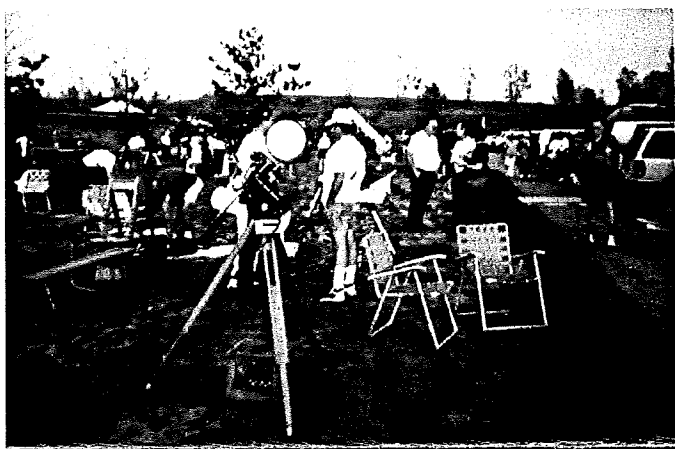


Feature of the Month



Island Lake Star Party – 1998

(Where the heck did all these people come from?!?)

by Clayton Kessler

Well – it happened! Six months of intensive effort, a week of watching the weather and maybe some arcane incantations to move a cloud deck to the north came into focus on Saturday. The 1998 FAAC Island Lake Star Party was a success of truly “astronomical” proportions!

I am not sure how it happened but our Michigan weather was very well behaved. The temperatures were in the 90's during the day and very mild at night – I was quite comfortable in a “t” shirt. It was somewhat breezy during the day but the wind died a bit during the evening and did not interfere with observing conditions. There were a few sparse clouds at sunset but

Island Lake (Continued on page 3)

SUMMER STAR PARTIES – I wish the nights were longer!

By Clayton Kessler

What a great summer this has been for star parties! We had Boon in May, the NCO Summer Solstice Star Party in June and SMURFS in July. Then August came around!

STARFEST:

I had never attended StarFest before. What a great party those North York guys throw! The event was marred only by the lack of clear skies at night. Normally this would be fairly important but there was so much going on during the day it kind of made up for the nighttime clouds.

Starfest was held at a campground north of Mount Forest Ontario. This was only a four-hour drive from Detroit. This place was really

Star Parties (Continued on page 3)

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- Statically Speaking

Star Stuff
Monthly Publication of the:
Ford Amateur Astronomy Club.

Star Stuff Newsletter
P.O. Box 7527
Dearborn, Michigan 48121-7527

1998 Club Officers

President	Greg Burnett
Vice President	George Korody
Treasurer	Ray Fowler
Secretary	Dave Beard

General Meetings

The Ford Amateur Astronomy Club (FAAC) holds regular general meetings open to the public on the fourth Thursday of the month at 5:00 PM. Meetings are held in conference room 1491 of the Ford Credit Building

Observing Site

The Ford Amateur Astronomy Club has an established observing site, by permit, at the Spring Mill Pond area of Island Lake Recreation Area in Brighton, Michigan located near the intersections of I-96 and US-23. Members are responsible for opening and closing the gate after the parks 10:00 PM closing time. (Summer season only)

Observing Hot Line - (313) 390 5456

On Friday and Saturday nights, or nights before holidays, you can call the hot line number up to 2 hours before sunset to find out if we will be observing that night.

WWW Page

FAAC maintains a web page on the internet at URL:
<http://kode.net/~dougbock/faac/>
Ford Intranet at:
<http://be0084.be.ford.com/fhl/faac>

Membership and Dues

Membership to the Ford Amateur Astronomy Club is open to both Ford employees and the general public. The dues structure is as follows:

Annual Individual/Family	\$ 20.00
Lifetime Membership	\$100.00

Membership benefits include a subscription to the Star Stuff newsletter, discounts on subscriptions to Astronomy and/or Sky and Telescope magazines, after hours use of the observing site at Island Lake, and discounts at selected area astronomical equipment retailers.

Newsletter Editor:

Jack Kennedy	248-399-9403
e-mail	jkennedy1@voyager.net
home	248-399-9403

Editors Corner

By Jack Kennedy

This is our Star Party issue. Your newsletter staff has made it their project to go to as many star parties as possible and report back to the club membership. We have had a very good summer viewing season. But Island lake, where did all those people come from. What a great turnout. We just became a major star party. The Island Lake crew deserve a great deal of credit for handling such a huge and unexpected crowd. As far as I know a very well behaved crowd. I will leave it to Clay Kessler to tell the story. Clay also provides us with accounts of both the Starfest 98 in Canada and the NCO Autumnal Equinox party in Fenton.

With Orion rising in the late night sky that means it must be time to plan our annual fall trip to NCO wilderness site near Boon. The star party is planned for October 16th to the 19th. It's a great trip with dark skies at night and fall colors during the day. If you haven't been to this star party drop by Doug Bock's web site and get some instructions, it's a great time.

I think the newsletter could use an observing list each month. Any volunteers? Remember this newsletter is about, by and for the club members so contribute what you can. Articles should be in but the meeting each month for the following issue.....

House Bill 4254

The light pollution bill is still in the Senate committee for Technology and Energy. It doesn't look like we will get any action on this bill until after elections. Looks like our Michigan Legislature at its best. We need to keep the pressure on our Senators or this bill may die of neglect. If you would like more information on this bill contact:

Jack Kennedy at 248-399-9403 or e-mail to jjkenn@ibm.net

Star Parties (Continued from page 1)

"set-up" for observing with a very open camp area and lots of room. Very few trees blocked the horizons – unfortunately the clouds did a good job of that. The event was extremely well organized with lots of events and talks aimed at astronomers of all different levels. There were also kids events that let the entire family in on the fun. These various events started at 10 AM and ran all day Friday and Saturday, which kept everyone occupied.

There was a fair group of FAAC members in attendance at StarFest. We kind of "clumped" together and set up our telescopes in the same location. This worked out well – both for the small amount of observing that was possible and just for socializing. While it clouded up each evening (Rats!) there was still some opportunity for observing. We did some solar observing each day and there were "holes" that some objects could be viewed through. The little observing that I could do held out promise

Star Parties (Continued on page 4)



One of the guests at Starfest 98

Island Lake (Continued from page 1)

they cleared away and we had a great night to introduce people to the stars.

A lot of club members came out early to help and to set up their telescopes. In addition we had solid support from the other local clubs. A number of people from the Warren Astronomical Society came out and they brought their 22" dobsonian. That scope is always a crowd pleaser and had long lines to look through it all night. I think ALL of the EMU Astronomy Club showed up, Norbert Vance gave a great talk on light pollution. All in all there were 75 to 100 telescopes set up for public viewing. A big "Thank You" goes out to everyone that came out, set up and then helped people to see the universe.

All of the presentations went well – Barry Craig's comet making demonstration was a big hit with the kids and Greg Burnett's "Astronomy 101" lecture was well attended. We managed to save all of the "rainy – cloudy" alternate presentations for another time. (We should try that "Stump the Chumps" thing at a meeting sometime – just for fun.)

A big "Thank You" also goes to our co-sponsors, The Nature Company and Rider's Hobby Shops. Both outfits brought a variety of telescopes and accessories out to display. This helps the public to see just what is available and gives everyone an idea of what is necessary for the hobby. Riders and The Nature Company also donated some great door prizes. Several happy people went home with telescopes and binoculars.

We have to remember that people is what this star party is all about. We don't do this to fill our treasury with cash (Ha! What treasury?), or to do "serious photometric reductions of Jupiter", or to do astrophotography, or serious Galaxy hunting. This star party exists to introduce the general public to amateur astronomy. This year's star party was an especially great success because of the sheer numbers of people that attended.

Island Lake (Continued on page 6)

for **VERY** dark skies in this area. The objects visible through the holes and thin spots had a lot of contrast and definition. This bodes well for a return trip next year.

I enjoyed all of the talks that I attended but I especially enjoyed the talk that Jerry Lodgrius gave on "Digital Image Enhancement". I learned more about Photoshop in that hour than in a year of poking around in the dark! He demonstrated methods to use Photoshop to bring out detail and improve the contrast and color of astrophotos. When I returned home and got my Astronomy magazine SUPRIZE! One of the images that Jerry was working on in his demo was the cover shot! The other one graced the cover of the "Explore The Universe" special edition. This is truly getting advice from the experts. His other talk, on the images that he has taken, was excellent also.

There was somewhere around 1000 people in attendance (would that be 625 American? ☺). With this kind of crowd there were a wealth of exotic telescopes on display. I got to examine the original "Alice" dob (as seen in "Making and Enjoying Telescopes") and talk with the builder on several occasions. There was a Peter Cera-
valo "Mak-Newt" there – heck there was even a Peter Ceravalo himself! Lots and lots of people with lots and lots of ideas to share. There was a very good swap meet and many commercial exhibitors. Author Terence Dickenson ("NightWatch", Splendors of the Universe", "The Backyard Astronomers Guide" ETAL) was generous with both his time and his autographs.

All in all I had a great time at StarFest. I am already looking forward to next year when I am sure that I will return! There were more great star parties to come in September. AstroFest was the first early in September. I had made reservations to go but I canceled at the last minute. I cannot give you a direct report until next year ☺ but attendees that I talked to said they had a great time.

NCO Autumnal Equinox Star Party:

Last weekend was the NCO Autumnal Equinox Star Party. This gathering was outstanding with clear skies all night long. Many FAAC members attended and observations were going on long after I crashed for the night. The sky was clear but there was some moisture and haze that limited observation on the horizons. This did not stop George from taking some fantastic CCD images of Stephens Quintet and the surrounding area. I had quite an interesting night. Bruce Johnston came out and brought his ST7. I was allowed to assist (and learn a great deal) him in taking several images through Doug's 12 1/2" newtonian telescope. This was a lot of fun and the images (M13 and M27) looked pretty good. Bruce donated a copy of his image processing software "SuperFix" and "MegaFix" to the Northern Cross Observatory.

I ended up crashing in the "Visiting Astronomers Hut" around 1AM. I think Doug packed it in even earlier! There is a story behind this. On Friday afternoon Doug called me and invited me to observe. I was not expecting to observe and I did not have any equipment – so I went into "power whine" mode. "I don't have a scope.....I don't have my camera.....I don't have any film.....I'll be right out!" Boy was I lucky. Friday night was fantastic. It was dark and dry, the milky way was very bright and clear. It was probably the best night that I had locally all year. (Thanks for calling Doug!). I was having so much fun that the first time I looked at the time was 3AM!!! I did not get home until 4:30 so I was wasted. Doug, however, stayed up until 4AM then got up early to play in a golf outing all day. We were both dragging by Saturday evening.

Everyone seemed to have a great time at the NCO Autumnal Equinox Star Party. We were favored with clear skies and moderate temperatures and this helped us to have a good attendance. I hope the Island Lake Star Party has weather this good. I will report on that next time!

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Meeting Minutes for 9-24-98

by Dave Beard

The meeting was called to order at 17:05 EDT by President Greg Burnett. There were 34 members and guests present. Immediately, and without hesitation, the members started in on the pizza and pop. While everyone ate, President Greg Burnett passed around a collection of N.Y. Times articles related to Astronomy, and the round table discussion ensued. The members discussed recent viewing experiences, new equipment, Astronomy news, and not once was the name Bill Clinton mentioned.

Member Doug Bock announced his Fall Wilderness Star Party in Boon, Michigan, slated for October 16-19. Check out Doug's web site at <http://kode.net/~dougbock/>. This is a great site as well for links to other Michigan clubs, and information about Doug's Northern Cross Observatory.

Vice President George Korody mentioned that the Jackson Club will be having an early morning Orion viewing session soon. You can e-mail them at hyud85a@prodigy.com. George also mentioned that the television program "Assignment Discovery" on the Discovery channel often covers astronomy topics.

The Treasurer's report was given, and the club is gaining a little on being broke, but we still have a ways to go.

Member Bob "Gatekeeper" Fitzgerald told the group that the Island Lake access is now open 24 hours, and open through the winter. President Greg stated that we do need to have our membership cards on us for staying past park hours.

Member Bob McFarland gave a report on the preparations for the Island Lake Star Party and thanks all involved for their fine efforts. Bob gave the rundown on the party events and volunteers were taken for the sky tour.

Ray Fowler and Alan Bates announced a new Sky and Telescope and Astronomy magazine subscription program, that offers a \$10.00 discount! Forms are available from the treasurer. A huge thanks to Al and Ray!

Members then began bag stuffing in preparation for the Star Party, and as the meeting soon descended into bag stuffing chaos, it was adjourned at 6:30pm on the nose.



Lost and Found

There were a number of items found at the Island Lake site after the star party such as lense caps. These items can be claimed at the next meeting.

A Special Thank You

One of our guests and her son spent the morning after the star party picking up trash and the Lost and Found items. This shows what type people these type events draw. A special Thanks goes to Kaye and her son for the help.

Here is a tip from Daniel J. Kmiecik.

Jack,

Go to <http://www.salon1999.com/dec96/verb961209.html>.

You will find an article about vowels and how they are used in the English language. Of particular interest in the article is the word syzygy. I bet not many FAAC members know this one. Please let me know what you think. Thanks.

Give it a try. You will want to bookmark this one.

Let's talk numbers for a minute. We had outstanding attendance last year with about 500 people attending. We had hoped to equal those numbers this year. I guess we did not set our expectations high enough. I know that we passed out around 700 door prize tickets (as opposed to last years' 350 or so) but many people came late or did not register. The DNR rangers at the park did an attendance estimate based upon the number of cars and told us we had between 1000 and 1500 people through for our star party. **THESE ARE SERIOUS NUMBERS!** People came through out the evening. I talked to one fellow at around 1AM who said he just got there! The number of attendees caused some problems. Spring Mill Pond has about 300 parking spaces. The DNR were parking the overflow in a field to the northeast and up and down the main park road. Some people walked 1/2 mile or so just to get in! This is definitely something to improve for next year!

We did have one big surprise. For those of you that have been on #astronomy chat channel and know Candy, she and her boyfriend Darly drove all the way up from Auburn Alabama just for the star party. That must be a record.

We all know that the key to attendance is the weather and this year the weather was just about as good as it could be! If it was cloudy, rainy or even colder we could not have drawn this many folks outside. So don't be disappointed if the attendance is down next year. Just remember – "if the weather is nice – they will come!"

I had a ball all evening. Everyone I talked to was glowing with complements and all the youngsters were having a great time. I only wish that we could do this more often.



NOTHING BUT THE FAACs

By George Korody

Welcome to recent new members Michael Watza, Tim Beswetherick, Scott Schneider, and Steve Begovich. We hope you have many pleasurable experiences while participating in FAAC activities.

An accessory for use with a sextant was found in early July at our Spring Mill Pond observing site in the Island Lake State Recreation Area. The device which is identified as an "artificial horizon" measures about 6" by 8" by 1/4" deep. The owner had been using it at the site, and can reclaim it by calling Mike at (248) 437-1912.

ALL POINTS BULLETIN - URANUS MISSING: During the night of the Island Lake Star Party the planet Uranus turned up missing from our solar system display which was placed along the route from the park entry booth to the star party site. The sun and the other eight planets are fine. Since the loss of Uranus would be so devastating to our solar system, a reward (TBD) is being offered to anyone providing information resulting in its safe return. Please notify Don Klaser or any Board Member with information.

Last year Neptune was lost under similar circumstances and was never recovered. A check of the solar system found that Pluto was now in eighth position from the sun. A new Neptune was created using universal building materials from a dependable source (Home Depot). However, the new Neptune was mistakenly placed in ninth position. Plans are to correct this arrangement in the near future.

The Northern Cross Observatory (NCO) has gone digital with the recent purchase of an SBIG (Santa Barbara Instrument Group) ST-5 CCD camera. In addition, a Cookbook CCD camera is on loan from the Warren Astronomi-

The Scary Public

by Dave Beard

An interesting thing, or should I say a paradigm shift, occurred to me while at our star party this year. Before the event, I had planned to bring both my 10" and 18" dobs to the party. My idea was to use the older 10 incher for public viewing, and bring out the virtually brand new eighteen, later, after most of the public had gone.

Now this is not such a strange idea, nor am I the only one to have thought of it. A few fellow club members had asked me if I was going to bring the new scope out, and kind of cautioned against it, as, well, it was brand new, and scopes *are* delicate, and boy it *would* be a shame if anything happened to it, etc., etc. And I pretty much agreed down inside, "yes, perhaps it would be a good idea to keep the huddled masses away from my new baby, at least for a while".

Well, as it so happened, I spent a bit more time at the registration desk than I thought I would, and didn't get to unload any scope till 10:00pm. And I thought, what the heck, I wanna look through my new scope, out she comes, I'm throwing all caution to the wind. And I did set it up, and the public was peering through the focuser even before I even had an eyepiece in, and I had a ball showing the universe to folks, young, old, big, small, short, and tall (talk about tall, I had one fellow walk right up to the eyepiece with the scope almost pointed to the zenith!).

It was fun! It was a blast! And everybody was so appreciative and kind and awed by the crummy view of the Andromeda galaxy through the clouds and humidity.

And the biggest shock of all was when I got home that night and unpacked the scopes and examined the upper cage of the 18 incher under the bright cold light on the ceiling of my garage, and noticed that there was..... *not even ONE fingerprint*..... anywhere.

FAACs (Continued from page 6)

cal Society for use in the second NCO observatory. These CCD cameras will provide both imaging and autoguiding capabilities.

A core group of persons is meeting monthly to develop additional improvements at NCO. Already planned is remote control of both observatories to permit operation from a local climate (and mosquito) controlled room. Discussion continues on the capability to provide long distance remote operation of both observatories via phone lines and/or the internet.

Comments and suggestions about this column are welcomed. Anyone with items for possible inclusion in future columns is requested to contact the writer at (248) 349-1930, or send E-mail to gkorody@mediaone.net.



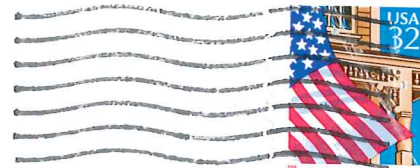
Star Parties (Continued from page 4)

But now we have to look to the future! Well – three weeks into the future anyway. Coming up is the Fall NCO wilderness Star Party in Boon. WOW – I can't wait... the crisp air.....the fall colors..... the earlier sunsets..... This will be a little slice of heaven! I hope to see you there!

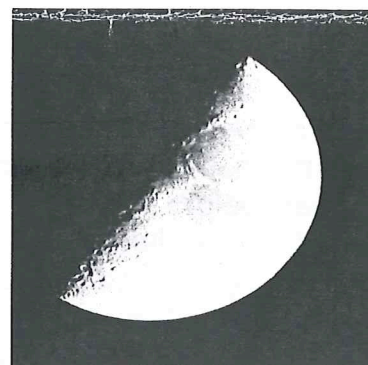


Clay Kessler, writer and amateur astronomer at the 1998 Island Lake Star Party..

Ford Amateur Astronomy Club
 Star Stuff Newsletter
 P.O. Box 7527
 Dearborn, MI 48121



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ASTRO PHOTOS WANTED

We are planning a special issue of Star Stuff with astro photos by club members. If you have photos and would like to submit let me know. Ed.