

NOVAC

The Newsletter of the Northern Virginia Astronomy Club

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November/December, 1990

President: Blaine Korcel.....703-256-4430
Vice President: Jim Schaeffer.....703-476-5624
Secretary: Al Schumann.....703-971-3257
Treasurer: Bob Ridgley.....703-671-0286
Editor: George Uhl.....703-369-4575
NOVAC Information Hotline.....703-256-8359
NOVAC Computer Bulletin Board.....703-256-4777

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
Kevin Jones
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George Uhl

Programs At NOVAC Meetings

by Brent Archinal

Summaries of this Fall's events will be the theme of the November and December regular meetings of NOVAC.

Our illustrious President Blaine Korcel will be the main speaker at our 21 November meeting, providing a slide show summary of the 1990 Northern Virginia Telescope Meet. For those of you who missed the meet (or those of you there who missed Blaine's instant slide show summary at the meet!) this is your chance to catch up. There's the views of the lake at Crockett Park, a beautiful sunset complete with sundogs and a halo, rows of observers and telescopes, and even the T-shirt and concessions tent! We hope anyone else who took photos at this year's NVTM will also bring them along as we do our annual recap of the telescope meet.

Our 19 December NOVAC meeting will be a member observations free-for-all meeting, with hopefully several members bringing in their observing results of this past summer and Fall. Blaine will again lead off, with excerpts from his video of the 15 September-daylight occultation of Jupiter by the

Moon. We'd like to see others bring their photos and drawings of Mars at its current apparition, and of Saturn and its white spots and bands. And make sure you let us know what other observing results you gotten over the

The Meet

by Al & Lynn Schumann

Let's face it, the gods really smiled. By any valid measure, the eighth annual Northern Virginia Telescope Meet held at Crockett Park on October 19 & 20, 1990 was a rousing success. On Thursday we had thunderstorms, microbursts, tornados, downed trees, power outages and torrential rains. That mess moved off to give us beautiful skies for both Friday and Saturday nights.

Friday was set aside for serious amateur observing. By my count, we had 16 telescopes of various sizes and shapes manned by a

couple dozen observers also in various sizes and shapes. The temperature was on the chilly side, and dew became frost by night's end. Some of us took a break to catch the Channel 4 news at 11 on Blaine's portable TV. During the weather segment, Bob Ryan gave the Meet a very nice plug.

On Saturday afternoon, the viewing area started filling up with observers and telescopes, and by early evening we had a dazzling array of equipment on hand. All told, we drew around 40 telescopes including several big light

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last few months. If you have anything to show, give Blaine a call (703-256-4430) or just come to the meeting.

These regular meetings of the Northern 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.

buckets, a whole raft of eight and ten inch SCTs, a few big time refractors, a number of splendid home-made Dobsonians, a new Ultima 11, a pair of 20 X 120 battleship binoculars and a host of instruments to fill the gaps in between. Suffice it to say, there was something for everyone.

The slide show and talks were held at the covered pavillion and started right after a spectacular sunset. Blaine showed his "instant slides" of telescopes being set up, Bill Burton talked about the history of astronomy and Geoff Chester gave a talk on light pollution. Over 100 people attended the program.

For the next few hours visitors lined up behind telescopes to ogle at the wonders of the universe. It's always a special kick to watch the reaction of people who are taking their first look at Saturn, M-31 or the Perseus Double Cluster to name a few favorites. All of the "civilians" - except for a few die-hards - left by midnight and serious observing replaced show and tell. The dew monster got to me at 2 am, so I had to wring out my C-8 and put it away. I left for home when the fog started rolling in, but there were still quite a few folks glued to an eyepiece as I drove through the gate.

Thus, NVTM 1990 is history. A lot of people did a helluva lot of work to make it come off. Any attempt to list everyone involved would be dangerous, because invariably someone would be overlooked. However, more than a year ago, Jim Schaeffer raised his hand and volunteered to serve as overall coordinator while the rest of us were shuffling our feet and studying the ceiling. Thanks, Jim, for a job well done. Also, many thanks to both Bill Burton and Geoff Chester for their informative lectures and to Blaine Korcel for his on-the-spot action slides. Finally, NOVAC tips it's collective hat to Gary, Roger and the Crockett Park Staff for letting us use

the park, helping us set up the grounds, and for putting up with us during the year. See you next year at NVTM 1991!

President's Column

NVTM '90, October 19 and 20, has once again been a successful venture for the club. The weather was perfect. Clear skies prevailed for most of the prime time observing hours. Friday night was a bit nippy. Most of us, even though over dressed, were not ready for such cool weather. Such acclimation takes astronomers months to complete. However, coffee and hot coco made the crispness a bit more tolerable.

Saturday night offered more reasonable temperatures, however, at a cost. High clouds lingered in the north most of the night. Too bad it was probably totally overcast for all those other conventions being held the same night up north! The warmer weather was no doubt a relief to all the people who stayed to view the faint light from some distant galaxy in Stephan's Quintet.

Those who were adjusting their observing sleep schedule or happened to have or be around a red filtered TV out at the park on Friday night, had the opportunity to see Bob Ryan, local TV meteorologist and celebrity for WRC-TV Channel 4, advertise our meet during the 11pm weather slot. He gave us some excellent publicity and showed off two of our collectible NOVAC T-shirts.

The events began with two EXCELLENT talks. The first was given by Bill Burton about amateur astronomy and what it's all about. His slides included many which were taken by fellow club members over the years.

The second talk was given by Geoff Chester of the National Air and Space Museum. His talk was about light pollution and ways in which we can

combat the problem. This talk was originally scheduled for the Air and Space Museum but happened to be scheduled the evening the Government was closed down a couple of weeks ago. We were fortunate that Geoff was able to share this talk with us as he and his wife are expecting the arrival of another young member of the Chester family.

Following the talks the observing commenced. As people fought desperately to keep the dew away, many were knocking off Messier objects like they were going out of style. The dawning of the computer aided telescope has made its appearance! Those who managed to keep from becoming a soggy lump of Down, Polyester and Holofil had an excellent night of deep sky observing.

The excellent publicity of NVTM '90, through TV ads and flyer distribution brought an estimated 250 people out on Saturday night. Overall, I believe there were about 40 scopes scattered about on the hill and down in the gravel parking area.

Thanks to all the members who showed up and to all those who worked so hard in pulling it off. A BIG thanks goes to Jim Schaeffer who, for the second year, has done an excellent job in supervising the event (Can we convince him to do it next year as well?) and to Brenda Jones who spun her galaxies off to finish our official NOVAC banner in time. A special thanks also goes to CM Crockett Park and it's staff for helping out with concessions, planning, the outstanding path lighting as well as letting us use the park year round for our general observing. Everyone involved helped make NVTM '90 a great success this year.

Now that we have time to breath, we should begin planning for next year's NVTM. A date should be established as soon as possible so that we and the

park can get our advertising together for next year. We also need to establish a committee to oversee its scheduling. We can discuss this at the next meeting. I also plan to have NVTM '90 slides for the meeting this month. If any of you also have slides you want to show, please bring them.

That's about it for now. Enjoy the clear weather while it lasts and hope to see everyone at the meeting on the 21st.

Clear Skies,



Blaine Korcel
President, NOVAC

Sky Sweep for November / December by Kevin Jones

This episode of Sky Sweep is going to ask you to do something you may think a little strange - just put your telescope aside for a period of time, say 30 minutes or so, lay down, and stare up at the starry sky. Don't worry, your telescope won't hate you or anything. The reason for doing this is that during November and December several interesting meteor showers reach their peak.

The first of these showers, the Taurids, reaches a broad maximum during the first half of November when perhaps 10 meteors per hour can be seen radiating out of the constellation Taurus. Centuries before, this meteor shower was the strongest visible, easily rivaling the famous Perseids of August. The meteors comprising the Taurid shower are derived from Comet Encke, which with only a 3-year orbital period has already shed much of its meteor-producing dust.

Two very minor meteor showers also peak during the first half of November - the Cepheids on November 9th and

the Pegasids on November 12th. Both of these showers generally produce less than 10 meteors per hour, but on one occasion in 1969 the Cepheids bursted out with 43 meteors over a 15 minute period.

On the 14th of November, the Andromedid meteor shower reaches its peak. This shower used to be a very impressive one, with peak rates of over 100 meteors per hour. Its parent comet, Comet Biela, split in two during its 1845 perihelion passage and disintegrated producing a meteor storm of 3,000 per hour in 1872 and of up to 75,000 meteors per hour in 1885. The course of the stream of meteor-producing particles has now been altered by the gravity of Jupiter, reducing this once-great shower to a mere meteor "trickle."

On Saturday evening, November 17th, the Leonid shower peaks. This shower is famous for producing extremely dense meteor storms every 33 years or so of up to 150,000 meteors per hour! The next forecast storm should occur on November 17th, 1998 or 1999. The Leonid rates are slowly increasing each year toward this maximum. A close eye should still be kept on the Leonids throughout the 1990s, however, because only a small perturbation in the orbit of the dust cloud causing the thick meteor storms could result in a spectacular display several years before or after the predicted-maximum. The expected rate this year is about 20 meteors per hour, but this is only a rough estimate. The typical Leonid meteor is bright and leaves a train (smoky cloud along its path).

Meteors will be flying from the constellation Gemini on the night of December 13th. This is the peak night of the year's best meteor shower, and the moon is only 3 days from new and will not wash out any meteors. At least 1 meteor per minute can be expected this year. About one out of eight Geminids is brighter than magnitude

zero, and many show strong colors. I can remember one meteor in particular from last year's Geminid shower that was intense blue and left a trail of orange sparks in its wake. If you only decide to look for meteors on one night out of the whole year, the night of December 13th is the time to do it!

On the evening of December 22nd (if you're not busy trimming the tree) go out and look for the Ursid or Umid meteor shower. These meteors originate from Ursa Minor (hence the name "Umids") and are mostly faint with a few bright fireballs interspersed. Somewhere between 5 and 15 meteors per hour can be expected from this neglected shower.

For those of you who feel you just might be suffering from telescope neglect after all this meteor watching, here's a quick list of objects to appease your 'scope's appetite:

- 1) M31, the Andromeda Galaxy and its two companions, M32 and M110. Can you see any dust lanes or star clouds?
- 2) M34, an open star cluster in Perseus near Algol and visible to the naked eye from Sky Meadows and maybe even from Crockett Park.
- 3) NGC 869 & 884, the famous Double Cluster in Perseus, easily visible to the naked eye as a bright patch in the Milky Way between Perseus and Cassiopeia.
- 4) M45, the Pleiades. How many Pleiads can you see with just your unaided eyes? Six? Seven? More?
- 5) M42 & M43, the Great Orion Nebula. Try different light-pollution filters on this object and notice how different filters bring out different details.
- 6) NGC 1973, the little neglected reflection nebula in the Sword of Orion above the Orion Nebula.

7) NGC 2194 & 2169, two faint but rich open clusters hiding in Orion's Club.

8) M1, the Crab Nebula, just north of Zeta Tauri (Taurus's lower horn).

9) M35, an open cluster sitting on Castor's Foot in Gemini.

And, 10) NGC 2392, the Eskimo or Clown-Face nebula in Gemini.

Clear skies and happy observing!

Watch the POST

by Al Schumann

A couple weeks ago I had a call from Kevin McManus, a feature writer from the Washington Post. Apparently, our notice for the NVTM caught someone's eye, and Kevin was assigned to write a story.

At the outset, Kevin interviewed Geoff Chester, who gave him a load of reference materials and turned him over to Blaine Korcel. Blaine then passed Kevin off to me. We made a date to visit Crockett Park on Saturday, Oct. 13, a scheduled observing night. However, the weather was punk, so we switched it to Sunday night.

The Plan: Mr. McManus would drive to my house, head out to Crockett Park in my truck, talk about amateur astronomy on the way, spend a few hours under the stars, talk about what we had seen while driving back to Springfield and he'd go home from there. Meanwhile, Al Boldt called Roger Pence at Crockett Park and cleared the way for our arrival on Sunday night. George Uhl and Gus the Astro-Pup would be there too.

Before his arrival, I spent a few hours at the word processor and put together a package of handouts including: basics on the solar system, types of deep sky objects, a page of Gee Whiz distances and numbers to impress friends and a couple pages on what we were

going to see. The latter included examples of planetary & diffuse nebulae, open and globular clusters, galaxies et al. We used that as a checklist to make sure we didn't overlook anything. Also, I gave him a copy of the NVTM flyer, a NOVAC brochure, a copy of Ottwell's calendar and a NOVAC hat.

Believe it or not, everything went according to plan. The weather was good, and we gave him a tour of the sky that wouldn't quit. We had him running from one telescope to another for several hours while showing and telling about lots of examples of deep sky wonders. George had to work Monday, so he left first. My scope was saturated with dew a bit after midnight, but we kept going strong with Al's 10-inch Dobsonian. We finished up with the Orion Nebula before heading home and arrived in Springfield at around 2AM.

He wasn't able to get to the Meet itself, so I took some notes and passed them along to him a couple days later.

Mr. McManus indicated the article should appear in the Post on either Nov. 2 or 9. One never knows how these things will turn out. It seemed like he asked a lot of questions for which I had only very dumb answers, but hopefully we'll get a few nice words about NOVAC and a boost for amateur astronomy. I told him that I hoped the real hero of the story was going to be the universe and all the wonderful things we can see.

NOVAC November Executive Committee Meeting

by Brent Archinal

The November Executive Committee Meeting of NOVAC will be held Thursday evening, November 15, at 7:30 PM, at the home of members Brenda and Kevin Jones. This promises to be an important meeting, as three significant items of interest will be discussed. First, planning needs to

begin NOW for our NVTM'91 star party, if we plan to have one at all. We need to find a new chairperson to be in charge of the overall planning, select a date, and begin work on obtaining a primary speaker for the meet. If these tasks, particularly finding a chairperson, are not completed within the next month or so, there is a good chance there will be no NVTM'91! So if you're interested in putting one on again, please show up at this meeting or let one of the officers or board members know of your interest. Secondly, we will begin discussing how to obtain non-profit corporation status for NOVAC now that Brenda has obtained the necessary forms to incorporate in Virginia. Finally, we need to begin searching for executive committee members for next year.

The Jones reside at 883 North Kentucky Street, Arlington, VA. Phone 703-527-7963 for directions. See you at the meeting!

September NOVAC Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:35PM by Blaine Korcel. The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as printed in the last newsletter.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. An NVTM discussion covered the following:
 - a. RV's and tents will be permitted in the park.
 - b. Bill Burton will give the slide program Saturday evening.
 - c. The slide show and talks will be held at the covered picnic area.
 - d. Publicity efforts were recapped, including notices to area newspapers, magazines and other astronomy clubs in the area.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Jim Schaeffer brought in and handed out 2,000 NVTM fliers for distribution.
2. Brenda Jones is preparing a 15 foot long NOVAC banner for use at the NVTM, Stellafane and other events. The club voted to provide the funds needed for materials.
3. Al Schumann gave a recap of activities at Crockett Park's very successful Kid's Day held on September 15. Big turn out and lots of interest in the telescopes.
4. Joanne Archinal presented a summary of events for October at the Air and Space Museum.
5. Blaine Korcel is assembling a full set of newsletters. He is missing issues no. 5, 19 - 22 and 32. He asked the membership to check their files and see if anyone can plug the gaps in NOVAC's history.
6. Blaine noted that the first telescope meet was held in 1983. Burke Lake Park was the site of the meets from 1983 through '87. Crockett Park has been the site from 1987 to the present.
7. Brenda Jones announced that the Arlington Outdoor Lab will hold an astronomy program at its site near Warrenton on Saturday, November

10th. Anyone wanting to participate should call Brenda at 703-527-7963 for details and directions.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:25PM at which time Brent Archinal showed and discussed a variety of astronomy related books and publications.

Respectfully submitted,
Al Schumann, Secretary

October NOVAC Meeting Minutes

The meeting was called to order at 7:30PM with Al Schumann presiding. The minutes of the previous meeting were read and accepted with the following addition: Herschel Payne requested that John Huggins and Nils Thomas be recognized as the driving forces behind the first NOVAC telescope meet which was held at Burke Lake Park in 1983.

OLD BUSINESS:

1. Jim Schaeffer updated arrangements for the telescope meet. Items included:
 - a. The campsite for tents is about 200 yards from the observing area.
 - b. RVs can park up on the grass at the observing site. There are no provisions for electricity.
 - c. Friday evening will be primarily for

amateur observing; Saturday for the general public until midnight. Regular observing from then on.

d. There will be a sign indicating the parking area for people with telescopes. All others will park in the lower lots.

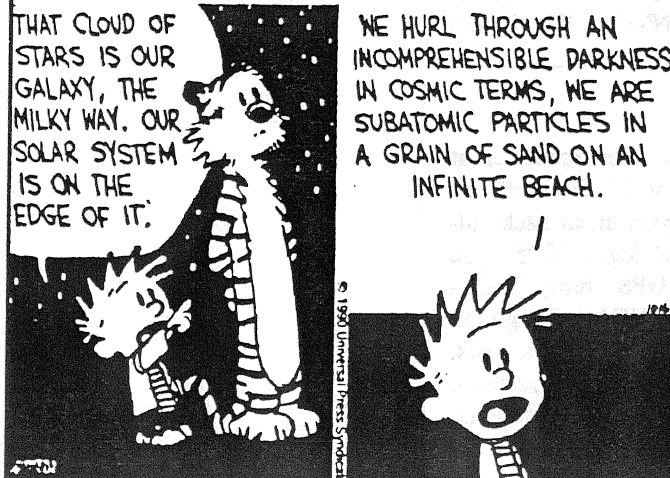
2. Brenda Jones unfurled the new NOVAC banner. It will be finished in time for the meet.

3. Brenda Jones gave the following directions to the Arlington Outdoor Lab: Take I-66 west 25 miles to the Haymarket-Leesburg exit. Go south one block on Rt. 15 to Rt. 55. Turn right on Rt. 55 and go west 4 miles to Rt. 600. Turn left on Rt. 600 and go 2 1/4 miles to Rt. 792 (past board fence - route sign on left). Turn right on Rt. 792 and go to the end of road and through the gate. The program is set for November 10.

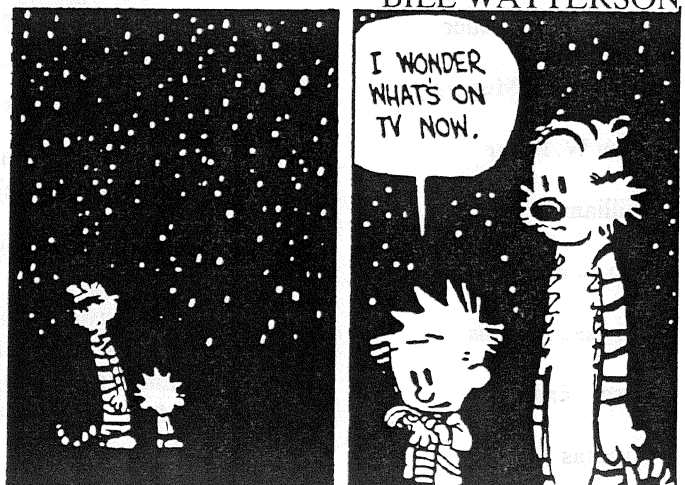
NEW BUSINESS:

1. Tom Willmitch of the Arlington Planetarium showed the RCAS Observer's Handbook and asked if anyone wanted to order a copy for next year. Lower prices are offered for groups.
2. Carl Adams has trip information for anyone planning a visit to Baja, Mexico for the eclipse next year. He can be reached at 202-566-9142.

CALVIN AND HOBBS



BILL WATTERSON



3. It was noted that, thanks to Al Boldt, we have a new lock on the Crockett Park gate. This lock has a much longer hasp and is easier to open and close. The combination is still 1961.

4. Al Schumann told about a meeting he had with Kevin McManus of the Washington Post. Mr. McManus is doing a feature on astronomy to be printed sometime in November. Al, George Uhl and Al Boldt treated McManus to a whirlwind tour of the universe at Crockett Park on Sunday night Oct.14. Al Schumann prepared a fist full of "Gee Whiz" handouts to help McManus with his story.

The formal portion of the meeting was adjourned at 8:05PM at which time Steve Smith showed pictures and gave a talk about seeing the solar eclipse from Helsinki, Finland last July.

Respectfully submitted,
Al Schumann, Secretary

NOVAC Tibits

by Bob Ridgley

Let's welcome the following new members:

George Prentice

Sikander Daryanani

Glenn W. Schumakerck

Eric J. Novotny

Lance D. Gardner

Douglas L. Megenity

John W. Mohr

William C. Bryson

Leo Lombardi, Jr.

Howard Marcus

Tyson Erdman

Vyautas Butrim

Lowell Rosen

Edward Montes

Jim Musson

Tom Nowak

Steven Cox

Here are the membership statistics as of October 31, 1990:

Active.....95

Past Due.....8

Complementary.....13

Total.....116

Club funds (excluding income from NVTM'90): \$1,127.60

Board of Directors Election Reminder

The time for electing members to the Board of Directors is coming up next year. If you feel you'd like to become more active in the club, and enjoy some of the perks that go along with being active, you are encouraged to throw your hat into the ring (i.e. nominate yourself). The term for office for the Board of Directors is one year. Club officers will be in the last year of their three year term during 1991, so if you want to take a leadership role maybe you can get a jump on the rest of the crowd and GET INVOLVED NOW!!

Advertisements

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.

For Sale, contact Bob Ridgley at 681-0286 (home) or 287-3441 (work): official NOVAC logo tee shirts. Available in black or white, sizes: S, M, XL, price \$9.95. All profit goes to NOVAC.

For Sale, 8" Celestron Super Polaris C-8 SCT. System includes 1 1/4" star diagonal; 26mm Plossl, 12mm Orthoscopic and 8mm Kelner eyepieces; Meade 1 1/4" Wide Field Adapter; Porro Prism (1 1/4"); 8 X 50 straight-thru finderscope; Telrad finder; Dual-axis drive; Orion auto-focus; Dewcap; Piggyback camera mount; Sky Sensor Computer; 12-volt, 5 amp hour battery; Enhanced SP mount and tripod; Double-length counter-weight rod; Homemade 4" off-axis mask. Have over \$2000 invested, asking \$1500/OBO. Call George Uhl at work (703)883-7305, or home (703)369-4575.

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The Northern Virginia Astronomy Club
5401 Danville Street
Springfield, Virginia 22151



12/90 - \$0.00

Bill Burton
2102 Whisperwood Glen Lane
Reston, Virginia 22091

