

Harford County Astronomical Society

Bel Air, Maryland
www.harfordastro.org



Volume 32 Issue 7

July 2006

Public Star Party (Open House), Aug 5, 2006 at dusk
General Meeting: Saturday, Aug 12, 2006 7:30pm (19:30)

Club Calendar for 2006:

Meeting Night

September 9, 2006
October 7, 2006
November 4, 2006
December 2, 2006

Open House/Public Star Party

September 2, 2006
October 28, 2006
November 25, 2006
December 30, 2006

Meeting time is 19:30 (7:30pm) unless noted otherwise. Dates and times are taken from the HCAS website.
Please check the website for possible schedule updates and changes.

<http://www.harfordastro.org>

Check the HCAS website for other club events.

In This Issue:

Minutes of July 8, 2006 HCAS Meeting

Open Houses - June 3 and July 1, 2006

Recent Observations by Club Members

HCAS Outreach Schedule

New Members

Minutes of the July 8th, 2006 HCAS Meeting

1. **President Jim Garrett opened the meeting at 7:35 PM.** The June meeting minutes were published in the newsletter. The minutes were approved as written.

2. **Treasurer:** Tim Kamel was unable to attend the meeting, but he sent a report by email. He has processed the transfer paperwork from the old treasurer and opened the new account. The starting balance was \$5064.06. After deposits for membership dues, magazine subscriptions, and equipment purchases, the total balance as of July 7th was \$6858.41. He is continuing to process the magazine subscription renewals.

3. **Observatory operations:** None this month. Mark Kregel gave a short overview of the dome motorization project, which has not progressed much due to his work commitments.

4. Outreach:

a. Tom Rusek will conduct an indoor program at the Bel Air library on Wednesday, July 12th. This was announced in the latest issue of the "Pennysaver" newspaper, along with several photographs and quotations from club members. If this event goes well, the library staff wants us to do it again in the future, with both indoor presentations and outdoor telescope viewing opportunities.

b. On September 18th, Tom will run an indoor and outdoor event at the Fallston library. The club is also putting together a display for the Fallston library display case. Grace will put the display together.

c. A girl scout group will attend the club's October 28th public open house. Tom will bring them to the observatory classroom for a presentation, and then they will be able to participate in the outdoor part of the open house. The rain date for this is the November open house.

d. The club was asked to give a presentation at a Star Trek "Shore Leave" convention this weekend. A non-member who is on the yahoo group volunteered to do this.

e. Lucy Albert forwarded a request for a star party for a group of blind students. This would require telescopes with cameras and a laptop computer to transfer image files to a special printer for output as a tactile Braille-like image for the students to use. Since no one has the equipment to do this, Tom will call and let the point of contact know that we cannot accommodate her request.

f. Grace will contact Yvonne Gabriel of Aberdeen High School in response to her request for HCAS support of her science class activities during the next school year.

5. **Old business:** All of the Broad Creek keys were accounted for. Cathy Tingler has spoken with the park rangers and they have the current list of club officers to contact in case of problems.

6. New business:

a. The club received a late notice from the insurance company. Apparently the renewal payment was due in December. The premium was paid up through December 05 according to an old newsletter. Jim Garrett said he would contact Tim Kamel about sending in the payment. Grace found a copy of the policy in the file cabinet and Jim took it to examine.

b. A reporter and photographer from the Baltimore Examiner newspaper attended the last open house. They took pictures and interviewed people, but in the end only one photo ran in the newspaper, with no article or caption explaining this was an HCAS event.

c. Several new and prospective club members attended the meeting. Jim welcomed them, and several members stayed after the meeting to talk with them and helped one group set up their new telescope.

8. The meeting was adjourned at 8:27 PM.

Open House - June 3, 2006

On 6/3, we had our June open house session. We had a fairly good session, about 25 guests, mostly children. Including, I believe, a Weeblo troop. This was a very polite bunch of kids, each of who walked around and thanked each of the Society members that were there. There were some adults including a family that wanted to join and promised to be at the next meeting but were a no-show.

We had 2 scopes set up, a 70 mm GOTO and a 14” push-to on a dob mount. There were also two binoculars including a 100 mm one.

Viewing was fair, with thin clouds covering portions of the sky at various times. We targeted several objects. The moon was first till it got dark. Jupiter was the big hit, very bright and bands and moons readily visible. Saturn was also a delight but getting low in the sky. This would probably be the last open house to see this planet during this apparition. The Bee Hive was also attractive and also low in the sky. Mars was too small to be of any interest.

With the partially cloudy skies, the session ended fairly early. The Society members remained almost till 11 PM for any stragglers but there were none and we called it a night.

.....Tim

Open House - July 1, 2006

On 7/1, we had our July Open House. We had a good session this evening, with good participation by Society members and the general public. Representing the Society were Roy Troxel, Mark Kregel, Stephen Krall, Jeremy Kirkendall, Grace Wyatt, Millie McCoy and yours truly. We had about 50-60 guests – families with children, couples and individuals. Conrad returned after a several month absence, looking for assistance in operating an ETX 70. Three guests indicated that they had joined, including one that paid at the open house.

Also on hand was a photographer from the Baltimore Examiner, who took several photos and spoke with the members. There was one photo published in the Examiner of 7/4/06, showing a family looking through the Dobsonian that Stephen Krall brought.

We had scopes ranging in size from a 70 mm GOTO to a 14” Dobsonian mount. We also had a 4” and a 6” refractor. I brought along the 6” F/10.4 and had some pretty good views of the moon and Jupiter.

Viewing was average, with no clouds and average seeing. However, with the moon and the street lighting, all that could be seen naked eye were the moon, Jupiter and a few bright stars. Polaris was a challenge this night.

As usual, we targeted several objects. The Moon and Jupiter were the big attraction. The Galilean moons were split two on each side but were joined by a background star of equal brightness, providing a different look. We were also able to bring in M13 and M92.

Also, we had a special treat. Mark pointed out a passing satellite and asked that we watch it. It shortly went into Earth's shadow and disappeared.

We had requests for Saturn, which could not be located and was likely below the tree line.

The session continued late this time, well past 11:30.

.....Tim

Recent Observations by Club Members



Cherry Springs Star Party

6/22 -06/26

Observation Report

By Tim Kamel

I attended the 2006 CSSP but almost did not go. I had been watching the weather forecast for the area for a week before going and it looked pretty bad. Predictions were for cloudy or partly cloudy skies for the duration of the Star Party with potential for thunderstorms. However, I decided to go anyway. I had never been to a star party before, had paid my fee and really did not want to wait for another one. I convinced myself that partly cloudy skies meant that there would be partly clear sections that I could view through and, anyway, it could not possibly be bad for 4 days in a row. Here is how it broke out.

I got there Thursday at about 4 PM and the place was packed. 359 registrants had already arrived (more came Friday and Saturday) and some had come as early as Tuesday. They took all the spaces that were near the electrical outlets. When I got there, I found Jeremy, who was camped with the Forum he belongs to, Our Dark Skies, and joined them. It was partly cloudy, and I set up my tent and got organized. Around 6:00 PM, someone drove around and advised that a thunderstorm was on its way and the front would hit us in 15 minutes. I made sure my tent was anchored as best as it could be and I sat in my van, reading a book. An hour later it hit. High winds and rain but no one had any damage that we heard about. However, my tent got wet. I ended up sleeping in my van that night and was one of the few people that saw part of the sky clear. Around midnight, about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the sky from the south to the west and almost to the zenith opened up. I got out of the van and grabbed my binoculars and started checking out Jupiter while deciding if I should start waking other people up. It was quite dark. Unfortunately, the opening closed up and was gone within 5-10 minutes. I went back to bed and had a miserable night's sleep on the hard floor in my van.

Friday started off partly cloudy and I got my tent dried out. I water proofed the seams again. The degree of cloud cover varied during the day and I set up a small scope to look at the sun but there were no sunspots and the sun was obscured a good part of the time. It got thicker at sunset till about 10:30 PM or so, then there were gaps in the clouds and some stars could be seen. We did some viewing with binoculars. Jeremy brought out his 6" f/15 refractor and we checked out Jupiter and had some pretty good views. This all ended at about Midnight when it became completely clouded over. I went to bed in the tent and this time remembered to use my pad. I had another miserable night's sleep because the periodic rain showers kept waking me. However, the tent stayed dry.

Saturday started off incredibly foggy till about 11 AM. We then had partly cloudy skies that improved as the day went on to the point where $\frac{1}{2}$ to $\frac{2}{3}$ of the sky was blue. I set up the sun scope again and again there was not much to see and I packed it up a short time later. After having dinner, I attended one of the presentations and also sat in on the raffle drawing but did not win anything. This all ended at about 9:30 and I walked back to my camp and looked at the sky and it had gotten worse, less than a third clear. Since this was the best we had had I decided to set up a scope but since I was expecting it deteriorate, I decided on using the 5" Mak instead of the 8" reflector because it would be quicker to pack away if the weather changed.

Well, the weather did change, but for the better. As time went on, the clouds mostly went away and by 1:00 AM all that was left were a big one sitting to the NE near the horizon and some tiny ones that I only noticed when they obstructed my telescope view for a few seconds. The consensus was that transparency and seeing were less than ideal. It was, however, incredibly dark. There were no light domes to be seen and it was as dark at the horizon as it was at the zenith. My guess was at least 6.0 VLM. The Milky Way was easily seen and fairly bright. Lyra and Corona Borealis were much brighter than when I had seen them at Broad Creek a month ago. I also see about 10 meteors during the night, mostly very faint but a remarkable number since most nights back home I do not see any.

I started off with Jupiter while waiting for Polaris to show from behind the clouds so that I could do my alignment. The four moons were visible plus a background star, with a similar magnitude as the moons, which was perfectly lined up with the moons so that Jupiter looked like it had 5 moons.

We then had a public announcement that we were to have an iridium flare within a minute to the NW. It happened on schedule and was brighter than Jupiter, lasting about 30 seconds in total.

By 11:00 PM, I was able to do my alignment and also adjusted the settings on my Autostar to reflect that I am almost 3 degrees further north. I had brought along a Messier list that I had printed off of my new Deep Sky Planner software and basically started working down the list, digressing when those near me mentioned a really interesting subject. Most of my observations for the rest of the night were using a no-name 32 mm super plossl, which gave a magnification of 60x and an exit pupil of 2.1 mm. On occasion, I used higher or lower power, depending on what I was looking at.



M 4 – GC – Big and bright and pretty. Spent some time on this one at various powers.

M 104 – Sombrero Galaxy. I saw it as a patch and could not see a break in the disk.

M 95 & M 96 – Too low and behind the line of trees.

M 97 – Owl Nebula. Could not see it, at magnitude 11.2.

M 65 & M 66 – GX - I could see only one but not sure which one. Both are roughly the same magnitude and size. Strange that only was visible.

M 105 – Too low and behind the trees.

M 61 – GX - Could not see it, at magnitude 9.7.

M 81 and M 82 – Bodes Galaxies. Saw them both. Fairly bright and big.

M 49 – GX – Fairly dim but visible, I guess due to its small size.

M 84 & M 86 – GX – Close to each other and quite dim at 9.3 and 9.2 respectively. Quite small.

M 87 – GX – Dim at magnitude 8.7 and small.

M 98 – GX – Could not find it. Magnitude 10.1

M 99 – Pinwheel Galaxy. Very, very dim at 9.8. Not really sure I saw it, just a smudge.

At this point, I take a break. I need a snack and a drink and I need to assess what I am doing. I am not sure what time it is but I am guessing around 1:00 or possibly 1:30 AM. I am noticing a pattern. I am having a heck of a time with finding the

galaxies on the Messier list, even with using the spiral search feature that my scope has. I recall that I had seen some of these galaxies in previous sessions, in skies that were not so dark. I now remember that I am using my 5" Mak instead of my 8" Newtonian that I normally use when looking at Messier objects. I am using the wrong scope. I am gathering less than 40% of what I could do with my reflector and my fields of view are narrow. I now need to make a decision. Should I pack away the Mak and set up the 8"? I decide that it is late and I do not want to lose the half hour or so in packing away a scope, setting up another one and doing an alignment and setting up my new coordinates. I am tired from lack of sleep and doubt I will make it much longer. I continue but I change my strategy. I will skip most of the galaxies and any objects dimmer than 9.0:

M 53 – OC – a little dim but a nice cluster.

M 40 – DS – Yup, a double star, and dim at that.

I notice that Sagittarius is fairly high, even though we are 3 degrees further north than Bel Air. It is also sitting in very dark skies. I start looking at some subjects there, having not seen any of these in the past.

I use different eyepieces here and spend some times on these objects.

M 8 – Lagoon Nebula – Barely visible, vague, more like a bubble superimposed on the stars, but very large. I see it better if I move the scope slightly.

M 21 – OC – A beautiful and bright open cluster next to the Lagoon Nebula. Easily seen.

M 20 – Trifid Nebula – Fairly large and bright. Looks like a flower with barely discernible lanes between the lobes. I see a double star in the middle.

M22 – GC – a bright galactic cluster and also big.

M24 – Nothing here to be seen.

I go back to working my Messier list.

M3 – GC – a very nice galactic cluster. Bright and big.

M 94 – GX – too dim, not sure I see it, even though it is rated at magnitude 8.2

M 63 – Sunflower Galaxy – too dim to see, rated at Magnitude 8.6

M 51 – Whirlpool Galaxy – Magnitude 8.4 and I can see the two nuclei, fairly dim. No other details.

M 5 – GC – another nice galactic cluster, compact and bright.

M 80 – GC – smaller galactic cluster, dim, located between two brighter stars.

M 107 – GC – another smaller one, as dim as M 80.

M 13 – Hercules Cluster – bright, big and simply grand. I spent some time with this one.

M 6, M 7 and M 23 are below the tree line and I miss these bright open clusters.

M 16 – Eagle Nebula – Big and bright.

It is now well after 3:00 AM and I am beat. I close out with:

M 31 – Andromeda Galaxy – It is easily naked eye visible. In the scope, it is huge. I also get to see M 32 for the first time. Pretty tiny, at least the part that I could see. No luck seeing M 110.

M 33 – Triangulum Galaxy – Could not see it, naked eye or in the scope. I have seen it in my 8” in my backyard. Tonight, I could not find it.

Double Cluster – Simply gorgeous.

It is 3:30 AM and most of the people around me have gone to bed. Jeremy is still up, had switched to visual after finishing up his photo shoots. The dew, which had started about 2:00 AM or so was all over my eyepieces and I was controlling it with a hairdryer. The dew shield protects the scope but there is moisture on the tube itself. I pack up and go to bed. What a grand night. I sleep better than the previous nights and get 5 hours of sleep.

Sunday morning is again very foggy. People are milling around and talking about the prior night.

Forecast for the day is 1 or 2 inches of rain per hour with chances of flash floods. We are at the top of a mountain and would not see flash flooding but I am worried about the road home. I decide to quit while I am ahead and head for home. I have a lot of company as many leave before I do. As I leave I see others also packing up.

The facility itself is pretty interesting. It is intended for amateur astronomers and one cannot camp here unless they are going to observe. Fee for the night of camping is \$4.00. There are toilet facilities. There is running water, in the form of faucets, on the grounds. There are several concrete pads to set scopes up. There are also power outlets at various locations on the site. For the event, additional portable potties were provided and these were cleaned daily. There were no shower facilities but hot showers were available at another campsite 16 miles to the south. Another facility 10 miles to the NW also had showers but access included several miles of unpaved road. The site is fairly flat but is surrounded by trees. I camped close to the western edge and had a great view to the east. Unfortunately, most of the objects on my list were to the west and south. Sites on the east end of park went quickly, being close to the food, pavilion and vendor tent. Food was provided by a vendor who provided a “chuck wagon” and also a tent and operated continuously from Thursday dinnertime till after breakfast on Sunday. Fare was fairly simple and limited in variety but was pretty good and was hot. Various snacks and hot and cold soft drinks were also available. The organizers had several speakers through out the session and I attended two of them and missed a third that I wanted to see.

Bottom line, I enjoyed the night of viewing immensely. I was able to view for a long time and the darkness was incredible. I have not yet decided if the two days of rain, the boredom, the 5-hours of travel each way and leaving early on Sunday justified the trip. But I keep thinking about the great views.

.....Tim

The Place: Abingdon Library, July 13th

The Scope: Orion SkyView Pro 120mm Refractor

For the past few months, I had wanted to set up my new refractor in the field behind the Abingdon Library on Tollgate Road. During the winter, the field seemed to be very dark, being away from street lights, and offering a clear view of the southern and eastern skies. However, this week was not the time to be there. The recent thunderstorms had left a high degree of humidity in the air, as well as a low haze

or mist. The haze also reflected the glare from the Bel Air and Aberdeen areas.

However, there were some exceptional views available: The double stars Mizar, Alcor, Vega and Albireo. Jupiter was very bright in the southwest, and the Orion refractor showed good detail on the bands and a distinct spot in the north polar area. For this reason, the Orion SkyView's optics get a high grade from me. The dew cap provided with the scope did its job in keeping moisture off the object lens. The scope comes with a 120mm (4.7") object lens with a 1000mm focal length. It also ships with two Sirius Plossl eyepieces – a 25mm wide-angle and a 10mm standard.

One warning: Installing or removing the mount from the tripod can be difficult if the counterweights are still attached. I would also recommend purchasing the carrying case, for an extra \$99.95.

Because of the haze and humidity however, the library site did not prove as valuable as I thought it would be. Perhaps on a crisp autumn night, seeing will be different.

(I'd also like to thank Grace Wyatt and Tim Kamel for their patience during a rather muggy evening.)

.....Roy

Test Your Knowledge

Check out this website:

http://www.windows.ucar.edu/tour/link=/games/order_planets_intro.html

It is a neat little game to test your knowledge of the planets.

HCAS Outreach Programs

Bel Air Library

Wednesday, July 12th at 7pm Indoor program only.

Fallston Library

Monday, Sept. 18th, Indoor program / outdoor possible

Abingdon Library

Monday, October 23rd, Indoor program and outdoor program

Girl Scouts at open house

Saturday, Oct. 28th for outdoor observing and at the observatory at 7pm for talk.

For further information, contact Tom Rusek at rusek54@yahoo.com

New Members In July

Please welcome the following new members that recently joined our Society:

Garrett Krol and family, from Phoenix, MD
Thomas Coffeen, from Parkton, MD
Roy J. Meyers III, from Bel Air, MD
Mike Talbard, from Bel Air, MD
Beverly & Sarah Abremski from Joppa, MD

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