



R. A. C. NEWS

October - 2001

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Observing and Meeting Locations

North Rockland High School Planetarium, Thiells, NY
Rockland Community College, Suffern, NY
Iron Horse Farm, Mike Pass, 914-496-6320, Campbell Hall, NY
*Anthony Wayne Recreation Area, Exit 17, Palisades Interstate Pkwy
*Lake Sebago, Seven Lakes Drive, Exit 16, Palisades Interstate Pkwy
*Silvermine Ski Area, Exit 18, Palisades Interstate Pkwy
*Wawayanda State Park, 973-853-4462, Highland Lakes, NJ
Tahgkanic State Park Taconic State Parkway, Ancram, NY

- Special permits are required to observe.

OCTOBER'S SPECIAL DATES

Wed. 3 - Reservation deadline for Smithsonian Bus Trip
Fri. 12 - Observing at Wawayanda State Park
Sat. 13 - Observing at Tahgkanic State Park
Fri. 19 - Observing at Wawayanda State Park
Sat. 20 - Observing at Anthony Wayne
Mon. 22 - Chestnut Ridge School Star Party
Thu. 25 - Rain date for Chestnut Ridge

Chestnut Ridge School Details: From NJ go north on Chestnut Ridge Road in Montvale into New York where the road becomes NY Route 45. The entrance to the school will be on the right. The observing field is behind the school at the top of the hill. Watch for signs for the access road up the hill. From NY go south on Route 45 at its intersection with Route 59. RAC members should make every attempt to arrive before 7:00PM to allow time for telescope setup.

Smithsonian Air & Space Museum Bus Trip is in danger of being canceled due to lack of interest. As of September 25, there are only 13 reservations.

A general club meeting at North Rockland High School has not been scheduled for October. Hopefully, a program is being worked on for November.

WELCOME NEW MEMBER

Jose Ortiz 53 S Madison Ave., Spring Valley, NY 10977
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LEONID METEORS LIKELY TO STORM THIS NOVEMBER

A press release from *Sky & Telescope*.

If predictions by the world's top meteor experts hold up, early on the morning of November 18th sky watchers in North America can expect to see their most dramatic meteor shower in 35 years. These meteors, called Leonids because they appear to radiate from the constellation Leo (the Lion), will signal the collision of Earth with streams of fast-moving dust particles shed by Comet Tempel-Tuttle.

In the November 2001 *Sky & Telescope* -- the magazine's 60th-anniversary issue -- meteorologist Joe Rao assesses the predictions provided by three teams of specialists. Rao concludes that two dramatic displays called "meteor storms" appear likely.

A burst lasting perhaps two hours is expected in the pre-dawn hours of November 18th for observers throughout most of North and Central America. The maximum rates should occur at 5:00 a.m. EST (corresponding to 4:00 a.m. CST, 3:00 a.m. MST, 2:00 a.m. PST). With no moonlight spoiling the view, the storm may briefly generate anywhere from several hundred to 1,000 or 2,000 meteors per hour for observers with clear, dark skies.

An even bigger storm arrives 8 hours later for viewers rimming the far-western Pacific Ocean. Because these locations are on the other side of the International Date Line, this peak occurs before dawn on November 19th. Several thousand meteors may streak across the sky for an hour or so starting at 3:30 or 4:30 a.m. in eastern Australia (depending on location); 2:30 a.m. in Japan; and 1:30 a.m. in western Australia, the Philippines, and eastern China.

Meteors create momentary "shooting stars" when flecks of interplanetary dust strike Earth's atmosphere at high speed. The Leonids, which are one of a dozen or so annual meteor showers caused by cometary dust, arrive at a blistering 44 miles (71 kilometers) per second -- the fastest known. Typically showers produce one meteor every few minutes, though often there are bursts and lulls. Two years ago the Leonids briefly peppered the skies over Europe and the Middle East with up to 2,500 meteors per hour. In 1966 lucky observers in the southwestern United States gaped in awe for 20 minutes as Leonid meteors fell at the rate of 40 per second!

More about the prospects for a Leonid storm appears in the November issue of *SKY & TELESCOPE*. This issue marks the diamond anniversary of the monthly magazine for amateur astronomers launched by Charles and Helen Federer in November 1941. The Federers took on the challenge of merging *THE SKY* (which had been published by New York's Hayden Planetarium) and *THE TELESCOPE* (then published by Harvard College Observatory). Today the magazine is enjoyed by some 2500,000 sky watchers worldwide.

Sky & Telescope will issue another press release closer to the date of the Leonid meteor shower containing background information about meteors and how to observe them. More information is already available on the magazine's Web site.

FAREWELL TO OUR INNOCENCE

As I watched the events of the past week unfold, my hands trembled and my eyes welled up. America was under attack. The unthinkable, the undreamable was happening; America's worst nightmare was unfolding right before our very eyes. It would get worse though . . . as I witnessed the towers and buildings collapse . . . my heart also collapsed into the same pile of rubble. The human tragedy was, and is, incomprehensible.

Had we become complacent and serene in our daily lives? Perhaps, but isn't that a part of what America is about - freedom and peace - peace of mind? Whether you have been directly affected or not, everyone has been touched in some fashion by these events. How do we as a people, ever find

normality again? Yet we must go on and become even stronger. If we don't, then they will have won.

Some people may find comfort in words, but I find them troubling and difficult at this time, so I will make them few. Everyone is feeling something different and is dealing with this tragedy, as they must. I, personally, feel immense sorrow; I feel anger, and, yes, I feel fear. We should not say that though, or again, they have won. But, it is not concern for myself, it is for my children, and young people all over. This is no longer the world in which I grew up, it is a different place, but today, not a better one - and once again, I am brought back to the feelings of sorrow. How will our children perceive this new world? I don't know, it is too early to tell. I find hope in believing that it will make us stronger and wiser. I can only pray that that will be the eventual outcome of all this.

Telescopes and star charts somehow seem trivial at the moment. But, as we return to our lives, and our thoughts slowly return to astronomy, let's look momentarily towards the heavens, and give thought to the souls of those lost in this tragedy. Perhaps they are among the stars we all so love much.

Ed Siemenn

OBSERVING REPORT FROM LAKE TAHGKANIC

Saturday night was a real winner, as were all those who showed up to observe at the top-notch lakeside site at Tahgkanic Park, about 80 miles/minutes north of Rockland.

Although it was a bad week for America, the gods were finally with us last night, aligning all the planets and celestial objects in a non-stop parade of viewing pleasures. Unfortunately, Osama's influence was felt, as relatively few RAC members showed up for this prime occasion, but I was determined that for a little while at least, I'd battle terror with joy.

There were just six of us, armed with a wide variety of scopes: a 20" Tectron f/5 newt, 15" Obsession, 11" Starmaster, C-8, 5" Meade Cassegrain, 4-1/4" Tasco, 3" FS-78 Tak apo, and a neat set of Bear 15x70 mounted binos.

The evening was billed as an "all-nighter" in the RAC newsletter. Indeed, two of us ended up staying until 7:20 am... 12 hours of sheer visual treats. To make a long story short, the viewing conditions went from good to better to outright jaw dropping! By 3 am we were in dry, stable, mag 6.5 skies, without a single cloud to mar the stunning beauty of just looking up. This was almost as nice as my recent visit to the mag 7 skies of Western Wyoming -- not bad for the erratic Northeast.

Everything looked fantastic: the Milky Way popped, objects like the Andromeda Galaxy and Pinwheel Galaxy were a revelation in these crisp conditions. 3-D and brimming with detail, normally faint extensions leapt out and demanded

comparison with CCD photos. We counted four separate dust lanes spiraling out from M31. The Orion Nebula was simply stunning, its red and violet colors quite apparent. "Brainy" detail around the Trapezium was easy to view and particularly pleasing. M74, an open cluster, exploded like fireworks in crisp pinpoints of light in both the 3" Tak and 11" Newtonian. Every scope was performing at its absolute peak capabilities. Star fields yielded layer upon layer of ever-fainter points. It felt as though we were on the deck of the Enterprise, with nothing between infinite space and us.

Neptune, Uranus, Venus, Saturn, and Jupiter all vied for attention. Saturn revealed both the Cassini and Encke divisions, as well as the subtle inner crepe ring. I have only viewed under such superb skies two or three times. This year's Shady Pines never matched the transparency and clarity of this atmosphere. The cool weather kept us bundled up at around 45-degrees F, but the views kept our inner fires burning so that by the time the sliver of a crescent moon came up, it seemed like 3 hours had expired, not 11.

As we packed our equipment, the lake softly misted, the sun slowly rose over it and a Great Blue Heron stood silently in silhouette amidst the rich and rapidly changing colors of morning, admiring along with us, the idyllic beauty that embalmed our evening of delights.

There is simply no way around it: if you want to really see full and deep, you've got to make an effort. This place is not close (several new members drove two hours to attend), but the rewards of persistence and fortitude are many. We had our breath taken away by our Universe, and, for a resplendent slice of time, were able to forget the man-made horrors that have enveloped us. Long live America (and amateur astronomy)!

Mies Hora

OUT OF THE MOUTHS OF . . .

Excerpts of 6th graders history tests. Watch the misspelling!

1. Ancient Egypt was inhabited by mummies and they all wrote in hydraulics. They lived in the Sarah Dessert. The climate of the Sarah is such that all the inhabitants have to live elsewhere.
2. Moses led the Hebrew slaves to the Red Sea where they made unleavened bread, which is bread made without any ingredients. Moses went up on Mount Cyanide to get the Ten Commandments. He died before he ever reached Canada.
3. Solomon had three hundred wives and seven hundred porcupines.
4. Socrates was a famous Greek teacher who went around giving people advice. They killed him. Socrates died from an overdose of wedlock. After his death, his career suffered a dramatic decline.
5. In the Olympic games, Greeks ran races, jumped, hurled biscuits, and threw the java.

6. Julius Caesar extinguished himself on the battlefields of Gaul. The Ides of March murdered him because they thought he was going to be made king. Dying, he gasped out: "Tee hee, Brutus."

7. Joan of Arc was burnt to a steak and was canonized by Bernard Shaw.

8. Queen Elizabeth was the "Virgin Queen." As a queen she was a success. When she exposed herself before her troops they all shouted "hurrah."

9. It was an age of great inventions and discoveries. Gutenberg invented removable type and the Bible. Another important invention was the circulation of blood. Sir Walter Raleigh is a historical figure because he invented cigarettes and started smoking. Sir Francis Drake circumsized the world with a 100-foot clipper.

10. The greatest writer of the Renaissance was William Shakespeare. He was born in the year 1564, supposedly on his birthday. He never made much money and is famous only because of his plays. He wrote tragedies, comedies, and hysterectomies, all in Islamic pentameter. Romeo and Juliet are an example of a heroic couple. Romeo's last wish was to be laid by Juliet.

11. Writing at the same time as Shakespeare was Miguel Cervantes. He wrote Donkey Hote. The next great author was John Milton. Milton wrote paradise Lost. Then his wife died and he wrote Paradise Regained.

12. Delegates from the original 13 states formed the Contented Congress. Thomas Jefferson, a Virgin, and Benjamin Franklin were two singers of the Declaration of Independence. Franklin discovered electricity by rubbing two cats backward and declared, "A horse divided against itself cannot stand."

Franklin died in 1790 and is still dead.

13. Abraham Lincoln became America's greatest Precedent. Lincoln's mother died in infancy, and he was born in a log cabin that he built with his own hands. Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves by signing the Emasculation Proclamation. On the night of April 14, 1865, Lincoln went to the theater and got shot in his seat by one of the actors in a moving picture show. They believe the assassinator was John Wilkes Booth, a

supposingly insane actor. This ruined Booth's career.

14. Johann Bach wrote a great many musical compositions and had a large number of children. In between he practiced on an old spinster that he kept up in his attic. Bach died from 1750 to the present. Bach was the most famous composer in the world and so was Handel. Handel was half German, half Italian, and half English. He was very large.

15. Beethoven wrote music even though he was deaf. He was so deaf he wrote loud music. He took long walks in the forest even when everyone was calling for him. Beethoven expired in 1827 and later died for this.

16. The nineteenth century was a time of a great many thoughts and inventions. People stopped reproducing by hand and started reproducing by machine. The invention of the steamboat caused a network of rivers to spring up. Cyrus McCormick invented the McCormick raper, which did the

work of a hundred men. Louis Pasteur discovered a cure for rabies. Charles Darwin was a naturalist who wrote the Origin of the Species. Madame Curie discovered the radio. And Karl Marx became one of the Marx Brothers.