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THE NHAS OBSERVER AND MESSIER MONTHLY



Newsletter of the New Hampshire Astronomical Society

Volume 2003 No. 3

"All the news that fits in print"

March 2003

Auroras Highlight Next Meeting

President's Message

I am writing this report the morning after our February Coffee House, which also happened to be our annual "Freeze Your Buns" event (aptly named by past members). The air was cold but not as cold as it could have been and the skies were clear – imagine that!

There was plenty of activity: people with new scopes learning how to use them, seasoned observers comparing images between scopes and those who became lone space travelers taking a trip around the universe. There was plenty of food and plenty of conversation to make the event even more enjoyable. Many thanks to those who helped to make sure that the dark sky site was usable for their fellow astronomers.

The month of March should bring with it the beginning of the end of a brutal winter. This month also comes with the anticipated Messier Marathon (March 28th) where amateur astronomers strive to capture all 110 objects (109 really, one is a repeat) in one night.

At our March meeting (14th) we will be talking about Astronomy Day events and considering what will be the new image for our Astronomy Day T-shirts. Plan on bringing your favorite picture for the club vote on.

There will be a special presentation after the break with a slide show by **Bob Veilleux** on "Highlights of Auroras."

Happy Observing,

★ Joe Derek
NHAS President 2003

Public Observing Highlights

Weds., Feb 5th proved that the fourth time is the charm for Wilkens School in Amherst, NH. The weather has been so lousy this winter that we had rescheduled this skywatch three times. But on Feb. 5th, the skies were crystal clear. The kids and teachers alike were thrilled by views of Saturn and Jupiter despite -20 deg. wind chills. **Mike Townsend** had his usual "low power" 330X view of Saturn, which showed Cassini's Division all the way around. Club member **John Bishop** showed off his new DGM OA 6.5-inch off-axis Newtonian scope.

Several NHAS members also showed up for the MENSAs skywatch at the Radisson Hotel in Merrimack on Feb. 15. It was another cold night, near 0 deg. F. MENSAs requirement for membership is demonstrating that you are in the top 2% of the population in intelligence. They proved their street smarts by mostly staying indoors and eating at the buffet.

But NHAS club members got another round of excellent viewing, and also managed to show Saturn to several **airline pilots** as they were checking into the hotel!

★ Ed Ting

Web Uploads

NHAS has successfully made the transition to a new web hosting service at mv.com thanks to efforts above and beyond the call of duty by member **Larry Lopez**. Even the mailing lists have been regenerated to run on the new server.

Thank you very much, Larry!

★ Barbara O'Connell

Astronomy Day 2003

We're getting ready for another fun-filled Astronomy Day at the Christa McAuliffe Planetarium in May! Last year, we had some wonderful exhibits and we were graced with clear skies for a skywatch at night. Please contact me if you are interested in doing an encore exhibit or a new exhibit.

This year the big outing is scheduled for Saturday, May 10 with an added attraction of a NASA exhibit van on site. More info. will follow via the e-mail list. Remember to bring pictures of your favorite historical or modern telescope to the March meeting!

★ Barbara O'Connell
Astronomy Day Coordinator 2003
barbnhas@yahoo.com

NHAS Observatory

Maintenance on YFOS was rewarded on the night of the rescheduled Freeze Your Buns observing session on Friday February 28. This work was done by several people over the course of months and it was rewarded by the overwhelming attendance and good skies. We had a packed parking lot!

We have increased maintenance of YFOS this year because it was suggested that we do so, and because it was easier to keep clear than the traditional Messier Marathon observing field.

★ Larry Lopez

Noteworthy News
Back from the Dark Nebula.....Page 2

Back from the Dark Nebula

Two of our notable members have come back from that dark nebula AKA as surgery, and are on the recovery trajectory.

Ed Dougherty of Dracut, Mass. planned for the worst but made it through over 8 hours of surgery on Feb. 18. He returned home the end of February to begin the long recovery under the care of his wife Cindy.

Chase McNiss of Hudson, NH also went in for surgery at the end of February and, after three hours, it was completed successfully. He was released within a few days and should be back in orbit after a few weeks of recuperation.

I know our wishes and prayers have not gone unanswered, and that we all wish these gentlemen a smooth recovery and a speedy return to the great dome of the night sky.

★ Michael Frascinella

Venus

by member Liz Ahl

Who can say why anyone suddenly rises in the quiet pre-dawn, before pink tints the sky's thin skin?

so cold outside that frost has gathered at window corners and the house cracks and creaks

so cold that the sky's thick with stars, so cold it's like they hurt because they're bright.

Bright Venus hurts the most -- her beauty mark so outrageous, it must surely be painted on.

Venus, not a star, but a celebrity, the center of attention -- I try to draw her into my telescope

which I drag through the dark to the kitchen, to the sliding door she's winking at me through

Refracted, she loses some charm, looks cellular and ironically microscopic --

so it's the naked eye for her, the eye drawn unexpectedly open in the silky pre-dawn, the quiet hour spent staring her down.

ATM True Grit

ATM meetings will begin again after the Messier Marathon. By then the weather will be warmer and the sap will be flowing (and the mud too).

★ Larry Lopez

Astrophotons

We will hold a photography meeting on March 22nd. Time and location will be sent via e-mail next week.

★ Mike Kertyzak

Messier Marathon

Messier Marathon is scheduled for Friday March 28 with an alternate date of Saturday March 29. Messier Marathon has been held at the **Lopez's** residence for the past several years.

Snow on the observing field is often present until a couple of weeks before Messier Marathon. It often quite amazing how quickly the snow disappears when the temperature rises and we get a good strong wind.

We had been waiting for some melting so we could use snow blowers and shovels to clear the field early enough to allow more temperate weather to finish the job. On the weekend of March 8-9, we had two snow removal sessions.

On Saturday, **Richard De Midio** (and two helpers) and snow blower, **Gardner Gerry** (a new member) and snow blower, **Linda** and **Larry** (his and her snow blowers), and shovels (and other implements of destruction) worked from noon to 5 p.m. or so.

On Sunday, **Barbara O'Connell** and **Larry** tackled the remaining snow. So the site is clear.

This was a good thing since we got another hard freeze the beginning of the week.

★ Larry Lopez

The Bottom Line

Here is the Treasurer's Report for March 1, 2003.

Balance: \$8,200

Members: 152

Membership Cards

Membership cards were mailed on Feb. 26th to all members who have a US mailing address on file with NHAS.

With this card, you are now entitled! Don't observe stars without it.

If you have not received your member card, contact the Treasurer to verify your mailing address.

The NHAS officers are working to change the format of the club membership roster. We are working to improve the value of the roster while maintaining privacy for those members who desire it. You'll hear more about this soon!

★ Jim Warend

New Post Office Mailing Address

The official mailing address of the club has changed to:

New Hampshire Astronomical Society
P.O. Box 5823
Manchester, NH 03108-5823

This change to a new Post Office facility gives the officers access to our Post Office box 24 hours a day. [Why they would go to the Post Office 24 hours a day, I'll never know. -- MF]

★ Jim Warend

Looking Back at Last Month

Opening. **Joe Derek** opened the meeting by welcoming the newest members to the club.

In the mail: Boston Museum of Science sent an invitation for its May 10 Astronomy Day. Joe asked for volunteers to represent NHAS.

Member **Ed Dougherty** made it through surgery on Feb. 18 and Joe wished him a speedy recovery.

Committees. Web: **Barbara O'Connell** and **Larry Lopez** noted that they had moved our web site and mailing lists to mv.com since the free service we had been enjoying was no longer to be available. ATMs: **Larry** said there would be no meeting due to preparations for Messier Marathon. Photo: **Rich Fleming** said there has been no meeting but they would schedule one for the coming month.

YFOS. **Larry** stated that the field was once again snowbound but would try plowing that weekend. **Don Ware**

(Cont'd p. 3)

Looking Back (cont'd. from p. 2)

devised an LED flasher-on-a-stick that is to be used to guide cars leaving the YFOS parking area.

Public Observing. Ed Ting was out of town. Mike Townsend reviewed recent skywatches at Wilkins School in Amherst and the Mensa Society in Merrimack.

Treasury. Jim Warendt reported a balance of \$8500, \$1100 in accounts payable, and 150 members. The club has a new P.O. Box (see p. 2).

Observatory Upgrade. A proposal for a new club telescope was presented by John Blackwell, as part of a research committee with Don Ware and Mike Townsend. They identified the best components for an observatory-quality system and presented their recommendations.

The most fundamental requirement was a solid telescope mount, which led to the Losmandy Titan with Gemini GOTO, which can hold up to 100 lb. of equipment (cost \$4995 + shipping).

A huge concrete pier is already in place at the observatory, so an adapter plate is all that would be needed to fasten the mount to the pier.

Three Optical Tube Assemblies (OTAs) were presented:

- Celestron 11-inch SCT
- Meade 12-inch SCT with many fewer features than the above scope
- Larry's Celestron C14, which needs work

The officers are currently pursuing the purchase of the Losmandy mount only.

Michael Frascinella suggested that we also look into property insurance.

Chase McNiss recently completed a club equipment property survey and agreed that would be a good idea.

Astronomy Day 2003. Barbara O'Connell would be the new NHAS coordinator and was starting to look for volunteers. She also asked members to submit designs for the club t-shirt at the March meeting.

Evening Program. John Pappas presented the Messier Marathon Pep Talk and Training Session. John reviewed the history of Charles Messier and his catalog of deep sky objects. John



covered some of the errors and duplicate objects, then moved on to the logistics of running the marathon.

Since objects tended to be either easy, moderate, or difficult to find, he said to leave the difficult objects for last or pass them by if elusive.

He circulated *The Year Round Messier Marathon*, by Harvard Pennington, a book that presented large finder charts for each object plus a lot of great technical tips and ideas for observing.

The other strategy is to find the objects based on the time of night, which is the method presented in past marathons.

He suggested taking a short rest after tackling the galaxies in Virgo. The toughest time will be in the wee hours of the morning, unless you have already succumbed to heavy eyelids, or slapping yourself stops working.

★ Michael Frascinella

NASA Space Place

Seven Strangers?

by Dr. Tony Phillips

At the dawn of the space age some 40 years ago, we always knew who was orbiting Earth or flying to the Moon. Neil Armstrong, Yuri Gagarin, John Glenn. They were household names-- everywhere.

Lately it's different. Space flight has become more routine. Another flight of the shuttle. Another visit to the space station. Who's onboard this time? Unless you're a NASA

employee or a serious space enthusiast, you might not know.

Dave Brown, Rick Husband, Laurel Clark, Kalpana Chawla, Michael Anderson, William McCool, and Ilan Ramon.

Now we know. Those are the names of the seven astronauts who were tragically lost on Saturday, Feb. 1st, when the space shuttle Columbia (STS-107) broke apart over Texas.

Before the accident, perhaps, they were strangers to you. But if that's so, why did you have a knot in your gut when you heard the news? What were those tears all about? Why do you feel so deep-down sad for seven strangers?

Astronauts have an unaccountable hold on us. They are explorers. Curious, humorous, serious, daring, careful. Where they go, they go in peace. Every kid wants to be one. Astronauts are the essence of humanity.

They are not strangers. They are us.

While still in orbit Dave Brown asked, jokingly, "do we really have to come back?"

No. But we wish you had.

Please see the NASA Home Page (<http://www.nasa.gov>) for more information on the Columbia Investigation.

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DEADLINE for next issue: 5 p.m. Mar. 29

E-mail your articles to the Editor. Phone if you have a late submission.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS

Notify the Treasurer. Include your full name and new street address. If changing an e-mail address, specify whether you want to add, modify, or delete an e-mail address.



How to Join N.H.A.S.

Write to us:
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Manchester, NH 03108-5823
Attn: Treasurer

Send E-mail to:
Treasurer@nhastro.com

Use our web site:
<http://www.nhastro.com/>

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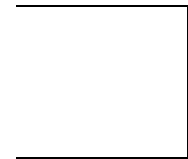
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New Hampshire Astronomical Society
P.O. Box 5823
Manchester, NH 03108-5823



Aurora Highlights. Mar. 14, St. Anselm

NHAS Upcoming Events

Event	Date	Time	Location
March meeting	Mar. 14	7:30 p.m.	St. Anselm's College, Goffstown, NH
Photography Committee	Mar. 22	TBD	TBD
Messier Marathon	Mar. 28	dusk-dawn	Lopez Mt., New Boston, NH
Coffee House	Mar. 28	dusk	YFOS
CMP Skywatch	Apr. 4	7:30 p.m.	Planetarium, Concord, NH
April meeting	Apr. 18	7:30 p.m.	Planetarium, Concord, NH