METEOR

The Newsletter of the Greenbelt Astronomy Club
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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 p.m. EST at the H.B. Owens Science Center. The Editor's name and address are: Matt Elliott; 53-B Crescent Road, #212; Greenbelt, Maryland 20770. The editor's email address is: mattel@greenbelt.com.

Editor's Note:

Sorry, but I've been struck with a severe case of "Comet Fever" and have not been able to do much but treat it the only way I know how: view Comet Hale-Bopp as much as possible! Thus, I haven't assembled and distributed the Meteor as promptly as I should have. I hope I have your understanding and forgiveness.

1997 Dues:

If you've already paid your dues for 1997, please skip to the next article. If not, read on. The treasurer has asked me to include a note to remind a few folks to pay their dues for 1997. We're sure that for most of you this is merely an oversight. It's only $12.00 per year, and includes subscriptions to the Meteor and the Reflector from the Astronomical League. Please bring the money to the next meeting (April 24), or mail it to the treasurer (checks only, please):

Lynne Gilliland
58-D Crescent Rd.
Greenbelt, MD 20770

Please note that checks need to be made to Lynne: we don't have enough money to justify the charges a bank account would incur, and the bank gives Lynne a hard time when she tries to cash a check made out to "The Greenbelt Astronomy Club". Thanks all!

The Apennine Couple

Fred Provost of Germantown, NY has written our club to request that those who are interested look for the Apennine Couple on the moon. This is a pair of structures in the Apennine Mountain range which have the appearance of human faces. For more information, please contact your editor.
Club Meeting of March 27:

Sue Bassett reported that the rooms originally booked for next year's eclipse trip to Curacao are full. She was able to book an additional ten rooms, but those may be full by the time you receive this. A final price should be known soon, as the airfare will be set shortly. Also, Sue is proceeding with plans for a trip to Turkey for the August, 1999 eclipse.

Tom Bridgman is now maintaining the club's page on the World Wide Web. It is at the following URL:
http://lheawww.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/outreach/gac/GAC.html

Doug Love gave an interesting and informative presentation about meteors. This was a preview for what he will present at Astronomy Day. He showed printouts from sites he found on the World Wide Web, including a list of annual meteor showers. Maybe next month we can get him to share his lists of web sites and meteor showers.

Much of the meeting was devoted to final preparations for Astronomy Day. Don't forget, it's this Saturday (April 12) at the H.B. Owens Science Center! Helpers for displays and other tasks are still needed. Also, we hope to have as many telescopes as possible there, so if you have one and can bring it, please do so. If you have photographs you would like to show, we will have a display for persons wishing to do so. The public will be welcome beginning at 6:00 p.m. If you wish to help or need time to set up, we expect to be able to get into the Owens Science Center at 5:00 p.m.

We clarified the issue of membership dues for persons who choose to receive the Meteor by email only. Persons (or families) who so choose can receive a $3.00 reduction in their dues, but the club requests that they consider donating that $3.00 to the club.

The next club meeting will be April 24.

Mason-Dixon Star Party - Lynne Gilliland

The 8th annual Mason-Dixon Star Party presented by the York County Astronomical Society will be held June 6-8, 1997 at the spring Valley County Park, York County, Pennsylvania (this is about an hour away from Greenbelt) . The keynote speaker this year is John Dobson, inventor of the Dobsonian mount for reflector telescopes.
Registration fee is $10.00 per individual if received before May 31, 1997. Children under 12 are free when accompanied by an adult. After May 31, and at the gate, registration will be $15.00 per individual. The registration fee includes camp site, all talks and events, entrance in door prize drawings. Water is available for drinking, some electricity will be available for a limited number of telescopes. There are no bathrooms only portapots. No open fires or pets allowed. You may cook on gas stoves or charcoal grills or you may eat at the caterer on premises. There are also lots of motels nearby. For more information and a registration form contact Jeri Jones during business hours at 717 840 7226.
Early April Comet Log Bits - G. Gliba

We (Lynne & George - ed.) went to Marshall, Virginia to see the comet with Matt Elliott the evening of April 1st. The comet was splendid. It had four tails, two dust and two ion, that were visible to the naked-eye for 10 and 12 degrees respectively. The bow shock feature was also seen with the naked-eye. In the 12x63 binoculars on a tripod much structure was seen in the tails. In the 5.5-inch SNT the hoods were seen with Lynne's 9mm Vixin eyepiece. The straight ion tails and curved dust tails were a beautiful sight. The nuclear condensation was about 0 magnitude, and the total comet magnitude was about -1! Our best view yet under relatively dark (5.8 LM) skies. Lynne and Matt took some photographs that may be on display at Astronomy Day.

(Editor's notes: I thought the tail was more like 15 to 20 degrees. I ordered an 8"x10" enlargement of one of the photos I made that night (it shows the comet and Cassiopeia). If I get it back from processing in time, I'll have it on display at Astronomy Day.)

Observed the comet the next night from downtown Greenbelt, and could just see a hint of the ion tail with 12x63 binoculars on a tripod. About three degrees of dust tail was visible to the naked-eye, five in 12x63 binoculars. So, as with Hyakutake a year ago, about three times as much tail can be seen from a fairly dark site (about a magnitude better). However, this was the best naked-eye view from downtown Greenbelt thus far. The next night Lynne and I saw it through a thin layer of clouds, but not very well.

(Editor's note: I drove to Haymarket, VA, that evening to observe from the Hopewell Observatory at the invitation of Jeff Guerber. The comet was very similar to the evening before. If anything, it may have been better: I saw slightly more tail.)

On Friday, April 4th a Comet Watch was held at the Goddard Space Flight Center Visitor's Center. Lynne and I went with the 12x63 binoculars on a tripod and the 4-inch f9 refractor. At 90x a couple hoods were seen, but nothing like we saw a few weeks ago on the morning of March 9th. There were an estimated 1200 people there. It was clear and everyone saw the comet well. Other club members present were Bill Hathaway, and Matt Elliott.

Some sites on the World Wide Web to check out:

As previously mentioned, the club site is now at:
http://lheawww.gsfc.nasa.gov/docs/outreach/gac/GAC.html

The photo that yours truly made and put in the Greenbelt News Review is at the following:
http://www.greenbelt.com/matt/hb.html

Tom Bridgman submitted the following:

Have you seen the 'Bad Astronomy' web site?
http://www.astro.virginia.edu/~pcp2g/bad/bad.html