

NOVAC

The Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club

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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
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1990 Northern Virginia Telescope Meet Program

Friday, October 19 and Saturday, October 20 at C.M. Crockett Park, Calverton, Virginia

Friday, October 19 - Astronomers Night

No official public program planned for Friday night. Bring your telescope and have fun observing with other astronomers from dusk till dawn (or longer if you like).

Saturday, October 20 - Public Night

Public Program begins at 6:25 P.M. with the following events:

- Opening Address by Blaine Korcel
- Featured Talk by our guest speaker
- Slide Show
- Observations from dusk till dawn and beyond (public invited)

Telescope Meet Details

by *George Uhl*

This year's Telescope Meet promises to be bigger and better than ever!

There is a map of Crockett Park with the important Telescope Meet areas marked on page 9 of the newsletter.

If you get there early, or plan to stay the weekend, Crockett Park has lots of fishing and some nature trails for hiking. You can rent a canoe and paddle around Germantown Lake.

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The talks and slide shows will take place on Saturday night at the Panorama Shelter. Remember, Friday night is Astronomer's Night (i.e., a regular club night with added significance?) and Saturday night is Public Night. Lets hope for clear skies and lots of star bunnies!

How To Get There (If You Don't Already Know)

- Take I66 West to Rt. 28

- Turn Right onto Rt. 28 South and continue thru Manassas...

[or continue on I66 West past Rt. 28. Turn Right onto Rt. 234 South. Go about 3 miles turn right on Godwin Dr. (see sign directing you to Rt. 28 South). Take this road to Rt. 28 South. Turn Right onto Rt. 28 South.]

- Continuing on Rt. 28 South, you will cross the Prince William/Fauquier County line...

- Continue for about 6 miles passing

Merchandise will be sold by NOVAC, other clubs and individuals in and around the Telescope and R.V. area. The park will provide a concession stand for refreshments both Friday and Saturday nights. Camping will be permitted at the Park, but only R.V.s, Vans, etc. will be allowed in the parking and telescope areas, i.e., no tents. Tent camping will be permitted by the Dam, about 200 yards away. There will be no electrical or water hook-ups, but the Park does have water and bathrooms (showers - probably not).

thru the small towns of Catlett and Calverton.

- You will cross over some railroad tracks at Calverton - now you're getting close!

- You will come to a sign for Rt. 643 (on the left) - DON'T TURN THERE!

- Go about 1/2 mile further and you will come to another Rt. 643 on the right - turn right. (You will see a Mayhew's General Store on the corner).

- After about 1 mile, you will come to the park sign ("C.M. Crockett Park") - make the left just past the sign.

- The Park entrance is 1/2 mile down the road, just past the "Road Ends 1/2 Mile" sign.

- Drive slowly into the Park, if you have a telescope, or plan to sell merchandise, make a left into the Telescope setup area on the big grass field (see Map in this Newsletter).

- If you don't have a telescope or aren't selling anything, you should park in the gravel parking lot about 200 yds past the entrance station on the right.

- If you get there after dark, please be considerate and use your parking lights to minimize bright light blindness to those who have dark-adapted eyes. Watch out for pedestrians though! Don't forget your red flashlights either! It has been rumored that NOVAC astronomers who get blasted by white light after becoming dark-adapted turn into flesh-eating Zombies!!!! So you've been warned!

Programs At NOVAC Meetings

by Brent Archinal

As the summer winds down, the programs at NOVAC meetings will be making the transition from telescope making to further reports on conven-

tions and summer observing results.

Our July meeting featured an excellent program by Herschel Payne on telescope making, with Herschel discussing many of his ideas on telescope making and displaying 3 telescopes he had made. The August meeting saw several reports on the late July Stelafane telescope making and observing convention, as well as a special-show from Al Schumann on his new backyard telescope pier.

Continuing this trend, our September 19 meeting will be looking at a specific amateur astronomy convention, in this case our own Northern Virginia Telescope Meet! Blaine Korcel and others will be showing some slides of the last two years' NVTMs as well as a few views of the earlier Burke Lake Telescope Meet gatherings. All this in anticipation of this year's NVTM on October 19 and 20. Members are also welcome to bring anything you might have on your amateur astronomy activities this summer, whether on your own observing or observing trips or other astronomy conventions - just let Blaine know in advance.

Steve Smith, Director of the Arlington Planetarium where we meet, will be the featured speaker at our October 17 meeting. Steve will be discussing one of his summer observing experiences, that of watching the July 22 total solar eclipse from Helsinki, Finland! Although clouds were a problem during the eclipse, he'll be showing us several slides of the eclipse and commenting on some of the strange atmospheric effects - and will even be "taking us there" with the planetarium projector. Steve will also be reporting on the International Planetarium Society's biennial meeting held there - which just "happened" to occur at the same time and place as a total solar eclipse! Anyway, come and get a preview of what Baha and Hawaii will be seeing next July!

These regular meetings of the North-

ern Virginia Astronomy Club are currently held the third Wednesday of each month at 7:30 PM, at the Arlington County Planetarium, 1426 N. Quincy Street, Arlington, VA 22207. Admission is free and open to the public. Call the NOVAC hotline (703-256-8395) for schedule changes, cancelation, or leave a message to obtain further information.

Sky Sweep For September And October

by Kevin Jones

Well, autumn is here once again. That means the return of school (for me anyway - groan!) and hopefully some pleasantly cool, less hazy, and less humid nights.

This issue's celestial tour will begin a little to the west of the zenith, with the constellation of Lyra, the lyre. The first target here is the star Epsilon Lyrae, the famous "double double" star. A person with extremely good eyesight should be able to split Epsilon into two components with the naked eye, though I can't claim to. With any sort of small telescope it is easily split into its two main components, and with enough magnification the duplicity of each star is revealed, making four components in all.

From Epsilon, move the telescope a few degrees to the south, about halfway between Gamma and Beta Lyrae. Here lies the "Ring Nebula," or M57. This nebula resembles a ghostly grayish green Cheerio in the eyepiece of almost any sized telescope, as the ring is not incredibly small. It is the remains of a star that went nova quite a while ago. Incidentally, this is about what the Sun will look like in a few billion years after it too dies. If you train a monster-sized telescope on the Ring, you might even glimpse the central star, an extremely hot blue dwarf of 15th magnitude.

After taking in the Ring Nebula, for a while, aim the finderscope at Delta-

Lyrae (a couple degrees to the north). Take a look at Delta (a double star) through the finder. Notice a very loose aggregation of stars there? Not too obvious, is it? Well, that little bunch of stars is the open cluster Stephenson-1. I happened upon this cluster about a year ago while I was out observing and was unable to identify it until I got my Uranometria 2000.0 a couple months later. To date, that is the only place I've seen it identified.

Rounding out Lyra, move the telescope roughly eight degrees to the southeast to find one of the lesser-known Messier objects, the globular cluster M56. This cluster is rather small but is easily visible in virtually any telescope.

The next constellation on the agenda is Cygnus the swan, also known as the Northern Cross. The first target in Cygnus is for the naked eye, or possibly the finderscope. NGC 7000, the North America Nebula, is located about two degrees to the east of Deneb and covers a couple of degrees of sky. It is sometimes visible to the naked eye as a bright patch in the Milky Way, and can occasionally be observed to have some structure in the finder or binoculars.

Near Sadr (Gamma Cygni) is an open cluster from the Messier Catalog, M29. This region also shows extensive nebulosity on long-exposure photographs and is a good target for "piggyback" astrophotography from a dark sky site. Out along one of the swan's wings, near Epsilon, is the Veil Nebula, which is so large and complex that it holds the numbers 6992-95, 6979, and 6960 in the NGC. Once thought to be an extremely difficult object to observe visually, the advent of contrast-enhancing filters has made the Veil an only moderately difficult object to find.

And finally, no look at Cygnus would be complete without a stop at the

swan's nose, Albireo. This star is a beautiful double star and is one of the most striking examples of colors visible in the night sky, shining light blue and yellowish-orange.

Rounding out this issue's observational tour are Vulpecula the fox and Sagitta the arrow, both located just under Cygnus. Vulpecula holds an interesting planetary nebula, M27, the Dumbbell Nebula. Amazingly, it is actually shaped like a dumbbell (well, OK - an apple core at least!) and this shape is detectable visually.

Sagitta holds another interesting object with some controversy around its classification. It is either classified as an extremely loose globular cluster, or an extremely rich open cluster. Anyway, the cluster is M71 and is located in the center of the shaft of Sagitta. I must say, it looks like a globular through my telescope!

That's it for this issue's Sky Sweep. Clear skies, and I hope to see many of you at the Telescope Meet!

Getting More For Less

by Al and Lynn Schumann

That title might sound like a contradiction, but it's a fact that sometimes you can get better results with less aperture. In recent years, amateur astronomers have become almost obsessed with large mirrors. While fast F4 and F5 "light buckets" are unsurpassed for deep sky observing they frequently come up short when used to view the planets in our own solar system. Large Schmidt-Cassegrain (SCT) or Newtonian reflectors can collect TOO much light and give overly bright, washed out and spikey images of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars. For that reason, serious planetary observing was thought to be the exclusive province of refractors. However, that does not have to be the case.

A simple off-axis mask can "slow

down" a large mirror telescope and turn it into a very effective instrument for planetary observation. What's a mask? It is probably the single least expensive accessory there is for a telescope; a piece of cardboard with a hole cut in it, a squirt of flat black spray paint and bit of tape or a rubber band to hold the mask in place at the front of the telescope.

Here's how to do it. Cut a piece of cardboard to match the outside diameter of your telescope tube. Next, cut a circular hole near the outer edge. The size of the hole will be dictated by mirror size and the space between the spider vanes which hold the secondary mirror. For example, let's take a 16 inch, f-4 Dobsonian. An off-axis mask with a 5.5 inch hole instantly converts that F-4 telescope to an F-11.6 instrument. With the secondary mirror and spider vanes covered, the effective aperture is a CLEAN 5.5 inches. Total light is reduced, focusing is easier and contrast is enhanced significantly. All with a scrap of cardboard.

Our Celestron C-8 is normally an F-10 telescope. We made a four inch off-axis mask which not only cut out most of the central obstruction of the SCT but gave us an F-20 focal ratio to boot. Add a 2X Barlow lens to the equation, and that same C-8 becomes an F-40 instrument with the sharpness, contrast and clarity the slower F ratio suggests. But what is the point of all this?

Well, Mars will be at opposition this November. It will be a bit further from Earth this year than it was in 1988, but it will be considerably higher in the sky. So, over the next few months, Mars should be a splendid target for all observers. It is a real kick to watch the polar cap grow smaller as summer comes to the red planet. Also, it is a real challenge to sketch the surface details which are visible through even modest backyard telescopes. Now and then, huge springtime dust storms

obscure the surface features; it's fun to watch them too. Furthermore, this year's apparition of Mars will be the best for the remainder of this century, so it's time to git it while the gittin' is good. In the meantime, Saturn is still nicely placed in the evening sky. Last week, Big Al Boldt came over and, using his 2.6 Barlow and the mask, we saw some stunning views of the ringed planet through what amounted to a four inch F-56 SCT telescope. We're ready for Mars 1990!

Events of Interest

Al Schumann will be hosting the Executive Committee meeting at his house on Thursday, September 13 at 7:30 P.M.. A big issue is the guest speaker for the Telescope Meet. Geoff Chester, who was going to speak is expecting a baby that week, and is now iffy. If you have any ideas, suggestions, etc. please forward them to any club officer or show up at Al's on Thursday. Al's number is (703)971-3257. WE NEED HELP.

C.M. Crockett Park is having a Children's Festival on Saturday, September 15, which also happens to be one of our club nights. You are encouraged to arrive a little early, set up your gear so folks can look at a "real" astronomical instrument, and then be willing to show some objects to the kids and their parents. This is good P.R. for us with the Crockett Park management, let's give them a good turn out!

Bill Burton and his NOVA Astronomy Class will be observing somewhere on September 15 (hopefully at Crockett). If you want to help him out call him at (703)860-0958.

Geoff Chester will have his star program at Sky Meadows on September 22, at 8 P.M.. Geoff loves to have extra 'scopes around, so help him out if you can. He'll also have a show on October 27, at 7:30 P.M., a week after the telescope meet.

There maybe a possible executive committee meeting on October 11 for last minute Telescope Meet planning. Call any club officer as the date approaches if you're interested in attending or have suggestions.

Don't forget the regular monthly meetings at the Arlington Planetarium on September 19 and October 17. See you at the Telescope Meet.

Rapt Up In Stellafane

by George Uhl

When I first joined the club a few years ago, I was attending a meeting at the planetarium when I overheard someone talking about cellophane (orsomething like that - I wasn't paying attention really). Cellophane? What's this got to do with astronomy? With my curiosity aroused I listened in. Apparently it was some sort of enormous astronomy convention somewhere in the mountains...Oh, Stellafane (what a weird name for an astronomy convention). Where was it? Springfield, Vermont (sounds great - probably not any light pollution for hundreds of miles). It was cloudy and rained alot (crypes, sounds like around here). Lots of homemade telescopes with far-out gadgetry (interesting, I wish I had the patience to make one - who am I kidding, I don't even have the patience to make toast). Someone has slides to show at the conclusion of the meeting (this ought to make my trek from Manassas to the meeting worth it).

To this day, I remember one telescope slide. Some guy had built a portable observatory on a trailer - it was wild. Oh, make that two slides - there was that bizarre looking telescope and observatory that was built at the convention site. I decided that someday I'd go, at least once, just to see what some of America's stranger minds could concoct.

Well, this was the year to go. Of course, being Mr. Spontaneity I

wouldn't commit to anyone till the last minute (I'll be damned if I'm going to drive halfway up the east coast to sit around in the rain). By Tuesday evening the weather report looked good and despite Al "Look on the Bright Side" Boldt's advice - bring an umbrella and enjoy the rain - I decided to go, but not alone. I had heard that Bill Burton was looking for a ride, and being one of the more normal people in the club, he seemed like a good guy to go up with. After playing telephone tag for a day or two we decided to leave at the crack of dawn Friday. He was going to bring an antique telescope tube and tripod assembly to sell and I was going to bring my pup, Gus, to eat, sleep, go potty, and play, play, play.

We took the "Manassas Cadillac" (my Ford Bronco) loaded up our stuff and the dog and were on our way by 6 A.M.. Now Bill is a Stellafane veteran, and I a green rookie. The night before we left, I started suggesting that we bring our telescopes and camp far, far away from the site. Bill patiently calmed me down and suggested we leave our 'scopes behind and forget about driving to some backwoods campground. Instead we should enjoy the interesting telescopes that were there, which was the whole point of going, and that we probably wouldn't get a whole lot of sleep anyway. In the end he turned out to be right.

We figured the drive would take about 10 - 11 hours. Wrong. Hey, I'm sorry, I can't drive 55! Minimum speed 65. Maximum speed, well my speedometer doesn't register anything over 85! I enjoyed the ride, but I can't speak for Bill. Though when it was his turn to drive, things were a bit more mellow. Anyway, it took us about 9 1/2 hours, including stops, to get there. The campground wasn't full and when we found Blaine, Brent, Brenda and Kevin, there was a camping spot open right next to them. After setting up our tents, we chatted with our clubmates and a few other zanies from Goddard

and the Space Telescope Institute. I kept on saying, to anyone who would listen, that the best thing about camping is sitting around and doing nothin'.

After a brief thundershower (O.K. Al, I don't want to hear "I told you so"), I eventually moseyed up to Breezy Hill, which is where the Porter Turret Telescope is. That's the bizarre one I mentioned earlier. On the hill were the other homemade telescopes that were there for the competition. There weren't as many as I figured would be, and I hoped I wouldn't have to stand in line that evening for half an hour to look at Saturn for 30 seconds.

It cleared up nicely that evening and the sky was as good as it gets at Sky Meadows, which is pretty good. I remember standing in line for about 10-15 minutes to look at the Dumbell Nebula through a 25-inch Dobsonian. It was bright, but hell I wanted to see something more exciting - like the Veil or Stephan's Quintet. Come back later I was told. Brenda and I were-walking around looking through different telescopes. There were Schispeiglers (forgive the spelling), a binocular observing rig that looked like it was once used as the tail gun turret for a B-17, all kinds of reflectors and refractors, not to mention all kinds of mounts: homemade dobsonian, alt-azimuth and equatorial. There were also about 2000 other people and at least one pup stumbling around in the dark. Worst of all, the guy with the key to the Porter Turret Telescope Observatory wasn't around so I didn't get to look through it. I was getting tired and I wanted to get up early to catch the deals at the swap tables, which I was told would be all gone by 7 A.M.. I crashed in my tent before 1 A.M. with visions of a new finderscope dancing in my head.

I woke up around 5:30 and rushed down to the swap tables only to find 1 or 2 people setting up, including that guy from the Delaware Valley As-

tronomers (DVA). He was one of the first to come and one of the last to go. I eventually did get a finderscope, an 8 X 50, for \$50 (not much of a bargain-but there weren't many of them there) and a piggyback mount for a camera for \$25 (an O.K. bargain). I also got a set of those whacky postcards that say "Greetings from Planet ..." with the great cartoon art on them. Bill told me he was up till 4 A.M. looking through telescopes after all the sensible people went to sleep. The sky had stayed clear and with no lines to stand in, he got to look at all the cool things that I wanted to look at. But he was a hurtin' cowboy the next day.

After the swap table, I went back up the hill to do some solar observing and to see in the daylight some of the instruments I was observing through the night before. I got to look at the Sun through a Hydrogen-Alpha filter for the first time and it certainly was a thrill. Someone had a CCD-TV attached to an SCT showing "live" pictures on a TV monitor! I checked out the Porter Observatory and was told that it would be open that evening.

Back to the campground to sit around and do nothin', nap for an hour or so, play with the dog, drink beer and cut cheese. Bill did sell his antique telescope rig for a fair price and made out great, since the 'scope was given to him anyway. Kevin sold a lot of stuff and probably made out like a bandit too. Later that afternoon, everybody but Bill went to town to eat pizza before the convention talks began. Bill had an overdue appointment with the sandman. In the end we got the pizza to go and brought it back to the campsite. As the evening settled in, the sky, which looked so promising during the day, began to deteriorate.

The talks began with an opening address, the raffle for the goodies (including a set of two-inch Nagler eyepieces), a ceremonial induction of the Stellafane site into the list of National

Historical Sites by the US Dept. of the Interior, a few amateur astronomer speakers and finally the guest speakers. The first guest speaker was the NASA Science Program Manager for the Hubble Space Telescope. I gotta admit, this guy had guts to come out to talk to a bunch of telescope makers. He talked about the spherical aberration in the optics and what caused the problem... well, I've seen the best in government talk in circles and Dr. Whats-his-name was no exception. Anyway, when the audience began to grill him, he decided to avoid a sticky situation through circular rhetoric and took the next space shuttle out of town. Then it was Dave Levy's turn. Mr. Levy does have that rare gift of being an entertaining public speaker, but alas, with the lack of sleep and the ball of pizza in my tummy, I began to doze. All of a sudden, somebody screamed out "AURORA!!!", which knocked me out of my chair into a standing position. It was Mr. D.V.A. and I am afraid that was the last I saw of Dave Levy.

I rushed up to Breezy Hill, away from the lights of the amphitheatre, to catch a glimpse of the aurora, which I've seen only once before. There was what looked like sky glow to the North above a low bank of clouds. Luckily, that cloud bank never pushed through and the local ones dissipated. There was only the faintest tease of aurora and I decided to go back to catch the rest of the show. When I got back, the show was over and the exodus to Breezy Hill by the masses had begun, not to mention the masses that left for home. I thought I might as well hang out till people went to sleep and then go back up to have some of those telescopes to myself. All of a sudden the aurora began to kick in. This was an amazing display, not a lot of color, but a lot of action. Arcs, rays, plumes, curtains shooting up from the north, racing from east to west and back again. All the people around me were oohing and ahing, applauding and just plain

loving it. Blaine and Brent went camera happy. Brenda and Kevin had just left for their hotel (I am sure they are just miserable for leaving so early). Bill had gone upto Breezy Hill, and from what he said none of the telescopes were in use as everybody was flat on their backs enjoying the show.

After about 3 hours things began to settle down and I went up to Breezy Hill, with Blaine and Brent. This time I got to look at Saturn through the Porter Turret Telescope and a few others. The seeing conditions were not nearly as good as the night before so Saturn was getting a lot of work. The schispeigler gave the best view I thought. I did catch Mars through someone's f-infinity refractor. There was a lot of detail and the polar ice cap was still pretty big. By this time I was exhausted and decided to turn in - it was about 2 A.M.. I think Bill had already thrown in the towel, but Blaine and Brent shot the rest of their film on the aurora, which was acting up again. They quit around 4 A.M..

Next morning Bill and packed up, had breakfast and were out on the road by 9. Although I kept a more reasonable speed, the trip back took less than 9 hours. Bill and I talked astronomy and telescopes almost all the way home and probably would have kept it up all the way if exhaustion hadn't crept up on us. I think you'll see me up there next year.

WHAT'S NEW IN NOVAC

by Bob Ridgley

NOVAC extends a warm welcome to those people who joined the club in July and August. They are:

Robert A. Owen
Marie Therese Lintz
Robert L'Hommedieu

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 now has 106 members. Of that number 92 are current in their dues, 1 is past due, and 16 are complimentary members (other clubs and organizations, etc). As of September 1st the NOVAC treasury balance is \$1,061.

August 15, 1990 NOVAC Meeting Minutes

by Al Schumann

The meeting was called to order at 7:35 PM by your humble servant acting for the absent Blaine Korcel. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and accepted.

OLD BUSINESS: Jim Schaeffer reported that RV's will be permitted to stay overnight at Crockett Park during the telescope meet. (Oct. 19/20)

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Saturday, Sep. 15 is "Kids' Day" at Crockett Park. NOVAC has been requested to support the event. It is a scheduled observing night, so let's turn out.

2. The Naval Observatory has put out a call for assistance in spotting the young moon on August 21. (Details in August Sky & Tls.) We can get our results to Brent Archinal, and he will forward them to the appropriate office at the USNO.

3. George Uhl noted that August 24 would be the deadline for drawings and photos for the Sep/Oct issue of the newsletter.

4. It was suggested that we include the meeting minutes in the newsletter. Voila!! Here they are.

5. The Air and space Museum has a new "Space Touchables" exhibit. It gives visitors a chance to get a real close-up experience with space arti-

facts. Phone: (202) 357-2700.

6. There is no program for the September meeting (Sep 19). Instead, it will be an open ended wrap-up night for anyone who has something to show and tell. Here's your chance to take center stage.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:50 PM. Al Schumann gave a slide show on the construction of a permanent pier. Brent Archinal then presented a comprehensive look at Stellafane 1990. Slides included a wide variety of unusual telescopes and a number of splendid photos of an aurora.

Respectfully submitted,
Al Schumann, Secretary

The President's Column

by Blaine Korcel

As usual, it looks as if I'm the last one to get an article in. A lot has happened since the last issue, mainly, NVTM '90. Planning has been "nearly" completed and we look forward to October 19th and 20th being clear this year. I won't bore you all with details here. I understand a contributor has written a nice article that explains the event in as much detail as we can give at this time. Spread the word and let's hope for the best. I think it'll be better than any of the previous ones we've held.

For those new to the club you may be interested in making a special effort to get to the September meeting on the 19th. I will be giving a short slide show and talk on NVTM's and BLTM's of the past as far as our records go back. I hope I haven't bit off more than I can chew with this one. At any rate, I hope to see everyone there this month.

On another note, we have been asked to provide some scopes, handouts, and people for Crockett Park's annual Children's Festival on September 15th. From what I understand there will be food and drinks available for

lunch. I don't know how late it will be served though. It would be nice to set up some scopes for daytime examination and possibly solar observing if skies permit. We should be able to move right into our regularly scheduled observing night without any interruption. Of course, kids and their parents who are determined to stick it out are always welcome to stay. This should be a lot of fun for everyone in spite of the expected zoo during the day.

As some of you already know, I have started planning for an observatory in my back yard. Everybody knows what a pain it is to set up the scope each night and I'm no exception to that rule. I was inspired by a recent observing session with Brent Archinal at the US Naval Observatory (USNO) in Washington, DC. YES, OBSERVING SESSION IN DC! We had an opportunity to observe using the USNO's Photometrics CCD camera on the 24" Cassagrain. It was inspiring to say the least to see objects around 19th or 20th magnitude with a waning gibbous moon overhead all night. That inspiration gave me hope that some useful observing may still be possible in the sodium lit corners of my back yard.

There is quite a bit you can still do even if you don't have a CCD camera. For example, Brent Archinal, his wife, Kevin Jones, his mother, and myself all sat witness to an event we won't see again until sometime in the 2000's. This event was the Moon/Jupiter occultation last month. We added a new twist to observing by outfitting the scope with a video camera and watching the event on TV inside the house. This also allowed us to video tape the event as well. Unfortunately, 10 minutes before the event, the background was so bright that we all but lost the image. The actual event occurred well after sunrise. Some processing is still in order for the video and I hope to show it at one of our upcoming meetings.

Along with occultations, we can still observe sunspots, the moon (That thing we curse but often find very interesting to look at once we force ourselves to turn the scope towards it), planets, and with a complement of filters, many deep sky objects as well. I also hope that this observatory will also serve as a tool for teaching others more about the sky and the operation of telescopes. I will photo document it's construction and present it at an upcoming meeting as well.

Well, I guess that's it for now. All of our last minute details on NVTM '90 will be presented at this month's meeting. See you all there.

Clear skies,



Blaine Korcel
President

Hubble Trouble

by Art Buchwald
submitted by Al Boldt

When the \$1.5 billion Hubble telescope went awry, the powers at NASA immediately called the telescope repairman. Naturally they got a recording. "This is Ernie, the telescope repairman. I am not in right now. At the sound of the beep leave your name and information about your telescope and I'll get back to you as soon as I can."

Several days later the Hubble Manager was still waiting to hear from Ernie. They called him at home.

"I was going to get to you today," Ernie said. "What's the problem?"

The manager answered, "The mirrors on the telescope seem to be showing a spherical aberration."

Ernie said, "Do you have a service contract?"

"No I don't," replied the manager.

"The telescope was under warranty for the first 4 million miles."

"That's only if the telescope falls into a black hole," Ernie explained. "You're going to have to pay for the repairs yourself."

"All right, but when can you get up there and work on it?"

"I don't have any telescopic mirrors in stock. I'll have to get them from Spokane. The way they're shipping these, it's going to take 14 weeks."

"We can't wait 14 weeks. The publicity is killing us."

Ernie said, "Let me ask you a question. Who put in the mirror in the first place?"

"John Scarsi of Telescopes-R-Us," the manager answered.

"I thought as much," Ernie replied. "He sells every piece of cut-rate space hardware in the book. Ever since NASA has been trying to save money, nothing works. You would have been better off going to Sears, Roebuck."

"We don't need a lecture," the manager said. "All we want is the mirror fixed so we can get some photos on the Ted Koppel show."

"I can probably put a temporary mirror in the telescope, but I can't guarantee what kind of picture you're going to get."

"That would be better than nothing. When can you do it?"

"Tomorrow morning. I have to fix a flawed radio signal antenna on the space station, so I'll be in the neighborhood."

The next day when the manager didn't hear from Ernie, he called him. "You promised to fix our mirror today."

Ernie said, "I forgot when I talked to

you I had a golf game. I'll get on it tomorrow." "A promise is a promise," the manager sputtered angrily. "I have a good mind to find another telescope repairman."

"Good luck. The way NASA is putting these things together you'd be lucky to find one who isn't tied up until 1995."

The manager asked, "Suppose you can't repair it in the sky? Can you lend us a mirror until you fix this one?"

"All my telescopic mirrors are out. I can rent you one for \$50 million a month."

"That's outrageous."

"Don't get mad at me. You want to see the Milky Way - I don't," Ernie told him.

"Do I have your word you'll take a look at it tomorrow?" the manager demanded.

"Of course you do," Ernie said. "A licensed repairman never lies."

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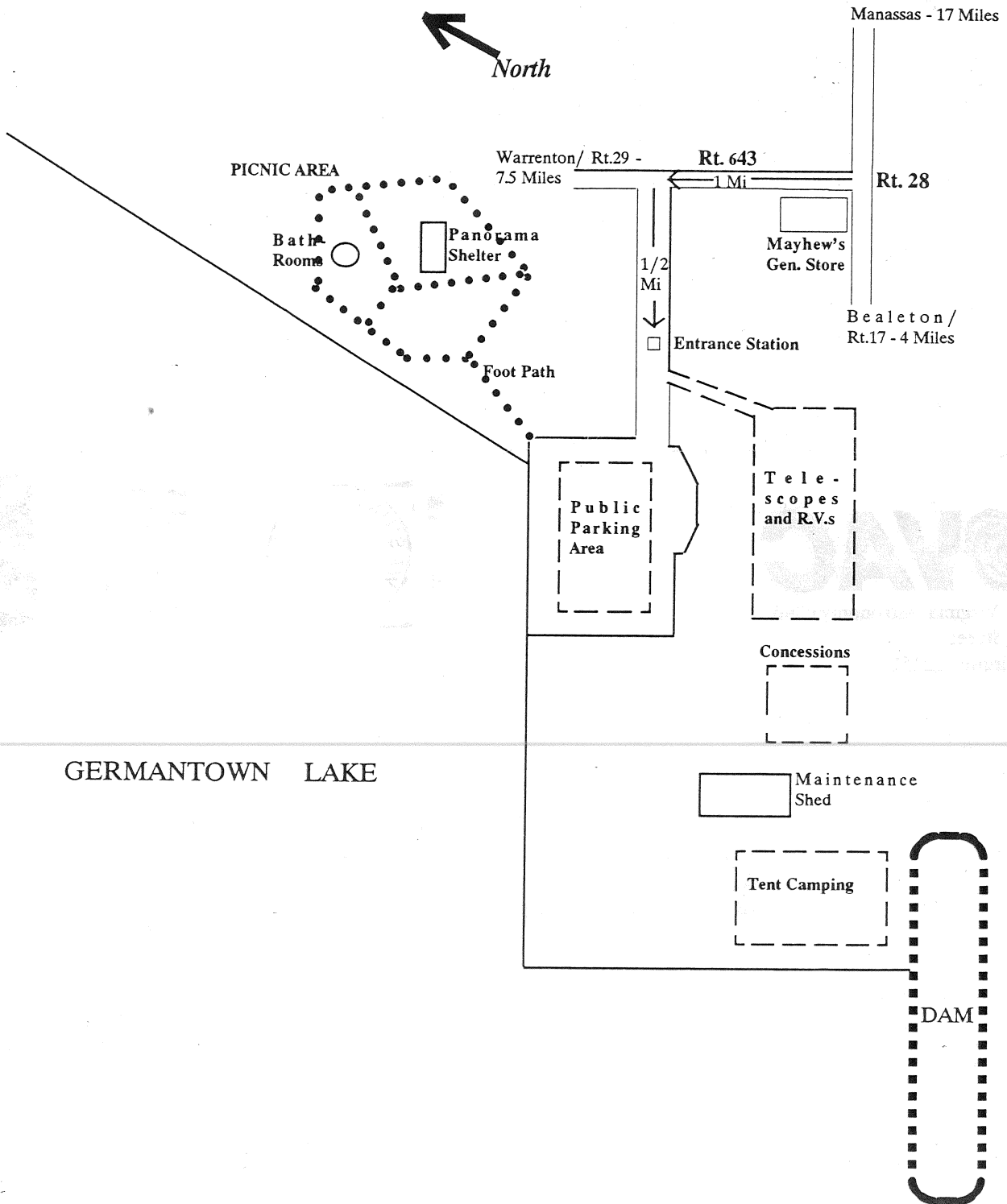
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