METEOR


METEOR is the official publication of both the Greenbelt and Goddard Astronomy Clubs and is distributed monthly as a privilege of membership in one or both of these organizations. Articles and other contributions are welcome. Membership in the Greenbelt Astronomy Club is open to all, but membership in the Goddard club is only open to NASA civil servants and contractors. The Greenbelt club meets on the last non-holiday Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm EST at the Owens Science Center. The Goddard Club meets on the second Tuesday of the month at the Goddard Space Flight Center at noon in Bldg.#21 Rm. #183. The address of the Editor is: 12A Parkway Road, Greenbelt, Maryland 20770

Goddard Astronomy Club

The Goddard Astronomy Club held its monthly meeting on Tuesday, December 14th in the Bldg. #21 Rm. #183 conference room at noon. President, Don Haxton talked about the new nova in Cassiopeia and how to locate it. Bob Dutilly mentioned that the Astronomical League has made some bylaw changes, which he passed around for members to read. Armen Caroglanian showed a video of the Lunar Eclipse taken with his 12 inch. The next meeting will not be held as usual, but will be held jointly with the Greenbelt Astronomy Club at the Owens Science Center on January 27th at 7:30 pm EST. THERE WILL BE NO REGULAR MEETING IN JANUARY. A planetarium show will be given, as well as a talk on planetarium operation. Please attend. Work on the new club observatory was halted for the holiday, and hopefully will resume sometime in the near future.

Greenbelt Astronomy Club

The December meeting of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club was not held at the Owens Science Center because they were closed due to the holidays, but was held at the Greenbelt Police Station instead December 30th at 7:30 pm EST. Appologies to those that weren't notified of the change in meeting place. We will try to be more prompt about notification in the future.

Doug Love gave a nice talk on the Star of Bethlehem. Mention of Nova Cass. was made and charts shown and distributed. Nominations were cancelled due to the low attendance. They will be held at the next meeting at Owens Science Center on January 27th at 7:30 pm EST. Astronomy Day and May's Solar Eclipse was mentioned.

Total Eclipse Star Party

Several members of the Greenbelt Club meet at the Northway Fields for the last Total Lunar Eclipse. Members Sue Basset and Larry Woods brought telescopes. Sue brought her 3.5 inch Questar and Larry his 4 inch Meade SCT for members to look at the eclipse with. Others brought their binoculars to view this event, which was not as dark as the one last December. During totality a red color was seen on the side of the Moon deepest in the Earth's Umbra. I would rate it as an L=2 using the Danjon scale. This will be the last Total Lunar Eclipse for a couple years, but there is a nice partial (22%) in May next year. This will be two weeks after the Annual Solar Eclipse on May 7th, which is 80% partial here.
Geminid Meteor Shower

There have been many reports of Geminid meteors seen by both clubs. The peak seemed to occur on the early evening of the 13th of December. As usual, the Geminids showed more bright meteors than the Perseids on average. Several minus magnitude Geminids were seen. I saw one -3 magnitude, two -2 magnitude, and a couple -1 magnitude in three hours of observation. Many were 1st magn. However, unlike the Perseids, very few Geminids left a train.

Don Haxton watched the shower from the warmth of his greenhouse. He said that he saw several very nice ones late Sunday night, December 12th. Armen Caroglanian was out both Sunday and Monday night, the 12th and 13th, and saw more on the night of the 13th than the 12th, in agreement with IMO predictions. There will not be another good annual shower with the dark of the Moon until the Eta Aquarids in early May.

Bright Nova in Cassiopeia

A Japanese amateur astronomer named Kazuyoshi Kanatsu of Matsue, Shimane Japan, has discovered a new galactic nova in the constellation Cassiopeia. He caught the star on the rise with a photograph taken on T-Max 400 film December 7th. The nova is located in the same binocular field as the supergiant star Rho Cassiopeia, which is an irregular variable star near maximum (4.5 mag.) most of the time. The coordinates of the nova are RA 23h 41.8m DEC+57d 31' (epoch 2000). According to the AAVSO Alert Notice 179, American Peter Collins discovered it independently on December 13th when it was 6th magnitude.

The AAVSO chart for Z Cas, with the nova plotted on it is attached on the following page. A week before Christmas, Nova Cass. 1993 peaked at 5.3 magnitude and was visible to the naked-eye. Last seen the nova was 6.7 magn. A drop to 7.4 magn. from 6.8 magn. followed by a recovery to 6.7 occurred Dec. 29th-31st. It may be an eclipsing binary, but more data is needed to determine this. It may still be an easy object to see in binoculars. But according to astronomer Brian Skiff, of the Lowell Observatory in Flagstaff, Arizona, the precursor star was 18th magnitude on the Blue POSS Sky Survey plate. So, it may soon drop like a rock because of this large amplitude. However, its hard to say, as novae are so different sometimes; not enough is known to be certain.

Great Observer Dies

It is with sadness that the news of the death of Walter "Scotty" Houston has come to us. He was a great observer and was known as the "Dean of Deep-Sky Observers". Those who were privileged to talk or observe with him are richer because of it. He was also a member of the AAVSO and made over 12,000 variable star estimates for that organization. He was also interested in meteors. He told me about one Fireball he saw years ago that made a sonic boom and lit up the sky like daylight!

At last years' Stellafane Goddard member Tom Bryant had a nice long chat with him and noted observer Steve O'Meara about the finer aspects of observing. It was then I saw him when he was talking to me about the Perseids. He also talked to Lynne Gilliland, and said he didn't recognize her because she wore a different dress. Funny, as she was not wearing a dress then or now. Then being the Winter Star Party last year where Lynne was very fortunate to have a long talk with Scotty. He was a good observer, and humor was an important part of his life. But he could be very serious when discussing astronomy and observing. He wrote the column "Deep Sky Wonders" for Sky and Telescope for forty seven years. He was 81 years old.