



STAR STUFF

The Newsletter of the Ford Amateur Astronomy Club

June 2000
Volume 9 Number 5



Please send articles to westparka mediaone.net by June 26th for July Newsletter
June General Meeting – Swap Meet! Bring your equipment to sell!

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IMPORTANT NOTICE TO ALL CLUB MEMBERS

By paid permit to the State of Michigan, the Ford Amateur Astronomy Club maintains an after-hours observing site at the Spring Mill Pond area of the Island Lake State Recreation Area. During much of the year Park Rangers lock the entry gate at the 10:00 PM closing time. After-hours entry and exit for Club members only is via a combination lock and key system. Guests in the immediate accompaniment of a Club member may enter and leave with the Club member only.

For your security and to prevent any liability on the part of the Club, effective July 1, 2000 the combination of the lock will be changed. Club members only may obtain the new combination after June 15 by

contacting a Board member, another known Club member, by sending E-mail to faac1992@hotmail.com or by leaving your name and phone number on the hotline. Bob Fitzgerald, the hotline operator, will confirm your membership and return your call with the number.

It is extremely important that the combination under no circumstances be given to a non-confirmed Club member. Always leave the gate as you found it (locked or unlocked) and don't forget to return the gate key and combination lock to the lock box for use by other Club members.

June Swap Meet

By John M. Kmiecik

At this June's General Meeting (June 22nd) the main program will be a swap meet. So bring your equipment to sell! Note that if the meet runs too long we will have to cut it off. If it is a hit, we will do it again!

Getting Accurate Time and Locations

By Lewis E. Duffing

As you well know all the programs used to present the sky (planetarium programs etc.) or control a telescope such as my Meade LX200 have one thing

in common, and that is the requirement for accurate location and time data.

This can present some problems. My local astronomy clubs observing location, is a state park without access to 110-volt power and no phone lines. Hey it's a dark site, what should I expect.

In the past I have used maps to get latitude and longitude, and atomic clock programs to get reasonable time information for my laptop PC. I am an engineer and a stickler for accuracy so I am always looking for better data. I think I have found a solution.

I purchased a street finder and road atlas program from Rand McNally. The package also included a Global Position System (GPS) receiver for \$99. It runs off the laptop computer and needs no additional power. I was able to get fairly accurate locations and altitude using this system. I noticed that the program gives time from the GPS satellites, which are very accurate, but you can not update the PC clock easily to reflect that time.

This past week I searched again on the Internet and was able to find a windows program called TAC32 through the Tucson Amateur Packet Radio (TAPR) group <http://www.tapr.org>. This program (TAC32) actually gives locations and altitude. It also uses the very accurate UTC time from the GPS satellites to set the PC clock time to within 25 milliseconds. This can be done in the

STAR STUFF is a monthly publication of the Ford Amateur Astronomy Club, an affiliate club of the Ford Employee Recreation Association.

Ford Amateur Astronomy Club
P.O. Box 7527
Dearborn MI 48121-7527

Your submissions to **STAR STUFF** are welcome. Please write to the address above or contact the editor...

John Kmiecik
westpark@mediaone.net

Officers:

President	Dan Kmiecik
Vice President	Don Thompson
Secretary	Mike Kruskie
Treasurer	Mike Bruno

General Meetings:

The Ford Amateur Astronomy Club holds regular general meetings on the fourth Thursday of each month (except the combined November/December meeting held the first Thursday of December) at 5:00 PM in conference room 1491 in the Ford Credit building in Dearborn, Michigan.

Observing:

The Ford Amateur Astronomy Club observes at Spring Mill Pond within the Island Lake State Recreation Area near Brighton, Michigan. The club maintains a permit for after-hours access. Weather permitting, the club observes on Friday nights, Saturday nights, and nights before holidays.

Hotline:

Observing schedules and additional club information is available by calling the Observing Hotline at (313) 390-5456.

Club Membership:

Membership in the Ford Amateur Astronomy Club is open to Ford employees and non-employees. Write or call for an application.

Annual -- New: \$ 25 - Renewal: \$ 20

Lifetime -- \$ 100

Membership includes a subscription to the **STAR STUFF** newsletter, discounts on **ASTRONOMY** and **SKY & TELESCOPE** magazines, after-hours access to the observing site, and discounts at selected area equipment retailers.

field using a NMEA compatible GPS receiver, such as the Rand McNally, and the TAC32 program. It appears to be the ultimate time and location device for remote locations.

The government has recently turned off something they called "Selective Availability" which degraded the GPS locations, so now very accurate locations and altitude within 60-90 feet of actual can be determined.

I hope that those of you who are observing occultations or satellites or other time and location sensitive tasks may find this a useful tool. The 30 day demo of the program is available off the Internet through the TAPR site. Registering the program costs a reasonable amount. And, as if that's not enough, if you purchase the Rand McNally street finder and atlas GPS version, you will always be able to find your way home.

OBSERVATIONS

by Greg Burnett

Our ancient ancestors' lives were guided by the stars. The annual cycle of the constellations foretold the coming of seasonal rains, and dictated the movements of nomadic tribes. Risings and settings told when to plant and when to harvest. But primitive people had no inkling of the true nature of the stars. Petroglyphs and other gleanings from the distant past indicate they thought the stars might be the home fires of distant tribes. Encampments of neighboring clans could be seen from the hilltops at night. Why not others, even further away?... strange races in distant realms, beyond the possibility of contact.

As time went by and our culture advanced, wonderful new mythologies arose to explain the comings and goings in the heavens. According to very early writings, the stars were stitch-holes in the cosmos where the fires of the gods shown through. In medieval times, the fixed and wandering stars were born along on crystal spheres, whose turnings were propelled by angels.

Enlightened by the towering intellects of Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton, renaissance philosophers began to puzzle

out the true nature of our Universe. Planets might be other worlds, stars other suns. These changes in thinking were hard-won. More than one scholar went to the stake for professing such heretical ideas.

But little by little, truth will out. The planets indeed were other worlds, but always too hot or cold for life such as ours. The stars were shown to be much like our Sun in many cases, but because they are so very distant, evidence for attending planets was lacking until recently. Today, with new instruments of exquisite precision, we can detect the tell-tale wobble of stars with large planets. Such discoveries now number in the dozens. Soon, scientists believe it will be possible to glimpse the spectroscopic signature of free oxygen, if it is present in the atmospheres of planets circling distant stars, very strong evidence for metabolizing life. As last we are on the verge of vindicating the ancients: Some stars may indeed be the home fires of other distant tribes.

Welcome Wagon

Star Stuff would like to welcome the following recent new club members:

Ken & Theresa Blanchard, Canton
Thomas L. Blaszkak, Dearborn
Jim Buzonik, Farmington Hills
Michele Faeth, Brighton
Scotty Fahs, Dearborn Hts.
James Frisbie, II, Plymouth
John E. Koleno, Westland
David Senf, Westland
Daniel Stuart, South Lyon
Janice Tuck, South Lyon

We all look forward to sharing in your astronomy experiences.

"A Little Knowledge is a Dangerous Thing"

By George Korody

I recently received the following from a friend.

As a Delta Air Lines jet was flying over Arizona on a clear day, the copilot was providing his passengers with a running commentary about landmarks, over the PA system.

"Coming up on the right, you can see the Meteor Crater, which is a major tourist attraction in northern Arizona. It was formed when a lump of nickel and iron,

roughly 150 feet in diameter and weighing 300,000 tons, struck the earth at about 40,000 miles an hour, scattering debris for miles in every direction. The hole measures nearly a mile across and is 570 feet deep."

From the cabin, a passenger was heard to exclaim, "Wow! It just missed the highway!"

2000 Ford Amateur Astronomy Club Calendar
FAAC, P.O. Box 7527, Dearborn, MI 48121-7527
(upcoming events are underlined)

<u>Jun 3</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>
<u>Jun 2 thru 5</u>	<u>NCO Boon Hill Star Party – Boon, West of Cadillac – BYO Everything</u>
<u>Jun 22</u>	<u>FAAC General Membership Meeting</u>
<u>Jun 23-24</u>	<u>17th Annual NCO Summer Solstice Star Party</u>
<u>Jun 30 thru</u>	<u>NCO Boon Hill Star Party – Boon, West of Cadillac – BYO Everything</u>
<u>Jul 5</u>	
<u>Jul 1</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>
<u>Jul 27</u>	<u>FAAC General Membership Meeting</u>
<u>Jul 29</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>
<u>Aug 24</u>	<u>FAAC General Membership Meeting</u>
<u>Aug 26</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>
<u>Sep 23 thru</u>	<u>NCO Boon Hill Fall Star Party – Boon, West of Cadillac – BYO Everything</u>
<u>Oct 1</u>	
<u>Sep 28</u>	<u>FAAC General Membership Meeting</u>
<u>Sep 30</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>
<u>Oct 7</u>	<u>Eighth Annual Island Lake Star Party</u>
<u>Oct 26</u>	<u>FAAC General Membership Meeting</u>
<u>Oct 27 thru 30</u>	<u>NCO Boon Hill Star Party – Boon, West of Cadillac – BYO Everything</u>
<u>Oct 28</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>
<u>Nov 25</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>
<u>Dec 7</u>	<u>FAAC Joint November/December General Membership Meeting</u>
<u>Dec 23</u>	<u>Lake Hudson Dark Sky Stargaze</u>

Check for updates on the FAAC hotline: 313-390-5456

Ford Intranet: <http://www.be.ford.com/astro/faac.html> or the External Internet: <http://kode.net/~dougbock/faac/>

Ford Amateur Astronomy Club

Beginners' Night at Island Lake

July 8th, from 7:00PM to Midnight
(Arriving at 7PM will allow you to get help during daylight)

Do you have a new telescope that you would like to learn to use? Do you want to see samples of what the night sky has to offer? (weather permitting)

You should consider coming out to Island Lake Recreation Area on Beginner's Night. These nights are dedicated to providing equipment and observing assistance to new astronomers

The event will take place on the date indicated regardless of sky conditions, cloudy or clear. If it is raining, the event will be cancelled.

The exact location of the observing site is the "Spring Mill Pond" parking lot and picnic area, at the Island Lake State Recreation Area, on Kensington Road, south of I-96 between South Lyon and Brighton.

For more info or details on this event, contact John at Pattern120@hotmail.com or Dan at FAAC1992@hotmail.com

The Ford Amateur Astronomy Club observes at the Island Lake site on Friday and Saturday evenings year round, provided skies are clear. You are welcome to visit the observing site on any weekend, but you must be with a club member if you plan to observe after 10PM. Call 1-313-390-5456 to find out if anyone is going out on any particular night.

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