



Well, Almost.....

Presidents Message

I had hoped to be able to report to you that we had closed the sale on Atlas Site in this newsletter, but, as of this writing (Saturday, June 20), it hasn't happened yet.

That's the bad news. The good news is, I expect that closing will be accomplished before the June meeting.

There are really no insurmountable problems, it's just a matter of getting lawyers, temporary Co-op managers, mortgage holders, and club presidents all heading in the same direction. We researched the deed on the land (I can now recite chapter and verse all the fascinating details about who owned it, when, how the government acquired it through eminent domain, and how the subsequent owners went bankrupt, then died leaving their estates to fight it out with a bank, etc., etc.) All the experts seem satisfied that, when we pay our money, the place will really be ours. The final hitch has to do with the fact that Firth Co-op took out a loan against the property in 1984, and the lender must release the mortgage on our part of it.

So, the paperwork battle drags on, but I am confident we will be able to call the 4.25 acres and one Very Deep Hole our own shortly. Before we rent keys at \$15 per year, we must close the access shaft to satisfy our insurance company. We will do that as quickly as possible after filing the deed.

At this month's meeting, even if all of the above has not been done, we will get a list of people who want to be keyholders, and accept payment. The keys will then be made, and I'll call each person and get the key to them as soon as we can legally do so. By next New Moon, you should be able to use your key to get into the site.

By the way, I want to express my gratitude, on behalf of the club, to our member, Bob Crosby, who has donated his legal time and talents to help us through the intricacies of acquiring Atlas Site. Also, to our new member, K.B. Smith, who donated many of his services surveying the land and running the gamut of County Surveyor bureaucracies in not one, but two counties (since we sit near the border between Lancaster and Gage). And finally my thanks to Del Motycka, who did much of the detail work, research, and just plain use of his knowledge of Where To Go To Get Things Done.

Now, if we can just traverse the last hurdle, and if it will stop raining for awhile, maybe we can get down to what this is all about: some serious sky watching! See you at the meeting.

Lee Thomas

A Message From the V.P.

I think its time to start thinking about the club picnic and star party. the only date in August that is anywhere close to new moon is August 22nd, so unless we want to delay things until September, that will probably be the day to circle on your calendar. We will also be trying to railroad someone into getting pop for the picnic, so beware! I think it is also time to discuss a possible change in the format in the event. A few years ago, Russ Genzmer talked about holding the club picnic in Holmes Park, at or near the observatory. I was initially opposed to this since I really came up for the star party only, but I think now we should reconsider it. There are a number of advantages to this change. First of all, we had been holding the picnic at Wagontrain lake, which requires a state parks sticker. Wagontrain is about 15 miles away from the Lincoln area and is quite a drive for our friends from Omaha. Wagontrain has no electrical hookups for things like crock pots or hot plates. The place where we usually set up had a moderate sized picnic table with a small tin roof for shelter in case it (horrors!!!) rains. The only major advantage to Wagontrain is its relatively dark sky. Those who have been to the last few picnics have noted the increasing number of nighttime boaters (I hesitate to call them fishermen!) who have very bright spot lights. They point the lights at everything in and around the lake, including a group of hardy amateur astronomers (maybe they are looking for the famous "Loch Wagontrain" monster). And the State Parks officials have been a bit testy lately about us driving our cars down to where we could unload our telescopes. In any case, Wagontrain is not quite as suitable for our "social" event as Holmes seems to be. We now have (hopefully) a nice private park-where-we-want-to dark sky site near Firth which we could use for the star party after the picnic is done with. Also, at Hyde we could still hold our picnic inside if it rains. Our club is a friendly social group, and I think that we should hold the picnic for the benefit of the group regardless of the skies. We can talk about astronomy or anything else, without our usual Tuesday meeting pressures, plus WE CAN EAT!!!

What I propose is this: hold the Prairie Astronomy Club picnic at Holmes Park, with the meeting point being Hyde Observatory. Activities could begin around 4:30 or 5:00p.m. with games or talk. At our usual 6:00 p.m. time, we would have the pot luck dinner outside on the terraces, or inside if it rains. After dinner and before the observatory opens to the public, we could go out to the Atlas site if it is clear and have our usual star party. We would have to reserve the observatory for our picnic, but I don't see too much of a problem getting it for the time frame in question. In any case, please come to the meeting and voice your opinions on the proposed changes. I would like to see the date stay close to new moon, but if a majority feel differently, we might change even that.

This month's program will be presented by Jack Dunn who will explain to us what the "Star Hustler" is really like!

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The next scheduled star party will be held on July 24th at the Atlas site near Firth. Attendance at the last observing session was a bit sparse to say the least (only two people showed up), but I have hopes for the next one.

Start out your summer observing right by looking at NGC 6543, a bright planetary nebula in Draco. It can be found about five and a half degrees east and just under a degree north of Zeta Draconis, and at ninth magnitude, it is bright enough to be seen in a 60mm refractor as a fuzzy star. Larger instruments will show a bright blue oval of light with some faint hints of detail.

In Hercules are several interesting globular star clusters. M92, located about six and a half degrees north and half a degree east of Pi Hercules, is a nice ball of faint stars in any aperture from six inches on up when high power is used. It can even be seen with a good pair of 10X50 binoculars. A more difficult target is the small and faint "intergalactic interloper", NGC 6229. It can be detected with a six inch telescope, but it is so distant that I doubt whether any telescope smaller than 20 inches is capable of resolving it. The major highlight of Hercules is of course M13, but you should also look to the southern part of the constellation for the small planetary NGC 6210. The best way I know of to find it is to go about three degrees east and two and a half degrees north of Beta. It is only about eight seconds of arc across, so use very high power and at least a four inch aperture.

This part of the summer sky also offers a large number of bright open clusters to those with small to moderate sized telescopes. NGC 14665, located just over a degree north-east of Beta Ophiuchi, is a very large cluster that should look nice in binoculars or rich-fields telescopes. NGC 6633, located three degrees north and just under two degrees east of 74 Ophiuchi, is a large and rich cluster that is spectacular in a six or eight inch instrument. Ophiuchus also contains a couple of nice globular star clusters. M10 can be found about a degree west of the star 30 Ophiuchi and shows a few stars near the edges when viewed with a six

The Observing Chairman's Report

by David Knisely



inch. A ten inch will resolve the cluster well, although it won't be as spectacular as M13. M12 is located five degrees east and four south of Lambda Ophiuchi, and is much like M10 in appearance.

Scorpius also contains its share of globulars, with most notable being M4. This object is very easy to find if you look about a degree west of Antares. Any good pair of binoculars will show M4 as a small fuzzy spot, but a six or eight inch will resolve it into thousands of faint stars. The clusters also has a bar of stars running through its center that make it look like a barred spiral galaxy at low power. A somewhat more difficult globular can be found less than a degree north-west of Antares. NGC6144 is smaller than M4 and an eight inch shows only a few of its component stars.

At The Last Meeting...

The meeting was called to order at 7:33 p.m. with 19 members and 2 guests present.

ATLAS SITE NEWS: the survey work is done. Management turnover at the Firth Co-op has slowed things down a bit, but shouldn't cause any problems with our purchase. The lawyer is now reviewing the contract with our changes in it. We can still continue to use the site in the interim. Earl was at the site last Friday and sprayed our weeds. He mentioned some of his other adventures at the site as well (you had to be there to hear it all!)

Lee read an article stating that Pluto has an atmosphere and is NOT just an asteroid. Other announcements... there's a new magazine out called "The Observers Guide"; Universe 87 Astronomy League National Convention and the Dark Sky 87 Visual Astronomy Conference are both coming up; our list of telescope manufactures and parts suppliers needs updating (Dave said he would take care of it).

The club voted for Astronomical League officers:

President -- Jim Brown (1 opposing vote; unopposed)

V. Pres -- Ken Wilcox (unanimous; unopposed)

Secretary -- Harriet Witt Miller (unanimous; opposed by Larry Jahn)

We were asked to call Governor Orr to voice support for LB218, the bill to provide climate control for Morrill Hall. The business meeting ended at 8 p.m. The month's programs were a video of The Discovery of Pluto and an audio tape on "Parallel Universes". Refreshments were served after the meeting.

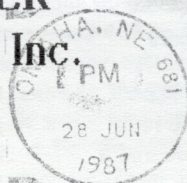
Thanks to Ron Veys for the May meeting notes...Editor

THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMER

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Next PAC Meeting...
June 30th