

THE OBSERVER

Newsletter of The Tri-State Astronomers

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Editor's Notes - Jim Stanicek

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How has the year been treating you ? We have had a few cloudy nights this past month, but the number of viewing opportunities have been greater than in the recent past, and I hope you have done some observing as a result!

During this past month, there have been TWO major used book sales, one at the bookstore on the north end of town, and the other being the AAUW sale out at the Ag Center on Sharpsburg pike. Your Editor took the opportunity to pick up several interesting books on the subject of astronomy, including one by that famous British expert Patrick Moore, that I practically devoured many years ago, and which was VERY instrumental in developing my personal interest in the avocation ! I hope to give some book reviews on several of them in the near future, because even if they would be out of print, if you should get the opportunity to pick them up you should take it!

Concerning "The Observer", we DO have a review of the Antietam Public star party which did take place this month, and some comments, pictures as well as observations of The Central Pennsylvania Consortium, a trip made by several members of the TSA recently.

The minutes of the last meeting will be found in its usual place, and Rod Martin, and Andy Smetzer's fine "Our Friendly Skies" will also be present in the following pages.

We will also take a look at the Constellation of the Month, and the Deep Sky Object of the Month.

As usual, there is fine reading ahead in the next several pages, so enjoy, and feel free to comment on what you find in "The Observer" ! Send your E-Mail and articles for future publication to :

Newsletter@TriStateAstronomers.org



Cool Temperatures and somewhat cloudy skies held attendance down a bit at the Antietam Public Star Party this month, but those who did come enjoyed views of the Moon, some of the brighter star clusters and double stars, and the planets Venus, Mars and Saturn.

More pictures and comments will be found further back in this issue of "The Observer".

Photo credit: Dan Kaminsky





Minutes - April 21, 2010

Tri-State Astronomers regular meeting

[Opening] TSA chairman Steve Berté opened the April 21st meeting at 7:30 PM with 25 members and guests present. A special welcome to new member Jeffrey Hubbard.

[Astro Puzzler] The astro-puzzler was presented; 'Which constellation contains the most Messier objects?'

[Presentation] Jim Vail presented a tutorial on how to polar align your telescope. In addition to a very useful and understandable presentation, Jim handed out a CDROM to each attendee with a nice collection of info and tools for doing polar alignment. Even if you can't see Polaris and the North Celestial Pole, Jim showed how its still relatively easy to polar align. Thanks Jim!

[Recent Outreach Events] On March 27th a mini-outreach was held at Steve Berté's Orionis Observatory in Middletown, MD. April 16th was clouded out but April 17th the semi-annual Antietam Battlefield TSA outreach event was held with about 150 visitors passing through! Not a bad turnout! Thanks to all who helped share their love of the heavens.

[Upcoming Outreach Events] A number of events are scheduled for the coming months including; Arendtsville Elementary School at 7-9PM on May 12 (will include some nighttime viewing, weather permitting); Night with the Stars Event at Catocin High School, Thurmont, MD at 6:30-8PM also on May 12th;? telescope clinic on May 22, 11:00am to 2:00pm at the Discovery Station; and on Oct. 15-16, the Antietam National Battlefield public star party. A couple more volunteers are needed for the May 12th events, so if you can help at any of these, please let Chairman Steve know as soon as possible. Unfortunately, we had to cancel our support for the May 1st Chambersburg Middle School Franklin Science Fair.

If anyone is willing to serve in the now vacated Outreach Coordinator, please talk to Steve. The workload is not that great and yet it's a very important job for any astronomy club. Many an amateur astronomer got their first peek through a telescope at a public star party or similar outreach event.

[Astro Puzzler Answer] And the answer is: Sagittarius with 15 Messier objects. The next runner up is Virgo with 11.

[Club Officers Reports] Treasurer Steve Ott got the club's taxes filed in time (thanks Steve!) Also, we have about \$1600 in the club account after buying some needed outreach supplies. (Now if we can just inspire someone to step up for the vacant Outreach Coordinator position ;-). Dan informed us that local NASA Solar Ambassador Greg Piepol is no longer doing presentations on the sun and solar astronomy (so we may have to work out one of those presentations in the Fall ourselves ;-). Don't forget to check out TSA's Facebook page - <http://www.facebook.com/pages/TriState-Astronomers>.

[Object of the Month- April] This month's object is the red giant carbon star, V Hydrae in the constellation Hydra. V. Hydrae is also a binary and a variable star - plenty to look at again and again ;-)

[The Sky this Month- April] This month's constellations are Hydra and Corvus. Corvus is host to the DSOs NGC4038/39 and NGC4361, along with the 'Stargate' asterism and the double star Algorab. Also, if you haven't had a chance to get a peek at the asteroid Vesta, don't forget to check it out in Leo! Finally this month we were treated to Rod's planetarium presentation. Thanks Rod!

[The Observer & Web Site] Be sure to read the latest TSA newsletter, "The Observer", and also check out the latest info on the TSA website. Our editor, Jim, would be tickled too if you have anything to contribute to the next one, be it a photo, some feedback on a new piece of gear, an observing report, a favorite astro-inspired recipe, whatever!

[Member Observing] Recent member observing adventures were discussed. Keep your eye on the TSA Google group for a possible upcoming club star party at Antietam Battlefield on May 7th(Fri) or 8th(Sat).

[Events in the News] In the news was some new 'old' observations of Cassiopeia A supernova remnant; by looking at light echoes from interstellar gas clouds, astronomers are able to see Cassiopeia A as it was when it 'blew' about 330 years ago - an astronomical 'fossil' if you will! Also discussed was the Japanese Hyabusa asteroid sampling spacecraft that may or may not have some actual samples when it returns in mid-June

[Upcoming Programs] Upcoming monthly TSA meetings:
- MAY 19th: I'll discuss my experience in setting up a SkyShed Pod Observatory.
- JUNE: Grillin & Gazin at my home in Frederick on Saturday, June 19th 6PM to ?
- JULY: Grillin & Gazin at Steve Berte's home in Middletown.
- AUG: Grillin & Gazin at Rod Martins home.

[Upcoming Events] Remember to mark your calendars for:
- Club star party at Antietam Battlefield on May 7th(Fri) or 8th(Sat) - TBA
- May 12; Arendtsville Elementary School & Catocin High School outreaches
- May 22 (Sat); Telescope Clinic @ Discovery Station 11am to 2pm
- June 19; Grillin & Gazin at Donn Williams' home, 6PM to ?
- July 9-11 (Fri-Sun); Mason-Dixon Star Party, Wellsville, PA. Details at <http://masondixonstarparty.org/>
- July 17 (Sat); Grillin & Gazin at Steve Berte's home in Middletown
- Oct. 15-16; Antietam National Battlefield public star party

Peace, blessings & clear skies! - Donn Williams



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is the monthly newsletter of the TriState Astronomers.

TSA is a nonprofit group that was established in 1985 to promote astronomy and encourage related activities to interested persons in the Maryland, Pennsylvania and West Virginia Area. Membership in the TSA costs \$15.00 annually. The group meets on the third Wednesday of the month in the planetarium of the Washington County Board of Education in Hagerstown, Maryland.

Outdoor observing sessions are usually scheduled each month during the weekend of the new moon, weather permitting.

TSA OFFICERS

Steve Berte' Chairman
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Steve Ott Treasurer and
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NEW MEMBERS ARE
ALWAYS WELCOME !

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Our Friendly Skies - May 2010 - Rod Martin - Art by Andy Smetzer

VISIBLE EVENING PLANETS

VENUS is bright in the west after sunset.
MARS is high in the south.
SATURN is in the south at sunset and visible most of the night

VISIBLE MORNING PLANETS

JUPITER rises at the start of morning twilight.
For more information about the visible evening planets and nighttime sky, download the planetarium's podcast "Skylights" from antpod.com.

SOLAR SYSTEM

A trio of planets is visible after the Sun leaves the sky. From the west to east you may spot Venus, Mars, and Saturn.

Venus is the brightest evening night object except the Moon at -4 magnitude. Look for the VERY bright "star" as soon as the Sun sets. Venus sets about two and one half hours after the Sun.

Next in line is Mars. Over the past couple of months you may have noticed its change in position in the sky. The wandering of Mars is pretty evident now due to the geometry of Earth's orbit and Mars' orbit. This month Mars moves into the constellation Leo the Lion after spending considerable time in Cancer. It is becoming dimmer as the Earth pulls away in its faster orbit. Mars sets shortly after midnight.

The showpiece of the sky is next, the planet Saturn. The ringed planet doesn't seem as bright as usual because the rings are only tilted 1.7 degrees, nearly edge-on. Look for it between the blue star Spica in Virgo and Regulus in Leo. The three are about the same brightness.

Jupiter is the bright morning planet. Look for it to rise at the start of morning twilight early in the month, but by nearly 2:30 a.m. by month's end. It is bright in the faint constellation Pisces.

Obscure Uranus moves within one degree of Jupiter by the end of the month. Use good binoculars or a telescope to spot this planet.

Mercury is not visible this month.

The eta Aquarid meteor shower peaks May 6. This usually reliable storm consisting of particles from Comet Halley is not favorable this year because of the position of the Moon.



SUN AND MOON

On May 1, the Sun rises at 6:11, sets at 8:04 for 13 hours and 53 minutes of daylight. By May 31, the Sun rises at 5:45, sets at 8:31 for 14 hours and 46 minutes of daylight.

The Sun enters the astronomical boundaries of Taurus from Aries on May 14.

The Moon reaches last quarter on May 6, new on May 13, first quarter on May 20, and full on May 27.

BRISH PLANETARIUM AND EVENTS

Public planetarium programs have concluded for the current school year. They will resume in October with the "Universe of Dr. Einstein."

The planetarium is located at the Central Offices of the Washington County Public Schools on Commonwealth Avenue off Frederick Street in Hagerstown. The planetarium's website is <http://www.wcboe.k12.md.us/content/d_i_planet.cfm>. For more information about schedules and special events, go to

<http://www.tristateastronomers.org>

Public Outreach - Antietam Star Party - At LAST!



The “Greeting Table” is the first thing visitors see when they arrive at The Antietam Public Star Party. There, they receive brief instructions about the proper use of flashlights, and a quick tour of the sky accompanied by Rod Martin’s “Skylights” pointing out the constellations and astronomical objects that can be seen with the unaided eye! Friday night’s event was rained out, and Saturday was “iffy”, but many fine views of the Moon, Planets, star clusters, and double stars were shown to the attendees. Greeters reported that around 150 people attended the Saturday Night session.

On the right, Rod Martin oversees one of the Meade Schmidt-Cassegrain telescopes as one of our guests gets a good look at the sky!



To the Left, a large refractor on a king-sized German Equatorial mount gives some of the sharpest, steadiest views of the sky that you can get! This scope is probably aimed at Venus, which is just about ready to set, but will be getting higher and higher in the sky as the nights roll by.

A large Dobsonian mounted telescope can give the brightest views of any particular object seen at a star party. This type of scope mount was invented by John Dobson, of the famous “San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomers, and is ideal for being able to hold very large reflecting telescopes, but still being portable enough to carry to events such as the Antietam Public Star Party. Here one of our participants lines up the big scope using the small finder scope mounted on the larger tube.



Central Pennsylvania Consortium Is Attended By TSA Members *Steve Berte' - Chairman - Tri-State Astronomers*

The 30th annual Central Pennsylvania Consortium (CPC) Astronomers' Meeting was held on April 24th at Gettysburg College. This event is a forum for astronomers and their students from several central Pennsylvania colleges and universities to present results of ongoing scientific research. Although many of the papers discussed cutting edge research, all were presented in such a way that you could take away quite a bit from them so don't let the fact this was a scientific meeting scare you away.

The meeting is a nice size (about 30 people) so it is a good balance between being large enough to present a nice diversity of topics while being small enough to enable interaction with as many people as you'd like. It also includes a poster session by students which is a great opportunity to learn some more from these bright young people. Posters can be intimidating due to their structure which is like a scientific paper. The secret to a successful poster session though, is not to read, but to ask. Engaging the students by asking them to give you a quick summary of what they did and why lets them shine as they present a succinct summary of their work while saving you the task of

wading through the scientific jargon! Though a scientific meeting, we amateurs were welcomed and were able to engage easily with other attendees. On occasions (e.g., in poster session conversations) where a response starting getting too deep, identifying yourself as an amateur astronomer immediately brought the discussion to a level you could once again understand. LOL.

After the meeting, Dr. Larry Marschall of Gettysburg College led a tour of the school's observatory which includes a radio telescope dish outside and a 16" truss optical telescope in the dome. He also demonstrated the computer control room for the scope which includes the ability to conduct work from remote locations. This latter capability is not available to folks like us, but researchers at the college use it routinely.

I strongly encourage you to consider attending next year's event which will be held in April at Franklin and Marshall College in Lancaster, PA.

Steve



Left: The group gathers in the poster area to view some of the achievements that students have accomplished during the past year.
Right: a tour of the grounds includes the radio telescope dish just outside the optical telescope observatory



Left: Donn Williams was among the participants touring the various displays in the education room at the meeting.

Right: a nice view of the truss telescope inside the dome at the Gettysburg Observatory



Left: A view of the control room at the observatory. Almost all the operations are controlled by sophisticated computerized equipment.



All Photos:
S. Berte'

The TSA Object of the Month- May NGC 5529 in Bootes

NGC 5529 (UGC 9127) Galaxy in
Bootes

Located at: RA 14 hours 15 minutes 34
seconds; Dec +36 degrees 13 minutes
36 seconds

Size: 6.2' x 0.8'; Magnitude: 12.8 blue;
Class: Sc: sp

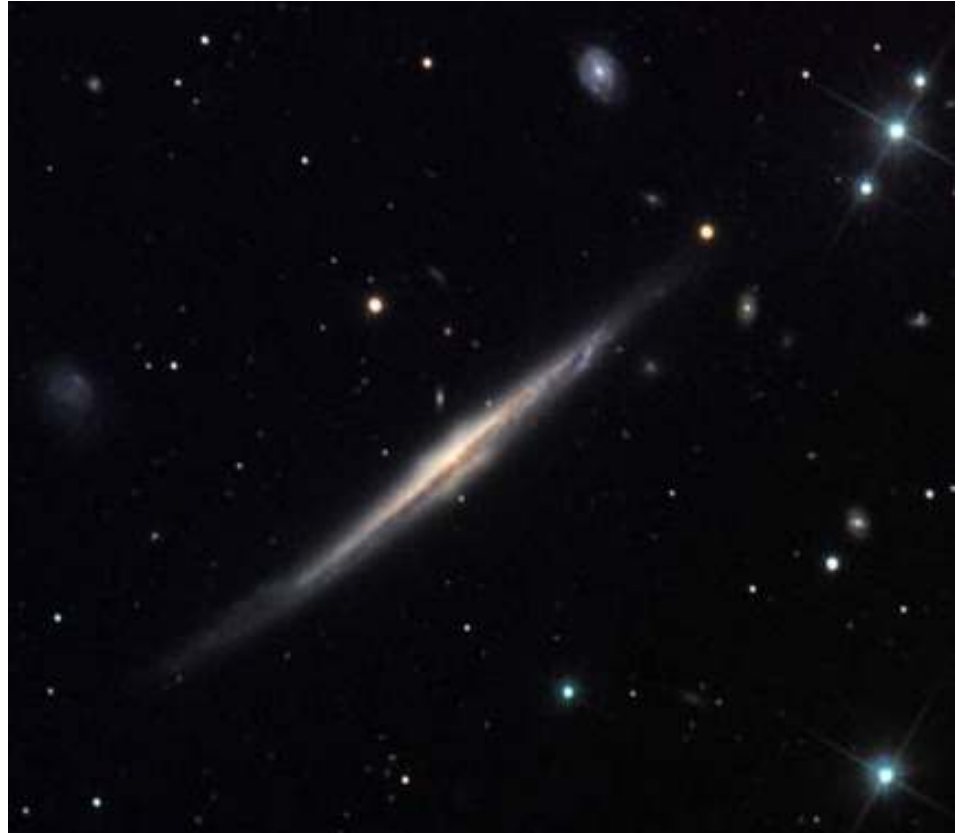


Image Credit: Bill and
Sean Kelly/Adam Block/
NOAO/AURA/NSF

At the April meeting, TSA member Jim Vail gave a talk on "How to Polar Align Almost Anything!" He showed us how we can achieve almost perfect polar alignment, even in the daytime, using such devices as "Google Earth" and precise tools such as the digital level that he is holding in his hand. Jim's talks are always very interesting and informative. We are very fortunate to have such a knowledgeable member in our group!

Photo Credit, Dan Kaminsky

