



RVAS NEWSLETTER

Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society (RVAS)

News About Amateur Astronomy

In Southwestern Virginia

<http://www.roavas.org>



Vol. 25 - No. 3

March 2008

RVAS Outreach at Staunton River High School

By Randy Sowden

The Scholastic Outreach Committee recently collaborated on a program with Staunton River High School in Bedford County. The outreach was initially set for the evening of February 1, 2008, but was postponed due to weather. The outreach was rescheduled for one week later and was held on Friday evening, February 8, 2008. The date coincided with a home basketball game thus providing opportunities for lots of kids come over and have a look. It turned out to be a beautiful evening with naught a cloud in sight. To top it off we had an absolutely spectacular sunset with just a sliver of a new moon following the sun to the horizon.

The idea for this event actually came up this past summer while Mark Hough and I were talking in my driveway. He was helping my neighbor across the street build a deck on the back of their house and they were just about wrapped up after a hard day's work. As Mark enjoys conversing with just about anyone, even me believe it or not, he stopped by to say hello before heading home. I mentioned that I was going to a RVAS observer's night at Cahas and would be heading out in a few hours. That is when I found out that he taught astronomy at



Photo Courtesy of Mike Overacker

Staunton River High School. I had known Mark for several years and the topic of Astronomy never came up before. Imagine that. Anyway I told Mark that RVAS loves to do outreach activities and asked if he and his school would be interested. He was so interested he came to our next meeting and met Matt Fleenor. At that point they began working together on possible dates. On a side note, that turned out to be a really great meeting as you would certainly remember if you were there. The capstone of the evening was at the end, not because Mike was finally done talking as you might have guessed, but when we went up on the roof

and watched the space station and space shuttle pass directly overhead. The shuttle had just disembarked hours before and the space shuttle was slowing separating from the space station. It was an incredible site to see while standing with so many of you on top of a building in downtown Roanoke.

Back to the outreach... Several RVASians started arriving at the High School a little before 6pm. By 6:30 we had a full complement of manned telescopes ready to go. The cast of characters included myself, Matt Fleenor, Jiri Kolejka, Jeff Suhr, John Goss, and Mike Overacker with his world famous

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Get your photos ready for the RVAS Astrophoto Competition in April. The competition is open to RVAS members and must have been taken since the last competition.

Check inside the NL for the RVAS Privacy Policy



Photo Courtesy of Mike Good

Mystery Object

Can you guess this object?

Send your best guess to Dave Thomas, our Mystery Object Columnist, at

ka-8-inl@hotmail.com

Club Information and News

RVAS Executive Committee Update

The RVAS Executive Committee is in the process of updating the RVAS Constitution and By-Laws. The Revisions, Updates, and Changes will be sent out for a vote by members.

New RVAS Vice President

The RVAS welcomes Kristen Gillespie as the Vice President of the RVAS. Kristen has agreed to fill the vacancy opened when Steve Manuel left the club. Kristen is a student at Hollins University, and she brings with her intelligence, youth, energy, and a fresh insight into an aging club.

RVAS Membership Discounts Available

Remember, the RVAS gives \$5.00 discounts to members that meet certain levels of activity in the RVAS. If you attend at least 3 RVAS meetings (not including socials and the picnic), 2 Member observings, 1 Public Outreach, work on an RVAS Committee, write at least one newsletter article or speak at a meeting, and pay your dues on time, you can get a \$5.00 discount on your next years dues. For more information, Contact RVAS President, Mike Overacker, at mike@overacker.com

ASTRO-QUIZ

Today's computer-controlled alt-azimuth telescopes are marvels for visual observers, but they pose a problem for those interested in long-exposure astrophotography. What's the problem and solution?

Answer to Last Month's Astro-Quiz: Knowing the true field of view (TFoV) of your eyepiece is very useful when hunting objects by star-hopping. A visual way to determine the TFoV is known as the drift method. Place a star at the right edge of the field of view as you look through your eyepiece and determine the time elapsed until the star disappears on the left edge. Since the Earth rotates one degree every four minutes, the elapsed time converts to a reasonably accurate measure of the TFoV. However, this is for stars at or near the celestial equator, and the star needs to drift across the diameter of the field. Adjustments are needed for other stars. Mintaka, at the right end of Orion's belt, is nearly dead-on the celestial equator. So this time of year offers a great opportunity for using the drift method.

The Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society is a membership organization of amateur astronomers dedicated to the pursuit of astronomical observational and photographic activities. Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. the third Monday of each month at Center in the Square in downtown Roanoke, Virginia. Meetings are open to the public. Observing sessions are held one or two weekends a month at a dark-sky site. Yearly individual dues are \$20.00. Family membership is \$25.00; student membership is \$10.00. For information, call the RVAS Message Line at 540-774-5651. Articles, quotes, etc. published in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the RVAS, its editor, officers, or individual members.

RVAS web page: <http://www.roavas.org>

Officers/Executive Committee: Michael Overacker, President / Newsletter Editor / Webmaster (776-3092); Kristen Gillespie, Vice President (890-4282); Mark Hodges, Secretary (774-5039); Jeff Suhr, Treasurer (563-0079); Dave Thomas, EC Member-At-Large (434 237-5135); Katherine Hix, Immediate Past President (334-2443); Paul Caffrey, Past President (345-2847)



Last Month's Mystery Object

The February mystery object consists of a group of three galaxies in Leo. The group includes M65, M66, and NGC3628, an edge-on spiral. It is about 35 million light years distant.

{Photo Credit: REU program/N.A. Sharp, NOAO}

RVAS Implements Privacy Policy

By Michael Overacker - RVAS President

The RVAS receives information from members when they join the club. In the past, this information was passed around within the organization without regard to privacy laws. After some concern from a few members about the RVAS handing out their information, I looked into the laws regarding this issue. What I found were laws that are complex and designed to protect the individuals whose information we hold as part of their membership. The Executive Committee tackled this issue and has put an RVAS Privacy Policy into operation. It is a simple concept that allows members to have what information

they choose available to other members.

The RVAS Privacy Policy states that all personal information given to the club for membership will be protected by the RVAS. Only members of the Executive Committee will be permitted to have the information on the RVAS Membership list. Executive Committee members are prohibited from giving this membership information to regular RVAS members or third parties. Members found in violation of this policy may be subject to removal as allowed by the RVAS Constitution and By-Laws.

However, if members wish to make some information known to other club members, they may "opt-in" information to a membership roster that will be maintained by RVAS Treasurer, Jeff Suhr. Jeff will be putting together a list of members. If he hears nothing from a member, the member will only have his or her name listed on the roster. RVAS members may contact Jeff and let him know what information you wish to make available to the membership. Remember, the information on this roster is available to all RVAS members, so choose the release of your information wisely. You can contact Jeff at jebesuhr@gmail.com.

RVAS Executive Committee Meeting Minutes - 2/24/2008

By Mark Hodges - RVAS Secretary

Present were Mike Overacker, Kristen Gillespie, Mark Hodges, Jeff Suhr, Katherine Hix, and Dave Thomas. Paul Caffrey did not attend.

Mike Overacker opened the meeting.

A request had been made for access to a membership list. The board has decided that the club will not share personal information with anyone outside of the Executive Committee.

Members will be given the opportunity to make selected information available to the other

club members with a separate Membership Roster.

There is a discrepancy in the membership dues that have been charged in the past. They are not in line with the RVAS Constitution. Family dues that were charged have been \$25.00, and the RVAS Constitution states that the correct amount should have been \$30.00. The correct amount will go into effect at the beginning of the next fiscal year.

The RVAS will celebrate Astronomy Day on May 3rd to coincide with the Chili cookoff.

Mark Hodges has been asked to build the display cabinet for club info and events to hang in the planetarium hallway of the Science Museum.

Moved to list non-club sponsored events to the upcoming events area of the newsletter.

RVAS message line, since the primary form of contact between members is now by email the club will no longer utilize or list in the newsletter Frank Baratta's message line as a form of communication for the club.

Outreach

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Astro-Van on prominent display. A little later Mary Couch arrived just in time to make sure us guys weren't up to any shenanigans. Mark Hough and the High School Principal, Michael Kelly, were also on hand to encourage the children to look, and to take a peak or two themselves. As some of you may know Michael Kelly is a member of the Blue Ridge Astronomy Club so he was really excited about this program. Since I am still trying to climb the curve in astronomy Michael actually showed me a few "harder to find" objects with my newly acquired, Michael Overacker built, "Stargazer Scope". He was very enjoyable to talk to, especially since I didn't have to worry about getting suspended for any unspecified transgressions.

As mentioned earlier the night was great for viewing. The skies were clear and the temperature was in the 50's at the start of the evening and had just dipped into the upper 40's by the time we packed up. I would estimate there were somewhere between 40 to 60 kids and parents that came over during the course of the evening.

As the sky began to darken I started to scan the southeastern sky, expecting that Mars would be the first object to come into view. John Goss was standing nearby as I mumbled to myself on the first object I saw. "That can't be Mars. It's not red enough. Hmmm..." John suggested helpfully, "What's the brightest star in the winter sky?" I replied in a questioning tone, "Desperate?" John replied, "No my little greenhorn buddy, that's Sirius." I retort, "Oh, I

thought it was 'Desperate, but not Serious' like that song from the 80's." The previous couple of sentences might not be a 100% factual recount of events, but it is directionally correct if a little poetic license is permitted. So about the time I had reconnoitered these first few objects in the night sky we started to get some visitors. Early on Sirius and Mars were the main objects we could view; the former with its appeal as a double star and the latter showing as a reddish orb of more substantial size in our scopes.

Before long many other objects join the procession. The biggest hits of the night were the Orion Nebula, Saturn as it rose in the east, Andromeda, and the Pleiades. Some of the more prominent constellations were also a big hit, especially when pointed out by green laser. By the way, Mary is learning her way around the night sky at an impressive rate. She did a great job explaining

constellations and other objects to many of the kids, some of whom were quite captivated.

Well, as all things do the evening began to wind down as the basketball games were over and with the night becoming more chilled. We broke down our gear, packed up, and headed back to home and hearth. This was my first outreach and it was a very enjoyable experience, especially when there were lots of kids around with looks of fascination on their faces and questions a plenty to be answered. It was also enjoyable when there were lulls and it was just mostly us RVASians. To be out there together is the main thing. If you participate in these events you already know this as I do now. If you haven't participated in an outreach yet you should consider it. You might even have more fun than that little kid looking through your scope. I'll bet I did.



Photo Courtesy of Michael Overacker

UPCOMING EVENTS

Frank Baratta's Roanoke Parks and Recreation Public StarGaze - March 29, 2008

Starts at 7:15 p.m. at the Cahas Mountain Overlook, milepost 139, Blue Ridge Parkway. For City, County and other area residents; Call 540-774-5651, for information.

Smoky Mountain Stargaze 2008 - Whittier, NC - March 28 - April 6, 2008

This is the inaugural year and they plan to make this an annual spring event held under the dark skies of the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina. This event will be held from March 28th, 2008 through April 6th, 2008 leading up to the new moon. This event has the cooperation and help of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation and local businesses. They will have speakers, a swap meet, beginner's astronomy classes, and door prizes for our attendees. In addition, they plan to have several field trips for nature, hiking, history, and culture. And, of course, the observing site is in a dark location with a great horizon away from the city lights to make night viewing exciting and rewarding. Info at <http://www.smokymtstargaze.com/>

Tennessee Spring Star Party - Pikeville, TN - April 4-6, 2008

The purpose of TSSP is a gathering of like-minded individuals to learn, share, and experience Astronomy under dark skies. There is no cost for this event; other than food and lodging which each participant may arrange directly with the park service.

Info at <http://personal.bna.bellsouth.net/s/p/spsmith/TSSP2008.htm>

NEAF - North East Astronomy Forum - Suffern, NY - April 26 - 27, 2008



NEAF (North East Astronomy Forum) is an annual event held by the Rockland Astronomy Club in New York. The event is held at the Rockland Community College at 145 College Road in Suffern NY. This event is heavily attended by astronomy enthusiasts from up and down the east coast and by astronomy vendors from around the world. Information will coming soon at the Rockland Astronomy site at www.rocklandastronomy.com.

Southern Star - Little Switzerland, NC - April 26 - 27, 2008

The Southern Star astronomy convention is hosted annually by the Charlotte Amateur Astronomers Club, Charlotte, North Carolina. The event is held at Wildacres near Little Switzerland, North Carolina. This is located just off the Blue Ridge Parkway. Wildacres is a private retreat with modern facilities and motel-like private rooms. Visit www.charlotteastronomers.org/southernstar/index.html

Frank Baratta's Franklin County Parks Public StarGaze - May 31, 2008

Starts at 9:15 p.m. at the Franklin County Recreation Park. Call 540-774-5651, for information.

Green Bank Starquest - Green Bank, WV- July 2-5, 2008

One of the closer star parties to our area, this event is in the shadow of the Green Bank Radio observatory. This event seems to get better every year, so if you plan on hitting a star party this year, this one is a good choice. For further information, visit www.greenbankstarquest.org/



ALCON Expo 2008 - Des Moines, IA - July 17-19, 2008

ALCON is the annual convention of the Astronomical League. This year it is in Des Moines, Iowa. Further information is available at <http://www.alconexpo.com>

Society Events and Activities for March 2008

MONTHLY MEETING: Monday, March 17, 2008 at 7:30 p.m., Fifth Floor Meeting Room, Center in the Square, Roanoke. The program for the evening is "RVAS Movie Night". Come join us for some Popcorn, Drinks, and a Movie about Astronomy.

"MEMBERS ONLY" WEEKEND OBSERVING SESSIONS: Unless otherwise noted, observing sessions are held at Cahas Mountain Overlook, milepost 139 on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Friday and Saturday, 7th and 8th. Sunset is at 6:21 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 7:48 p.m. The Moon sets at 6:36 and 7:46 p.m., respectively. (Note: DST starts at 2:00 a.m. on the morning of March 9th.)

Friday and Saturday, 28th and 29th. Sunset is at 7:40 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 9:09 p.m. The Moon rises at 1:43 and 2:34 a.m., respectively.

April Sessions: 4th and 5th; 25th and 26th.

RVAS EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING: March 10, 2008.

Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society
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