

Well, finally! Your editor has gotten around to getting this newsletter done, and there's been a lot of news. In addition to February's solar eclipse, the star party season has begun in earnest, at least here in the southeast. With the Winter Star Party in January, the Highlands Star Party in February, and the Peach State Star Gaze scheduled for the end of March, plus submissions of astrophotos by several of our members, the news is pouring in!

#### WINTER STAR PARTY

The 14th annual Winter Star Party was held on West Summerland Key on January 26th - February 1, 1998. In attendance were no fewer than 12 sciastro-ites, including FireCapt, JoeyFLA, CorHydrae, DaveC, rickstr, Portia, AstroCady, Hogo, and erg; Sealth and Ken\_MI also made it down from Seattle and Saginaw, respectively. Bigeye, who more often frequents #atm, but also joins us on #sciastro from time to time, was also there. What a crowd! Unfortunately we were unable to get the whole crew together at one time for a group shot, but we tried to get pix of as many folks as possible. We also met johnv and Buckshot, two new #sciastro members from Pensacola and the St. Louis area, respectively.

Observing conditions this year for WSP were pretty bad news, thanks to El Nino. Monday night was a complete washout and Tuesday night, though clear part of the time, wasn't a whole lot better. Wednesday wound up being the first good night of the week and several folks (including Portia) were up until nearly dawn. The views thru a 15" and a 17.5" scope on the beach of Eta Carinae were proclaimed the best ever. Omega Centauri, well up in the sky by 3:00 was equally spectacular, as were the views of the Southern Cross. Thursday night was lousy until about 3:00 a.m. local time, when suddenly, after looking crappy all night, the skies miraculously cleared. Views of southern deep-sky objects were fabulous. The best night of the week was the last one - Saturday - which made it hard for people to take advantage of it, and still get packed up and off the grounds by 10:00 a.m. Hopefully, we'll have better luck with the weather next year.

Portia and AstroCady took delivery on their new 18" f/4.5 StarMaster at WSP, and more or less spent the week fighting over the eyepiece. Fortunately, no blood was shed... :) Portia stacked two Barlows with an 8.8mm UltraWide Meade, onto the 18", which yielded 923x and stared at Saturn; although fairly low on the horizon, the image was incredible. Another favorite thing to do was to see how many stars we could count in the Trapezium with the 18 - Sealth and Portia finally gave up after finding 13 at 231x. Nothing like a little aperture to give your observing a whole new direction. In addition, rickstr brought a 22" f/4.1 that attracted crowds all week. With JoeyFLA's 12.5", FireCapt's 13.1", and DaveC's 12", we had plenty of glass on the field! For more Winter Star Party photos, go to Sealth's website at <http://homel.gte.net/buettemr/wsp/> or AstroCady's and Portia's website at <http://icstars.com/carrolls> and head for the star party page.

#### HIGHLANDS STAR GAZE

The 2nd Annual Highlands Star Gaze was held on February 26 - March 1 at the 9 Mile Grade Campground 17 miles west of Okeechobee, FL. This star party is organized by lindy, among others and is fast becoming THE star party of the spring, down here in FL at least. AlexFLA, lindy, JoeyFLA, Hogo, Portia and AstroCady were in attendance. Some of us got there Wednesday night, and enjoyed great views. Thursday's weather during the eclipse was perfect! Several folks set up for solar observing and photography; here are a couple of Portia's shots of the partial eclipse as seen from Florida. She used both optical Mylar and a

Type II Thousand Oaks filter, Kodak Gold 100, a 200mm lens working at f/8 with a 2x teleconverter, and an exposure time of 1/250th sec. Thursday night was also good, and so was Friday, at least until about 2:00 a.m. Saturday night, however, was another story. With weather reports calling for tornado watches, possible 70mph winds and 2" hail, the field was flooded with white light as people frantically packed up their equipment. As it turned out, the rain didn't hit us until early morning, and we never did get the 70mph winds or 2" hail; I don't think anybody was real disappointed over missing that stuff. We could see spectacular displays of lightning to the east; at least one diehard observer got a lightning blast in the eyeball thru several inches of aperture. For those of you who haven't had this experience - don't bother.

#### BYTES AND PIECES

SABER WINS THE ASTRO-LOTTERY! The HON Corporation of Iowa has donated \$25,000 to Saber and the Illowa Boy Scout Council to build an on-site observatory - complete with a CG14 loaded for bear - at the Loud Thunder Forest Preserve outside of Illinois City, Illinois. Saber has been active in the Scouts' Astronomy Merit Badge Program for several years. His observatory proposal was approved on March 2nd with a targeted completion date of July 1998. This project marks the first private, permanent observatory in the country to be specifically used for the Scouts' astronomy education. Saber promises that he will even allow the Scouts to look through the scope occasionally...

#sciastro welcomes new members at all times; two that were hooked in at the Winter Star Party are johnv and Buckshot. johnv lives in the Pensacola area and has an 18" f/4.5 StarMaster. He and his 9-year-old son Johnny are both avid observers. Buckshot is a long-time amateur from the St. Louis area; in addition to having a 12" scope, he has been very active in the St. Louis club for many years.

#sciastro brochures are now available. If you would like some to distribute at your club meetings or other functions, e-mail the editor at [scarroll2@pipeline.com](mailto:scarroll2@pipeline.com). This brochure gives a description of the channel and its mission, plus some basic instructions. Several were distributed at WSP, and more at the Highlands Star Party.

A little bird told this editor that at least two #sciastro-ites have a severe case of aperture fever and are now in the process of a) figuring out how to talk their wives into the purchase, and b) trying to see if they can cram a big light bucket into their current vehicles along with all the rest of their stuff. Guys - take it from me - b) is easy. a) All I've got to say on this one is good luck! P.S. And when your wife says "but we could use that money to re-decorate the kitchen", do NOT come back with "but you don't ever cook anyway!"

#### CRAWLING THE WEB

Want a piece of Mars? Get your hunk of property NOW on the Red Planet at <http://www.martianconsulate.com/> Well, it's good for laughs, anyway...:)

For some great CCD images of the moon, take a look at <http://www.astrosurf.com/moon/> Very nice!

For our Spanish-speaking members, there is an electronic newsletter for astronomers, in Spanish, at <http://www.astrored.org/infoastro> This newsletter is put together by #sciastro-ite rvr, from the Canary Islands.

Interested in propulsion issues? Think warp speed is possible? Take a look at <http://www.lerc.nasa.gov/www/PAO/warp.htm> This NASA website discusses current and future technology in rocket propulsion and even has a couple of neat Star Trek wav files.

The Lunar Prospector site is superb! Check it out at <http://lunar.arc.nasa.gov> One page has a JAVA applet that actually tracks the satellite! Thanks to Saber and a number of others for this one!

This website is fast becoming one of this editor's favorites. It is a virtual observatory that generates images of the sky at wavelengths from radio to gamma-ray radiation. The DSS is included in the database and the site has a JAVA applet that aids in location of specific objects. You can find it at <http://skyview.gsfc.nasa.gov/skyview.html>

And here's another goody to add to your arsenal - the Uppsala University History of Astronomy website. It has several pictures of the old scopes that were in use during the observatory's long history. It was here that most of the work on the New General Catalogue was done, with a 9" refractor. This refractor is still in use - as a guidescope on the observatory's Schmidt camera. You can find the site at <http://www.astro.uu.se/history>

Portia was notified, toward the end of the Winter Star Party, that her father had passed away. His loss was sudden and unexpected. She would like to thank all of those of you who sent cards and kind words; the support has been much appreciated.