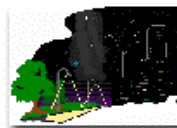


R. A. C. NEWS

October, 2002



International Dark Sky
Association



www.rocklandastronomy.com
Message Line (201) 768-3295

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Observing and Meeting Locations

North Rockland High School Planetarium	Thiells, NY
Rockland Community College	Suffern, NY
Lower Hudson Valley Challenger Center	Rt. 59, Suffern, NY
*Anthony Wayne Recreation Area	Exit 17, Palisades Interstate Pkwy
*Silvermine Ski Area	Exit 18, Palisades Interstate Pkwy
*Wawayanda State Park, 973-853-4462	Highland Lakes, NJ
Tahganic State Park	Taconic State Parkway, Ancram, NY

* Special permits required to observe at these locations

MEETINGS THIS MONTH

Friday, October 4 Observing at Wawayanda State Park

Saturday, October 5 'Up All Night' at Lake Taghkanic
Observing at Wawayanda State Park

Sunday, October 6 Special childrens' program and
Solar Observing at Challenger Center from 11am to
3pm. (See article elsewhere in this newsletter for
details)

Tuesday, October 8 Advisory Committee Meeting at
Challenger Center at 8:00pm

Friday, October 25 Regular club meeting at Challenger
Center at 7:30PM. Program TBA.

ANOTHER FIRST FOR RAC

We are proud to announce that our club has become a Lifetime Member of the International Dark Sky Association (IDA), joining a select group of organizations and corporations. What makes this especially noteworthy is that RAC is the first – and only - amateur astronomy club to join IDA.

IDA has established a 'traveling display' that will be set up at all future conventions and meetings. We've been informed that there will be wording on the exhibit thanking RAC for its support and generous contribution. Please look for follow-up articles about this topic in future issues of this newsletter.

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Ronald J. Bennett 43 Grand St., Warwick, NY 10990
(845) 988-9220.

Maria A. Boiano 8 Waters Edge, Congers, NY 10920
(845) 268-2013.

Walter G. Windish 117 Overlook Ave., Wayne, NJ
07470.

FOR SALE

Meade EXT 90mm. Excellent condition. Includes a full aperture, glass solar filter, Orion EZ-Finder, JMI foam-fitted hard-case, and all original packaging. Will entertain any reasonable offer.

Mike Kitt
Kitt@mhonline.net
(518) 734-6544

Children's Space and Astronomy Fair 2002

If you have kids, mark your calendar for October 6th. The Rockland Astronomy Club is presenting its first Children's Space and Astronomy Fair. The fair will be hosted at the Lower Hudson Valley Challenger Center and admission will be free to the general public. Hours are 11am to 3pm.

The fair is a family fun and leaning day, featuring a dazzling array of astronomy and space related activities designed specifically for the educational benefit of young children, ages 5-12.

The exciting demonstrations and activities being offered at the fair will help children gain an interest and a positive attitude toward science and astronomy. This kind of positive attitude can increase enthusiasm toward the study of science and math throughout the school year. It is promised to be a fun experience that will stay with your child for years to come.

Highlights will include, planetarium shows presented by staff from the Hayden Planetarium as well as simulated space missions in the Challenger Center's hi-tech simulator rooms.

Over a dozen other Children's activities will be presented by Rockland Astronomy Club members. Included in these activities are: How to make a Comet, including a special "ice cream" version! Also, Seeing the Sun through Special Filters, The Scale of the Solar System, Faces of the Moon, Your Weight on Other Planets, as well as kids lectures, videos and slide shows.

The fair will also feature costumed characters, a moon bounce, face painting, crafts, refreshments, and a huge prize raffle.

The fair will take place on Sunday October 6th from 11am to 3pm and will be held rain or shine.

So bring your kids out. They can learn about the stars, take a flight to Mars or even win a new telescope in the exclusive Kid's Raffle.

If you wish to volunteer to help in this fair, please contact Ed Siemenn at EdSiemenn@hotmail.com or Lisa Canino-Dymbort at lcainino@juno.com.

Your assistance is greatly needed and appreciated.

SPECIAL REQUEST

If you change your email address and forget to notify Don Urban, he will not be able to send you future issues of this newsletter, observing permits, or special reports.

A is for Andromeda

Keith Murdock

For those of you who have never been, here is a salute to this year's Summer Star Party, done as an alphabetical primer.

A is for Andromeda. From Shady Pines, it was possible to see dust lanes even with my 3" refractor. M31 was clearly visible to the naked eye most nights as a dim smudge about the size of my thumbnail at arm's length.

B is for Barlow Bob, who demonstrated that if you visit enough people with your Nagler-31, there is no reason to bother setting up your own scope. Thanks, Bob!

C is for Cassiopeia and Perseus, where we could clearly make out the north boundary of the Milky Way. Our Galaxy then stretched unbroken as a thick sparkling band of stars and clusters, all the way to Sagittarius, with the rift in Cygnus appearing clear and unmistakable.

D is for the Dome, where Jim Burnell, Ed Siemann, and Neil McMickle practiced their astrophotography and welcomed visitors. (As long as we didn't move around too much!) We all used the Dome as a landmark, as in: "My Dob is about halfway between the Dome and the Coffee Tent."

E is for the Endless Coffee Tent, as stocked by our Fearless Leader, Don Urban.

F is for Fuel Pumps. Mine died while at SSP.

G is for the Great weather and skies we had for about six nights out of nine.

H is for Hiking. Shady Pines is at the edge of Savoy State Forest, and hiking trails are immediately accessible from the campsite. Mount Greylock is only about 10 miles away.

I is for - I wish I'd gone last year as well!

J is for Jim Landis, who taught many of us how to build solar filters. J is also for Jim Burnell, who held court in the Dome, and introduced us to some fine friends.

K is for Kayaking. There are some good rivers nearby. Ask Lisa and David Dymbort for details.

L is for Large Objects, like Melotte 20 in Cassiopeia, and M-24 in Sagittarius. In these kind of dark skies, a rich-field scope or a pair of binoculars are just as much fun as a big Dob!

M is for the Many, many things we saw. If it was up, and you had enough aperture, and you didn't see it, I guess you just weren't interested enough. Because there was no other excuse.

N is for Neptune, clearly visible in Capricorn as a "pale blue dot" in several of the larger Dobs. N is also for New Friends, an excellent reason in itself to go to SSP.

O is for Ophiuchus. My apologies, I unjustly ignored you out of ignorance. I know you possess one or two rich star-clouds, as well as many other treasures. I'll catch up with you next time.

P is for Pluto, which Frank Bifulco showed many how to find. It moved noticeably from night to night. Thanks Frank, that was my last planet! P is also for pockets.

Bernie Sokolowski taught me that any dewed-up eyepiece could be put in your pocket until the lens clears.

Q is for Quality observing time. DIDN'T have to drive to the site every night; DIDN'T have to set up every night; and most importantly, DIDN'T have to break down and drive, exhausted, all the way home. Just a LOT of uninterrupted time under dark skies with many other astronomers shmoozing and sharing.

R is for Rockets. The Model Rocket Workshop is Mark Hettinger's baby. Lots of fun for the kids to build and fly and for the rest of us to watch.

S is for Sagittarius, Stellafane, Saturn and of course sightseeing.

T is for the Twinkies, Oreos, and other munchies, supplied to the Coffee Tent by Frank Bifulco.

U is for Don Urban, our aforementioned Fearless Leader, MC, and host. According to a number of the attendees, the SSP is their favorite star party in the Northeast!

V is for Visitors. Be sure to invite somebody new to astronomy the next time you go up. The SSP is an excellent introduction to the hobby and quite possibly will help them understand why you are such a fanatic.

W is for the local WalMart. They were surprisingly well stocked with camping supplies and gear.

X is for the unknown, especially unidentified fuzzy things. I had way too much fun surfing the southern sky without a map or digital setting circles, looking for cool stuff that I hadn't already memorized. I "discovered" the Swan Nebula, among many other things with this venerable technique. Just pretend you're Messier!

Y - Well why not? SSP is way too much fun, relatively inexpensive, and one of the best ways I can think of for club members to get to know each other.

Z is for Zzzzz - Sleep was our scarcest commodity. Catch some Z's by napping as much as possible, or be a Zombie.

Astronomy With My Son

When I was about eight years old, my parents bought me a six-volume set of monographs called: "Our Solar System" (or something like it, it was a few eons ago). Each volume was about 16 pages long, with the specifications of the planets, as they were known back then, including surface temperature, diameter, gravity, distance from the Sun - well, you get the picture. It had photos from observatories and imaginative pictures of planets that were too far away. I was hooked, that many years ago, to a science and adventure that I am only beginning to fulfill now.

A lot of things got in the way, many distractions (mostly good ones), but I never forgot the twinge up my back, studying the pages on Saturn and Jupiter, in my room on late weekend nights. I lived in central New Jersey when my son was born, and it wasn't long before I taught him how to pronounce the planet's names. We'd look into a very light-polluted sky, but on some crisp evenings, we could pick out Orion's belt, and then work our way from there. He would be fascinated by the nighttime sky and the inevitable questions that five-year-olds ask: "How far is that from us? How long would it take us to reach the planets?" When he was a little older, he began to challenge me with "Are there any other planets like ours? Does anyone live on them?"

I moved to Rockland 10 years ago, but only in 1997 did I encounter a copy of *Sky and Telescope*, which was only one of 50 magazines available for free for busy travelers at the Delta Shuttle terminal of LaGuardia Airport. Thumbing through the pages gave me that twinge I hadn't felt since I was a kid. I mentioned it to my wife, and on my next birthday, I was the proud owner of a department store Meade telescope. True, it was not very good, but it was not quite as bad as a 60 mm paperweight. With its 104 mm aperture, at least I had a chance to see something. I joined RAC soon afterward. But a truly lousy mount and a certain degree of impatience added up to a frustrating experience. I couldn't get a good glimpse of anything, other than the moon. I finally broke down and E-mailed Don Urban, who basically confirmed that whatever my wife spent for the telescope could have been better saved. However, he did give me some hints that allowed me to utilize the telescope and its poor lenses to some positive effect.

Then I was entranced by a special event. One fall evening, at about 11pm, a pair of star-like objects rose from the horizon. I was out on my driveway, trying to line them up for a good, long look. Finally, one was aligned in my viewfinder's crosshairs. I strained to focus the object without upsetting the delicate mount, and newly purchased 25-mm Plossl lens (again, at Don's suggestion). As the focusing knob twisted, the blurry object became smaller, contracting into a cleanly defined disk with distinct bands across it. Four smaller dots of light glowed in a straight line, two on each side. I ran into the house, out of breath. "Jason! Wake up, I've got Jupiter!" He jumped out of bed, put on some clothes and we burst outside. Of course, by that time, the gas giant had slipped from view. I wasn't going to let it escape this time. A quick adjustment in the viewfinder, a tweak there, and it edged back into our window to the heavens. He was as excited as I. Realizing what the other object must be, I worked furiously to realign, just a little lower, towards the horizon, and a bit more towards the northeast. It was then, that I noticed that old twinge returning. Saturn revealed itself as a jewel suspended in the dark. We both turned from the telescope to the sky in awe. Unfortunately, moving to higher magnification only made the image shakier and less distinct. But we could both finally say that we'd done it.

Today, we look back and say, "Done what?" Now, I have a Celestron 8, and we take great pleasure in eyeing old Orion's belt and its mysterious nebula, searching the heavens for other remote objects, and listening with the car windows open to John Sterling calling the Yankee game. On particularly nice evenings, we try to find a private, relatively dark sky if RAC isn't holding its Anthony Wayne observing events. In any case, the night usually ends with a trip to Carvel for a vanilla cone with sprinkles.

Those nights have been fewer along, nowadays; he's a teenager and has distractions of his own. I do a good deal of traveling for work, and the opportunities are fewer than just last year.

Anyway, that's how I hope he'll remember it to his children, someday.

Stan Mehr