METEOR


METEOR is the official publication of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club and is distributed monthly as a privilege of membership. Articles and other contributions are welcome. Membership in the Greenbelt Astronomy Club is open to anyone interested in astronomy. The club meets on the last non-holiday Thursday of the month at 7:30 pm EDT at the Owens Science Center. The address of the Editor is: G.W. Gliba, 58-D Crescent Road, Greenbelt, Maryland 20770.

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Greenbelt Astronomy Club

The monthly meeting of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club was held on May 23rd because of the Memorial Day holiday. The club talked about having a list of the members available that has phone numbers. Eileen has the master membership list that can be obtained by sending her an SASE. Estimates for the cost of the newly proposed Greenbelt Public Observatory are high. Plans to reduce costs will be looked into. The project is now on hold. The 4-H group is planning a camp-out and requests help with a tour of the night sky on Thursday, June 13th at 9:00 pm. If you can help call Sandra Hampton (301) 627-5815 in Upper Marlboro, Md.

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The Mason-Dixon Star Party

The seventh annual Mason-Dixon Star Party is scheduled for the weekend of June 14th-16th at York County Park, Pennsylvania. If you haven't sent in your reservations, you can still pay at the gate. A fee of $15 per person includes camping and all scheduled activities. Activities include talks on Friday evening and on Saturday afternoon and evening. An open swap table will take place on Saturday during the morning and afternoon. Food will be provided by a catering service, or you can cook your own on a grill. No open fires are allowed.

Saturday night is the peak of the June Lyrid Meteor Shower, a minor shower which seem to vary in activity from year to year. If they are active then, about five meteors per hour may be seen, in addition to sporadic meteors. These are not really dark skies, but 6.0 and fainter stars have been seen on good nights, allowing some fairly good deep-sky observation. Comets Hale-Bopp and Kopff will be well placed for viewing in the southern evening sky. They may both be visible in binoculars, or in a small telescope.

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Northway Fields Star Party

The second of our monthly seasonal star parties went well, but attendance was lower than expected. However, several people showed up to observe Venus and a number of nice double stars with telescope provided by members. Al Havrilla
came with Bill Hathaway and set-up his 4-inch Meade SCT, Charlie Goldsmith his 8-inch Celestron Ultima SCT, Lynne Gilliland the 5.5-inch SNT, and George Gliba a 4-inch f9 refractor. Several people also had binoculars.

Club president Doug Love was there on his bicycle, but his 6-inch telescope is down. He went to Nick Iascone's home to get the position of 1996 JAL, a newly discovered asteroid that was to pass only 0.00303 AU from the center of the Earth on May 19.690 UT, off the Internet. He returned on his bicycle with the ephemesis, but a search for the 11th magnitude object was unsuccessful.

The planet Venus showed a nice crescent phase with the 4-inch f9 refractor. Several nice double stars were seen, including Castor, Izar, Delta Herculis, and Alpha Herculis. The fog rolled in later making it harder to see. It was a good star party anyway. The next Northway Fields star party will be on June 22nd.

**A Few Summer Double Stars - by G.W. Gliba**

There are many fine double stars that can be split with a medium size telescope in the early Summer evening sky. The star Zeta Bootis is a difficult one that consists of two A-type stars with one arcsecond separation, that are 4.5 and 4.6 magnitude. Don't wait too long to split this pair as they are closing fast. By the year 2010 they will be only .6 arcseconds apart as the stars will be near periastron. This binary pair is gonna take a good night and at least a 4-inch telescope to split. It shouldn't be too hard with a larger scope of good optical quality, if you have good seeing.

Much easier and more colorful is the nice pair Epsilon Bootis, also known as Izar. It consists of a K0 and A2 type stars that are 2.5 and 4.9 magnitude respectively, and are 2.8 arcseconds separation. The colors are beautiful in a 4-inch f9 refractor with a Jaegers objective.

Over in Hercules are some fine double stars. My favorite is Alpha Herculis. It consists of a M5 giant and G5 sun that are 4.6 arcseconds separation. The primary is a semi-regular variable star that varies from 3.0 to 4.0 magnitude, while the secondary star is 5.4 magnitude. A good 2.4-inch glass will split the pair nicely, but a 3-inch or larger scope would be better. My 4-inch refractor shows the pair easily. The variability of Alpha Herculis was discovered by the famous astronomer Sir William Herschel in England over two hundred years ago.

Another nice double in Hercules is Kappa Herculis, which consists of a G8 and K1 star with 27.5 arcseconds separation, that are 5.0 and 6.3 magnitudes. This is a nice low power double sun located near the head of Serpens Caput.

A nice double star of historic interest is the pair 61 Cygni located a few degrees north of Epsilon Cygni, the most eastern star in the Northern Cross. In 1838, German astronomer Frederick W. Bessel, became the first person to measure the distance to another star using stellar parallax. The distance to 61 Cygni is about 10 light years. The components consists of a K5 and K7 star separated by 29.7 arcseconds, of 5.2 and 6.0 magnitudes respectively, which are easy to split in a small telescope with low power.

No summer evening splitting double stars in Cygnus can be complete unless Beta Cygni is looked at. Also known as Albiero, this is probably the most colorful double star in the Summer sky. It consists of a K3 and B8 star, that are 3.1 and 5.1 magnitudes in brightness, with only 34.5 arcseconds separation. The pair have a beautiful color contrast in a low power field. The view of Albiero in a rich Milky Way star field makes it a favorite of many observers.
Another Cometary X-ray Detection

According to IAUC 6404, K. Dennerl, J. Englhauser, and J. Trümper, of the Max-Planck-Institut für Extraterrestrische Physik in Germany, found x-rays in comet C/1990 N1 (TSUCHIYA-KIUCHI) with the ROSAT satellite data taken during the all-sky survey on November 18th and 20th 1990. The optical luminosity of C/1990 N1, however, was lower by a factor of 15 than that of C/1996 B2. This second x-ray detection of a comet indicates that x-ray emission is a class property of such objects. Perhaps most comets are x-ray objects, which at present is hard to explain with the currently accepted theories.

Some Dates to Remember

June 14-15 - Mason Dixon Star Party
June 15/16 - Maximum of June Lyrid Meteor Shower
June 16th - New Moon
June 22nd - Northway Fields Star Party
June 27th - Greenbelt Astronomy Club Meeting
July 22nd - Northway Fields Star Party
July 25th - Greenbelt Astronomy Club Meeting

A 4-H group is planning a camp-out and requests help with a tour of the night sky:
Date: Thursday, June 13
Time: 9:00 p.m.
Number of campers: 50
Ages: all ages, up to 10th grade, plus parents
Location: 4-H Center, 18405 Queen Anne Rd., Upper Marlboro (off Rte. 301)
Contact: Sandra Hampton (301) 627-5815