

And the winner is - - First Light! Yes, folks, we FINALLY have a title for the newsletter! Thanks to ratz for contributing this suggestion for the title.

FIRST EVER EAST-CENTRAL #SCIASTRO STAR PARTY!

saber101 gets the credit for organizing this one. We'd like to invite as many #sciastro-ites as possible to the Twin Lakes Star Party, held at the Land Between The Lakes Recreation Area near Golden Pond, KY. The dates are September 30 - October 4. Early arrival and free observing on your own is on Tuesday - Thursday. The formal star party begins Friday. Registration is \$16 per person, or \$22 per family, and includes camping. There is primitive camping on site, with power available for scopes, and potties. There is a nice campground five miles south of the observing field, with showers, etc. The Golden Pond Visitors Center features an 82-seat planetarium, and an on-site observatory with a 4.5" refractor piggybacked on a 12.5" reflector and a 17.5" Dob. For more information, contact Ross Workman at (502) 797-8959. Previous attendees report getting mag 16.8 objects thru a 16". The Land Between the Lakes Recreation area is right off I-24, about halfway between Nashville and Paducah. The West Kentucky Amateur Astronomers, who are putting on the star party, have graciously offered to host us, so if you've got these dates free, think about joining us at the Twin Lakes Star Party!

ON MERIDIAN

THE (RUMM)AGE OF AQUARIUS

By saber101

So you've exhausted all your targets in the Scorpion/Archer Metro-area. You've completed your planetary work in Capricorn (this year's Gas-Giant Rest Stop), and it'll be an hour or so before Saturn clears the treeline and atmospheric muck. You may be overdue to spend that hour digging around in the dimly-lit, random section of space that's rising off your southeastern horizon: Aquarius.

Holding the 11th position along the ecliptic, this grouping of stars - somehow representing a man pouring water from a jar - usually affords little interest to naked-eye observers. But our celestial Waterbearer reveals many treasures to those armed with a telescope or binoculars.

The brightest non-stellar object in Aquarius, M2, is one of the showpiece globulars of the early autumn sky. Estimated to lie 37,000 light years away, this swarm contains no fewer than 100,000 stars. M2 shines at magnitude 6.5 and can be found 5 degrees north and a little east of Sadalsuud (Beta Aquarii).

Just over the northern border of Capricorn you can nail two of the "homestretch" Messier Marathon objects: M72 and M73. Messier's 72nd entry is the faintest globular listed in his catalogue. At 9th magnitude, this 60,000 light years distant cluster appears as a "fuzzy star" in 7x binoculars. Slewing a degree and a half east will net you M73, a close asterism of four faint stars that The Chuckster saw fit to catalogue as an open cluster.

Two of the most popular planetary nebulae in the night sky also reside within the boundaries of Aquarius. About 5 degrees northeast of M73 lies the Saturn Nebula (NGC 7009). Along with its unique greenish tint, this 8th magnitude nebula is also famous for having one of the highest surface brightnesses of any planetary. The Helix Nebula (NGC 7293) hangs out at a neighborly distance of only 450 light years, making it the closest planetary to Earth. Displacing nearly a quarter-degree of space, this delicate celestial smoke-ring appears as a round, hazy

patch of gray light. Some of the best views of this low-surface brightness object are seen through 10-20x binoculars. A tough manual find, the Helix can be found between Fomalhaut and Iota Aquarii.

Throw in a few decent double-stars and a visiting planet now and then, and Aquarius becomes a very worthy constellation to explore (when you can tear yourself away from its flashier counterparts).

By the way, the highly-touted "Age of Aquarius" will occur when the vernal equinox moves from its current position in Pisces into Aquarius. This movement is caused by Earth's precessional motion. But don't look for worldwide peace and understanding too soon - this momentous event is still about 800 years away....

Vital Statistics:

Aquarius (uh qwayr' ee us)

Meaning: The Waterbearer

Abbreviation: AQR

Possessive: Aquarii (uh qwayr' ee eye)

Bordering constellations: Aquila, Capricornus, Cetus, Delphinus, Equuleus, Pegasus, Pisces, Pisces Austrinus, Sculptor

Midnight culmination: August 25

Rank in size: 10th (979.85 square degrees)

Visibility: completely visible from latitudes +65 to -87; portions visible worldwide.

Meteor showers: Eta Aquarids (May 3); S Delta Aquarids (July 29); Southern Iota Aquarids (August 5); Northern Iota Aquarids (September 20); Kappa Aquarids (September 21)

Messier objects: M2, M72, M73

Must-see NGCs: 7009 (Saturn Nebula), 7293 (Helix Nebula)

Double-Vision: Zeta (4.3 + 4.5 @ 1.8"); 94 (5.3 + 7.3 @ 12"); 41 (5.7 + 7.2 @ 5")

Variables: R Aquarii (t.8 - 12.4 mag./period: 387 days); S Aquarii (7.6 - 15.0 mag./period: 279 days)

A LETTER FROM CAROLYN SHOEMAKER

August 4, 1997

Dear Friends, Old and New, All Special People,

My children and I want to thank you for all your outpouring of love and support since Gene's death. To know Gene was loved, liked, admired, and respected by so many people has helped to sustain us in this very difficult time. Gene would have been so pleased to know you cared. The concern people have shown for me has been comforting and I am happy to report that I am recovering quite well and hope to be returned to Flagstaff soon. I was fortunate to have all my children (including my in-law children) and two Australian friends arrive very promptly in Alice Springs. New friends in Alice Springs opened their doors to all of them and then to me when I left the hospital. Everyone has been very helpful in taking care of the necessary details that needed to be addressed after the accident and this has allowed me to focus on my own recovery. My children and I have also had time to reflect on our loss together and to think about it in the perspective Gene would have wished.

Gene and I were traveling on the Tanami Track in Northern Territory close to the Western Australia border when the no-fault accident occurred. We were to meet Dan Milton in a few days to helpfield check the geology and mapping of Goat Paddock, an impact structure. The accident occurred on one of the few bends in the road where you could not see another vehicle coming. It was an unlikely place considering all the places we have traveled, yet it was a blind curve on a very rough track. There is no question that Gene died immediately in the vehicle on impact. It was my good fortune that it happened where it did, because help was quick to come from the gold mines in the area. In four hours time the Royal Flying Doctors had transported me back to the emergency ward in Alice Springs. I owe a special thank you to everyone who helped to save my life and the superb care I received at the hospital. It is remarkable I survived at all considering that mostly what was left of our vehicle was the bed of the truck.

Although the death of Gene is still a shock and a great loss to us all, Gene would have felt it was a good way to go. He was out doing something he loved away from all the pressures of the world, in a country he loved, with the woman who has been his life partner for 46 years, and he died quickly. We both talked about how, if our lives were to end, we had lived very fulfilling lives. We had wonderful children and a close knit family. Our scientific careers have been extremely rewarding. We were blessed with having numerous friends in our lifetime. And, most of all, we had a marriage in which our love for each other knew no boundaries.

Gene said a few years ago he would never be able to complete the many projects he had going. He said it would be up to others to pick up where he left off. He never felt he had all the answers, but he had complete faith that there were others who were capable to come along and follow in his footsteps. Gene would have said, "Don't grieve for me. Get on with life and work at the things that make you happy!" We hope you all will be inspired to do that.

Love,

Carolyn

BYTES AND PIECES

Rob_in_NJ, NebM42, UnderMutt, and ed_turco all went to Stellafane this past week. We hope to get reports and pics from some of them soon! Rob reports that there was only one night (Thursday) that was clear enough for observing.

Sealth and longship went to the Table Mountain Star Party held last week also; we hope to get more details on this one, too (hint, hint). Several hundred folks were in attendance and it sounds like the skies were clear, too!

Portia went over to the Cape for the launch of STS-85 last Thursday, Aug. 7. The shuttle Discovery went off exactly as scheduled at 10:41 a.m. EDT. Weather conditions were hazy, though, and Portia's pics are still in the camera. If she has any decent shots, however, she promises that she'll send 'em along for the next issue.

ATTENTION, #sciastro-ites! The next Shuttle launch is tentatively scheduled for September 18, at 1:39 a.m. Several people on the channel have expressed an interest in coming down for this launch. If you are interested, let Portia know

so that she can arrange for launch passes. Since this is a night launch, passes go fast, so please give her plenty of time to make the arrangements!

This beautiful painting is another water color by our own algenib. It is entitled "MoonScape". Thank you so much, algenib, for this beautiful edition to the newsletter.