.W., is open seven days a week. Normal hours are 10:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Admission is free.

For additional information about Smithsonian public programs, please call (202)-357-2700 or 357-1729 (non-voice TDD). For prerecorded information about events in a specific museum (Dial-A-Museum) call (202)-357-2020. For prerecorded information about the night sky (Dial-A-Phenomenon) call (202)-357-2000.

Jan/Feb Sky Sweep

by Kevin Jones

As the evening begins in January and February, two galaxies from our own Local Group are already sloping over in the west. The brightest of these is M31, the Andromeda Galaxy. It is located about 15 degrees to the northeast of the northeast corner of the Great Square of Pegasus, and is bright enough to be seen with the naked eye from either of NOVAC's observing sites on a good night. When observing this galaxy, note its two satellite companions, M32 and NGC 205 (M110) located in the same field. Also look for dust lanes in M31. (I've seen one with only a pair of binoculars, so they can't be that elusive.) Our other neighboring spiral galaxy is M33, sometimes called the Pinwheel Galaxy. It is about half the apparent size of M31, but has a much lower surface brightness. It is reputed to be a very difficult object for the telescope, but using the lowest possible power (maybe even the finderscope only), it becomes relatively easy to locate.

While observing in this part of the sky, be sure to also note Gamma Andromedae, or Almaak. This star (at the end of the Line of Andromeda) is a beautiful Albireo-like double with nice color contrast in its components.

Moving about 15 degrees to the north of this star will bring you to a spectacular pair of open clusters, called the Double Cluster in Perseus. This pair is also known as NGC 869 & 884. It is located in a truly dazzling Milky Way field and is impressive in anything from the smallest binoculars to the largest telescopes. These two clusters are also faintly visible to the naked eye from a dark observing site.

After lingering on the Double Cluster, look over at the constellation Taurus and a much more conspicuous open cluster, the Pleiades, or M45. The splendor of this dipper-shaped grouping of stars is completely lost in large telescopes; binoculars or your finder-scope give an unforgettable view. If you want a real observing challenge, telescopes from about 8 inches can sometimes show the nebulosity surrounding the brighter Pleiads. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish the nebulosity from the glare surrounding the stars, however. Good luck! About 15 degrees to the southeast of the Pleiades you will find another open cluster, even larger than the Pleiades, and poorer in stars. This is the v-shaped Hyades cluster. It is completely lost in even the smallest telescope, and can only be observed well using binoculars or finderscopes. The star Aldebaran, forming one tip of the V, is not a true member of the cluster. It is located at only half the distance of the true Hyads.

Still lingering in Taurus, 1 1/2 degrees to the northwest of Zeta Tauri (the tip of the southern horn) is the Crab Nebula, NGC 1952. This gray fuzzy blob is the remains of a star which went supernova in 1052 A.D. Some structure can begin to be seen in this object with larger telescopes.

Moving southeast into Orion, you will find the best-known deep sky object in the entire sky: the Orion Nebula, M42 & M43. This intricate nebulosity surrounds the multiple star Theta Orionis, also called the Trapezium due to

the shape formed by its four brightest components. The predominant color noticed by most observers in the nebula is green, due to emission from doubly-ionized oxygen. Can you detect any hint of the red, so prominent in photographs? This red color is from hydrogen emission and it can occasionally be glimpsed visually.

Continuing on, to the east of Orion is one of the most neglected areas of the sky, which also contains some noteworthy objects. The constellation Monoceros contains NGC 2237-39, also called the Rosette Nebula. This nebula is rather faint and has a low surface brightness. It is annular in shape and surrounds the star-poor cluster NGC 2244. About 5 degrees to the north of the Rosette Nebula is a complex of nebulosity that contains several interesting clusters and nebulae. These are the Christmas Tree Cluster (NGC 2264, a star-poor cluster with the brightest members amusingly shaped like an evergreen), the Cone Nebula, a dark protrusion in this nebulosity that is quite difficult for amateur instruments, and NGC 2261, Hubble's Variable Nebula. This last object is a peculiar example of a nebula that has changed appearance noticeably over time. This is thought to be due to clouds of soot blocking starlight ("casting shadows") on the nebulosity.

Have fun, and remember... Warmer nights will be here before you know it!

A Yale Bright Star Catalog Query and View Program

by Steve Robinson

The YaleView program presents an easy to use, full-screen bright-star viewing capability. The bright-star catalog is organized to correspond to the Sky-Atlas 2000 charts produced by Will Tirion. Therefore the program with its data consists of a single program file and twenty-six data files, one

for each of the star charts.

The package provides the astronomer with an intuitive query capability that is similar to those found in good query-by-example user interfaces frequently provided with commercial data base management systems. All of the fields in the catalog are available for specifying portions of the elements, and any number of catalog fields can be combined to produce the needed level of query qualification. For example, an astronomer may wish to retrieve all of the stars on a particular star chart that have a visual magnitude greater than 4, within a grid defined by a range of Right Ascension/Declination values and that are of spectral type K0, and that are part of a multiple star group with more than three components. The full screen user interface provides this kind of query capability in a simple-to-use format.

I am looking forward to sharing this program with our club in February, and look forward to your comments. I hope to have all of the documentation complete by that time. It is my intention to demonstrate the program, and have some hands on use of the program for those of you having interest. In the near future, I hope to have the YV disks available for downloading from our club's bulletin board.

Hope to see you there in February.

A Bright Comet This Spring

by Bill Burton

In our evening skies this spring we will be treated to Comet Austin, which may reach a brightness greater than magnitude 3. The comet was discovered on December 6th by Rodney Austin, as reported in IAU Circular 4919. IAU Circular 4926 gives the ephemeral coordinates from late March to early June.

Figures number 1 and 2 were generated on Voyager, an astronomy software program which was created for the Macintosh by Carina Software, San Leandro, California, telephone 415-352-7328. A review of this program will be published in the next issue. The "A"'s denote the predicted positions of Comet Austin in five-day increments beginning on March 20th. To make the charts I downloaded the coordinates from the NOVAC BBS and created a datafile, which Voyager plotted on its regular stellar database. I then called up a particular projection called "Local Horizon," which shows the sky visible from a set location (in this case Washington, D.C.) at a set time. Figure number 1 shows the sky looking west at 6:39 P.M. on March 20th. The sun will have set 20 minutes earlier, so the sky will still be fairly bright. The moon will not be up. The circled "A" is the predicted position of Comet Austin on this date, with an estimated magnitude of 5.4. At this time of evening it will be 13 degrees above the horizon, and will set at 7:51 p.m.

Figure number 2 shows the sky looking west at the same time of evening (6:39) on April 9th, when the comet (circled) is expected to be at its brightest - perhaps magnitude 2.7. The sun will have just set, and the comet at this time will be 14 degrees above the horizon. The full moon will be rising in the east, and the comet will set at 8:08 p.m.

It appears from these diagrams that a low western horizon is warranted. Sounds like Crockett Park to me. See you there!

If anyone needs astronomical positions for the stars or planets for any time in the past or future, give me a call (860-0958) or contact me via the BBS.

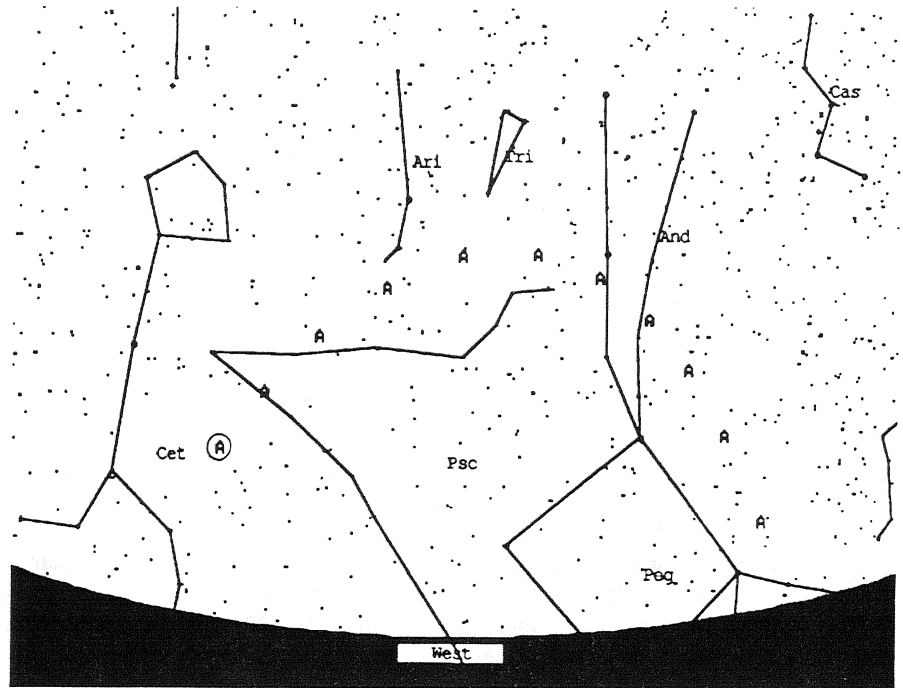


FIGURE 1 Chart Center: RA 01h,13.2m Dec 20deg,23sec
 Universal Time: 23:39 on 03/20/1990
 Local Mean Time: 06:39 p.m. on 03/20/1990
 Field: 83degs x 57degs

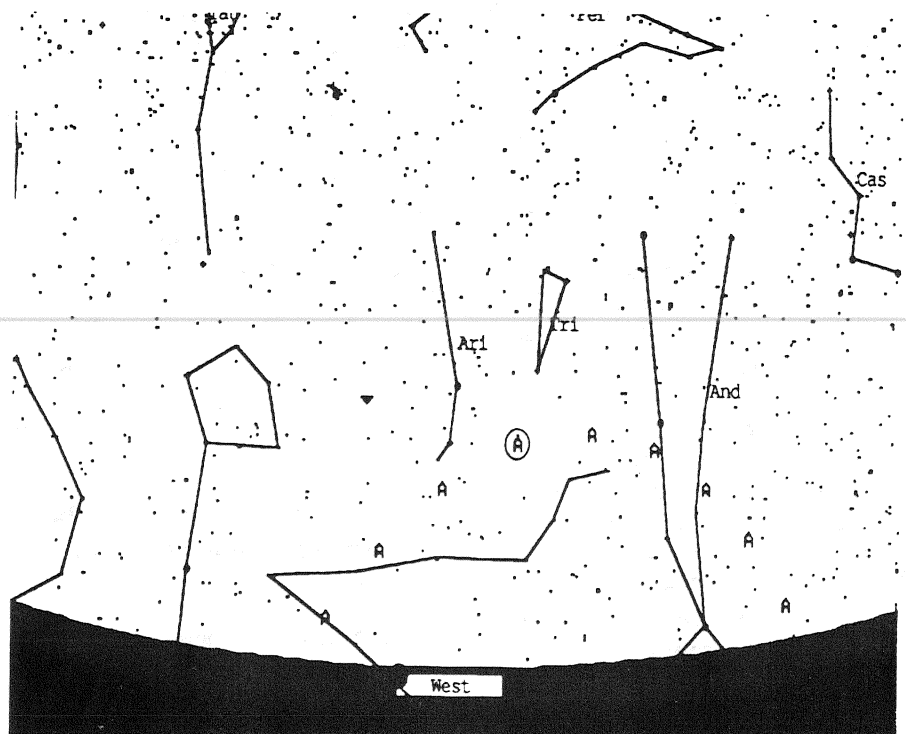


FIGURE 2 Chart Center: RA 02h,00.6m Dec 22deg, 06sec
 Universal Time: 23:39 on 04/09/1990
 Local Mean Time: 06:39 p.m. on 04/09/1990
 Field: 83degs x 57degs

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An Eclipse Recap

by Al & Lynn Schumann

There were about a dozen of us milling around Blaine's house on the evening of August 16th. Everyone dutifully admired the new deck in the backyard and nervously made small talk while waiting for the moon to rise above the tree line.

Meanwhile, the aurora was especially striking. Subtle pinks, a bit of deeper red and a gentle wash of yellow/orange light bathed the northeastern horizon. Well, all right damn it, it wasn't the aurora. It was the neon signs from Landmark shopping center combined with lights along Shirley Highway which glowed through the haze and humidity. At least, it seemed like the aurora! Point is, it wasn't that good a night. Vega, up near the zenith, was the only star visible. So much for polar alignment.

The moon came into view just to the

left of the TV antenna on the chimney. Watching a lunar eclipse is always kind of spooky as the shadow of the earth spreads slowly across the moon's surface. We take a lot of things for granted today and tend to forget that more than 2,000 years ago Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, deduced that the earth was round while he watched a lunar eclipse.

The big unknown was what we would see during totality. Astronomers had predicted the eclipse would be darker than usual since there had been no recent major volcanic activity. They certainly hit the mark. Shortly after the last thin crescent disappeared the moon was gone. No reddish tinge, no coppery glow, no nothing! What a letdown.

The crowd became surly and turned on Blaine. After all, he is the president, right? Al Boldt threw a rope over a tree limb. A neighbor screamed and fainted. Another neighbor said the sky was falling. John Huggins started talking in tongues. Tony and Sue Korcel said, "Blaine is not really our son, We found him on the doorstep," Photographers ripped rolls of film from their cameras and threw them in the gutter. It was not a pretty sight.

Finally, George Uhl defused the ugly situation by putting the whole thing in perspective. "Hey," said George, "This is great! I've never seen an eclipse like this before. This is the way it should be!"

Well, totality lasted almost two hours. During the darkness, everyone packed up and headed for home. We set up shop in our backyard just in time for the moon's emergence. Clouds were a nuisance by then, and the dew was terrible. But we were able to see the whole show,

In retrospect, it would have been nice if the skies had been clear, but we did see the eclipse, and there's a lot to be said for that. Let's get ready for the next one.

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For Sale, contact Jim Schaeffer at 476-5624 (home) or 281-6363 (office): CAPS, baseball type, mesh back, adjustable, NOVAC logo, \$5.95 (you pick-up), \$7.75 (UPS ship); JACKETS, nylon/satin, NOVAC logo on front & back, elastic at sleeves, neck, and bottom, very good quality, sizes S, M, L, XL, \$34.95; TELRAD finders, \$38.00.

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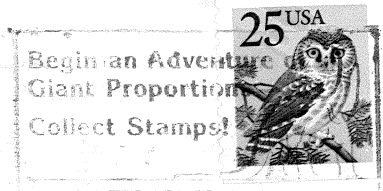
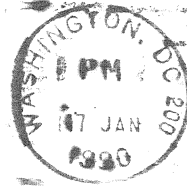
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