

## A Note From The Corporate Bean-Counter (Treasurer)

Some folks who wanted the RASC Handbook were apparently not at the meeting when orders were taken. I have had requests from three individuals to place another order with the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada. We need 11 or more in order to get the low price of \$6.90 per book. If you didn't request a handbook the first time around, and you're still interested, call me (at 483-5639), or let me know at the December meeting. A telephone call will most likely get my answering machine, but it is user-friendly and will take your order. If we fall short of 11, I'll call back anybody who has expressed an interest, and we can make up our collective minds how to proceed.

Cedric Gibb, Russ Alberts, Gary Barkley, and Ellen Owen should make arrangements to get the handbooks they ordered at this meeting, else they might be sold off to other members.

According to our records, several members have not renewed their Atlas Site keys during 1988, but still retain the keys. The records may be incomplete, but I would appreciate hearing from the following folks as to their key status: Russ Alberts (#5), Earl Moser (#8), Joseph Turek (#10), and Dave Knisely (#4).

Also, I understand there are a couple of refunds due for overpayments of one sort or another. I'd appreciate the individuals involved getting in touch with me so we can get checks-out before the end of the year. Tidy books make Santa (and the IRS) happy.

*Lee Thomas*

### The Prairie Astronomer

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Next PAC Meeting December 27, 1988

# The Prairie Astronomer

## Happy Holidays!

My first meeting as president got off to a fine start. First, the meeting started a few minutes late. As I called the meeting to order I mentioned that our secretary (Ellen Owen) was ill and would not be at the meeting, so there was no secretary report. Next was the treasurers report, and the new treasurer Lee Thomas reported that he and Dan Neville had not yet gotten together to transfer the accounts. Dan came in a bit late, and so we had no treasurer report.

As I mentioned, there was no secretary for the evening and the business part of the meeting was almost over before I remembered to ask someone to take notes in Ellen's absence. Oh well, maybe the December meeting will go a little better.

Next, some old business. Earl Moser said he would like to have the roof repaired on the shed where the club telescope is stored. The PAC responded on December 4th, when Donn Baker, Delmar Motycka, Johnson Winemiller, Dan Neville, Rick Littrell and his three children, and I met at Earl's about 1:30. We removed the old roof, put up a new one, cleaned up the mess and hopefully left Earl in a happy frame of mind. I think the needed repair on the roof had been overshadowed by the repairs at the observing site.

The Firth Co-op once again had the gate at the site repaired and asked the PAC to help pay the bill. We agreed to the payment to maintain our good relations.

Finally, I THINK the club will forgive Ellen for missing the last meeting, BUT DON'T LET IT HAPPEN AGAIN! Thanks for listening. I hope to see all of you at the December meeting. Let's have a good turnout. I'm Ron Debus...

### FOR SALE

Steve Traudt is selling his photo of the Persied that appears on page 108 of the Dec. issue of Astronomy. The photo is 8 x 10 is matted and ready to frame.

Send \$17.95 to Gallery 412, 412 Main Street, Grand Junction, CO 81501.

### At The Next Meeting

Jack Dunn will be presented video tape highlights of the latest shuttle flight. Jack grabbed the pictures from the NASA satellite transmissions.

## The Reviewer

by Dave Knisely

### The Universe From Your Backyard by David J. Eicher Cambridge University Press, 1988

Those of you who read Astronomy Magazine are probably familiar with the monthly series "The Backyard Astronomer", which highlights the contents of a particular constellation. Now, David Eicher, editor of Deep-Sky Magazine, has taken those articles and combined them into a 188 page volume entitled "The Universe From Your Backyard". Now all of you who liked the series don't have to go rummaging through all your back issues anymore.

But just exactly how good a guide is this book? At first glance, it seems to be just what the doctor ordered. Each chapter is devoted to one or two constellations, providing lots of informative material. A generous text covering selected deep-sky objects in each constellation is supplemented by a number of good photographs and drawings of the objects discussed along with a star map of the area. A table of object data is also supplied for those objects mentioned in the text, providing items such as position, magnitudes, classifications, and sizes. All in all, it would seem to be an excellent reference guide for the average amateur, right?

Well, not exactly. There are a number of problems with this work that should have been dealt with before it ever saw the publisher's desk. First of all, it is just a collection of articles without a much needed introductory chapter containing hints for the deep sky observer. The book really needs a brief discussion of things like averted vision, atlases, wide field eyepieces, nebular filters, finders, observing sites, and location techniques. By and large, these things are either neglected entirely or buried in obscure locations in the text. Second, the star maps do not always contain the objects mentioned in the text. For example, the first chapter on Andromeda mentions NGC 7662 (the famous "Blinking Eye" nebula), but the portion of Andromeda containing it and another mentioned object, NGC 7640, is not on the map. This is a really good way to confuse and frustrate the

beginner. Also, on page 159, the positions on the map for NGC 6882 and NGC 6818 are wrong. Several constellations are either left out completely, or slighted severely. Puppis, which has the spectacular open clusters M46, M47, and M93, doesn't even have a chapter covering it! Several other major constellations are also missing from the book. Eicher covered Carina and Phoenix, so why didn't he write a chapter on Puppis, Dorado, or Crux?

Third, the author's descriptions of deep-sky objects are often very misleading. He speaks of seeing color in galaxies or globulars, a feat which is beyond the ability of the human eye in anything except giant observatory class telescopes. Several times, he talks of galaxies with spiral structure that is "easy" to see in some fairly small instruments. Spiral structure is one of the most difficult things to detect regardless of the aperture used. It is NEVER very easy! One particularly bad description accompanies the picture of M74, stating "Under dark sky, a 6-inch telescope reveals a subtle arm structure.". I recently observed M74 with 10-inch and 17-inch Newtonians under excellent conditions and I could just barely see the spiral structure in the 17-inch, but little detail was shown in the 10. Eicher talks about the "starcloud NGC 206" in the spiral galaxy M33. Unfortunately, there is no NGC 206 in M33, it's in M31! There is an HII emission NEBULA in M33 (NGC 604) at the position he mentions, but no starcloud. Several other examples of questionable descriptions are scattered through the book, marring what otherwise might be an excellent work. o73

Fourth, a number of interesting and fairly easy objects were left out of the work. Eicher mentions the difficult triple star Zeta Cancri, but ignores the easy and very colorful double Iota Cancri. He mentions the "ruddy star" R Scuti, but fails to mention what is probably the reddest star in the entire sky, V Aquilae, which is only a few degrees to the east. Describing each object would have only taken a sentence or two and would have improved the text greatly.

In fairness to the author, the overall layout of concept of the book is quite good. The maps are pretty good, the pictures are generally very good, and the text isn't too bad except for the glitches I have mentioned. But I really wish that Eicher had given a pre-publication version of the book to some advanced amateur for some creative "editing". That might have raised the book from a "fair" to a "must have" rating.

## Observing Chairman's Report

by Dave Knisely

THE NEXT SCHEDULED STAR PARTY IS ON FRIDAY, JANUARY 6TH AT THE ATLAS SITE. The cold clear skies of mid winter offer a fine assortment of open star clusters and diffuse nebulae. M35, located one degree north and 1.25 degrees east of 1 Geminorum, is a fine cluster that is just visible to the naked eye under good conditions. Almost any telescope will resolve it into a large group of fairly bright stars with several curving strings cluster members present. Users of 4 inch and larger apertures may notice a small hazy patch of light just to the south-west of M35. This patch is the distant cluster NGC 2158, a group which is nearly as rich as M35, but is about six times farther away. A six inch at high power will show stars in the group, but somewhat larger instruments are required for full resolution. The cluster is beautiful in a ten inch at 120x.

In eastern Eridanus is the small but bright planetary nebula NGC 1535, located about two and a half degrees south of 39 Eridani. It appears as a fuzzy 9th magnitude star in small refractors, but larger apertures reveal some detail at very high power. A six inch will show a bright bluish disk with a hazy outer edge, while a 10 inch at 250x will show a bright inner shell and fuzzy outer shell in contact with the inner one. The central star is also visible in a 10 inch under good conditions.

The Great Orion Nebula is a favorite target for beginners, but experienced observers with moderate to large apertures will want to try out nebular filters on this object. This object improves greatly when observed with a filter from a dark site, showing almost all the detail that appears in pictures of M42. The Lumicon

OIII filter imparts some interesting color to the view, making some regions bluish, greenish, and even faint reddish colors. Well north-east of M42 just east of Zeta is the diffuse nebula NGC 2024. This complex gas cloud can be seen in a six inch rich-field as a small faint puff with a vague dark lane down the middle. Eight or ten inch instruments show some interesting dark detail in the cloud if the Lumicon Deep-Sky filter is used and Zeta is kept out of the field of view. The small reflection nebula M78 can be found about 2.5 degrees east and two north of Zeta Orionis. M78 is difficult to see in small telescopes, appearing as a small dim puff near a star in a 60mm refractor. A six or eight inch aperture will show it as a broad dim fan of light with a star near the center. A diffuse dark area can be seen in a ten inch, but otherwise, the nebula is nearly featureless.

A good open cluster for small to moderate aperture, NGC 2169, can be found one degree south and about 1/3 degree east of Nu Orionis. It is a fairly small group of fairly bright stars arranged in two triangles. An eight inch will show about 20 members making it look like a saw horse! Those of you with six inch or larger telescopes will want to try the large faint nebula NGC 2174, located about 1.5 degrees east and a half north of Xi2 (62) Orionis. this object appears as a 25' diameter hazy area around a 7th magnitude star and is nearly invisible without a nebular filter. A ten inch equipped with an OIII filter will make the nebula really stand out, revealing some interesting dark detail. And remember, nebular filters work even better under dark sky conditions than they do under light polluted skies, so be sure to take them with you when you are going to your favorite observing site.

### Correction

The address (and name spelling) of Lyneelle and Wendell Wood is 1313 N. 63rd Street, not 2313 as printed in the last newsletter.

The Prairie Astronomer is published monthly by the Prairie Astronomy Club, Inc., and is free to all club members. Membership status and expiration date are listed on the mailing label. Membership dues are: Junior Members and Newsletter Only Subscribers...\$10/yr; Regular Members... \$24/yr; Family Memberships...\$27/yr; Address all new memberships, renewals, or questions to THE PRAIRIE ASTRONOMY CLUB, INC., P.O. BOX 80553, LINCOLN, NE 68501. For other club information contact one of the following officers: Ron Debus(Pres)435-5688, Dave Knisely (V.Pres)223-3968, Kim Ellen Owen (Sec)423-7440, Lee Thomas(Tres)483-5639, Jack Dunn(2nd V.Pres)475-3013. All newsletter comments and articles should be sent to Newsletter Editor JOHN LORTZ, 9255 CADY AVE #14, OMAHA, NE 68134 no later than 7 days before monthly club meetings. Club meetings are held the last Tuesday of each month at Hyde Observatory in Lincoln, NE.