

The FBAC Observer

VOLUME 18, ISSUE 2

FEBRUARY, 2004

An Important Message From The President

Fellow Club Members,

For those of you that did not attend the January meeting or haven't heard already, I have given notice that I will be stepping down as club President effective in February. Although this decision was not taken lightly by me, I had to make this change in my life at this point in time. As I mentioned at the meeting in November of 2003, I was involved in my second corporate lay off in less than two years. This in itself is stressful enough on an individual trying to find work in a depressed market. Being an officer of the club, undue stress was also directed at me which only amplified matters.

I opened the floor to discussion on whether the club would like to vote in a new officer that night or form a search committee to locate a new president. The majority agreed that a search committee should be formed and that committee is composed of Dennis Borgman, Joe Dellinger, and Terry Hiserodt. During the time between the January and February meetings, the committee will locate potential officers to nominate. The club will then vote for the candidates at the February meeting.

To make matters more complex, Cynthia Gustava also announced that she would be stepping down as Vice President of the club for similar reasons. Therefore the search committee will be locating a replacement for her position. The club members asked if we would remain in office until the February meeting, which we both agreed to do.

I encourage those of you who are new members and old members that have never been involved in the mechanism of the club to become more involved. This is your club and you should support it. Like in any organization, 90% of the work is performed by 10% of its core members or associates. I would like to see this rapidly change. We at FBAC have always been known as doing things differently, so let's set a new standard unlike other astronomy clubs.

When I moved to the Houston area, there were several clubs in the area that I had the opportunity to join. I joined FBAC because I had gotten to know some of its crazy members at TSP in years past and also it very closely modeled the club that I formed in Victoria, being truly dedicated to teaching and sharing astronomy to the public. I am still going to be very involved with the club and its activities as I still feel very strongly that FBAC can unite and embrace its core values.

In closing, I would like to thank those who have stood by and supported me during my short term in office. I am very proud to have been able to serve you as President.

See you under the night skies!

Derek Newton

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:




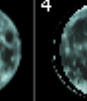






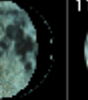


















Happenings	2
Upstaging Herschel	3
Obsolete Constellations	5
Light Pollution	6
Meeting Minutes	7
East Dome	8
Minor Planets	9
The Termite Syndrome	10
HELP!	11

From the FBAC President/ Vice-President Nomination Committee:

Dennis Borgman, Terry Hiserodt and Joe Dellinger have a short list of FBAC members who we believe would make good officers to cover the remaining terms of Derek and Cynthia.

We are in the process of contacting those on our short list to see if the individuals have interest in one of the open positions and inquiring if they feel they have the time to dedicate to the positions as club officers.

If you are interested in being a club officer (position of President or Vice President) please contact one of the nomination committee members as soon as possible. Likewise, if you believe a fellow club member would make a good officer. We are open for suggestions and guidance.

February 2004						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1 	2 	3 	4 	5 	6 	7 
8 	9 	10 	11 	12 	13 	14 
15 	16 	17 	18 	19 	20 	21 
22 	23 	24 	25 	26 	27 	28 
29 						

What's Happening In February

Feb 1—The waxing moon sits between the Bull's horns, stars Beta and Zeta in Taurus. Aldebran is 16 degrees to the right of Luna.

Feb 2, Ground Hog Day—Saturn rides half a fist-width below and to the right of the moon tonight.

Feb 4—See if you can view four planets at once. Jupiter rises before Venus sets. Mars and Saturn are already in the sky. Best time: about 3 1/2 hours after sunset.

Feb 6—Full moon at 2:47 AM CST. Variously called the Snow, Hunger, or Wolf moon it denotes the harsh time of winter.

Feb 8—Jupiter rises 30

minutes before the Moon. In the coming months, Jupiter will be in retrograde motion toward the west. In May, the Jovian planet will resume eastward motion.

Feb 9—Venus blazes at mag 4 in the evening twilight, almost two magnitudes brighter than Jupiter. It will dominate the western sky for three hours after sunset, lining up with the eastern side of the great square of Pegasus in the next few days.

Feb 10—The waning gibbous Moon is perched high in the southwestern sky among the stars of Virgo. Spica will sit 3 degrees to the lower right of the Moon.

Feb 11—The equation of time reaches its minimum for 2004 at -14 minutes. This is the difference between sundial or apparent solar time to clock or mean solar time.

Feb 14—During the next few mornings, the Moon passes through the summer constellations, Scorpius and Sagittarius. Before dawn today it will stand 3 degrees to the upper right of Antares, the heart of the Scorpion.

Feb 18—A hairline crescent Moon challenges observers. Venus and Mars are 28 degrees apart and will close to 6 degrees in late April. Venus and Saturn now span 85 degrees but will decrease to 15 degrees in early May. Mars and Saturn will also cozy up in late May.

Feb 19—The magnificent Orion is at it's best in early evening. Looking toward the south and overhead, you find Betelgeuse and Rigel in Orion, Sirius in Canis Major, Procyon in Canis Minor, Pollux and Castor in Gemini, Capella in Auriga, and Aldebaran in Taurus.

Feb 20—FBAC Club Meeting. New Moon at 3:18 AM CST. Try to convince your significant other that you should make a trek to Hawaii to view this event since the Moon is too young for those of us on the continent to see.

Feb 21—The belt stars of Orion are easy to find and show to your non-astronomer friends. From left to right (east to west) the are Alnitak (al-nee-TAK), Alnilam (al-nee-LAM), and Mintaka (min-TAAK-ka). Learn to pronounce their names and impress a club member or girl/boy friend/wife/the cat/whomever will listen as you sit under the starlit sky—in the second coldest month of the year.

Feb 22—Check out "earthshine" on the Moon as a bright arc frames an ashen gray disk. The dim portion of the moon is reflection from sunlight bouncing off Earth.

Feb 23—Find a planet in daytime. Using the Moon as a reference Venus is only 6 degrees away.

Feb 25—Travel to a location off the coast of Chile to watch the Moon occult Mars. Or not.

Feb 26—Just before dawn, Scorpius, Sagittarius are low in the southeast. The Summer Triangle is halfway up in the east and the Milky Way flows across the eastern sky.

Feb 29—Time to fiddle with the calendar in order to remain aligned with the universe. It's Leap Day.

Upstaging Herschel

By Wes Whiddon

After the last FBAC club meeting where Larry Mitchell did an outstanding job presenting the life and times of William Herschel, I began to wonder about deep sky observing before one of the world's greatest astronomers came on the scene.

We all know Charles Messier and the list of objects he developed while chasing comets. But what about the ones who came before him? When did deep sky observing really begin and what were the first objects recorded by early astronomers?

To find this information, I turned to the numero uno source for data in this age: the internet. And I found a wealth of information, more, in fact, than I could use for an article that has to fit the confines of this newsletter. With all this data in hand, I will attempt to outline the beginnings of deep sky observing from a time before Christ until William Herschel's illustrious career began.

First, we have to define "deep sky observing" since anything beyond our solar system could technically be called deep. In ancient times, the night sky was, for the most part, free of light pollution. Early observers quite easily saw objects that are now invisible to those with normal vision. These people, of course, had no way of knowing where anything lay in the scheme of the universe. To them a star was a star and until the advent of the telescope, most probably thought they were all the same distance from Earth. Many of the early asterisms or star clusters such as the Ursa Major group certainly can't qualify because they are a physical cluster and this didn't become obvious until modern times.

Even in Herschel's day, many deep sky objects were classified as "nebulae" of various stripes so it appears that most of what the ancients observed can be put in a few boxes labeled nebulae and star clusters.

M41 may have been the first recorded deep sky object. It's possible that in about 325 BC Aristotle mentioned it and may have also mentioned M39. Both these objects have visual magnitudes of 4.6 and would be easy targets for naked eye observing.

The famous Greek astronomer, Hipparchus, compiled the first catalog of stars around the years 146-127 BC. The catalog included two "nebulous" objects now known as M44 and the Double Cluster (NGC869 and 884) star cluster in Perseus.

Ptolemy, whose Great Syntaxas catalog (compiled in 127-151 AD and later known as the Almagest), listed 7 objects. Three were asterisms and two were duplicates, M44 and the Double Cluster, but two were listed as new. The first, the "Nebula behind the Sting of Scorpius", has now been identified as the open cluster M7. Second was the object known as Melotte 111, a star cluster in Coma Berenices.

For some odd reason, there is a huge gap in recorded observations between Ptolemy's work and the next discovery. The advent of the Dark Ages may have contributed to this dearth of information but most of the darkness was happening in Europe. Arabic, sub-Saharan Africa, Chinese, Indian, and American civilizations were flourishing during that period.

Around 964 AD, the Persian astronomer, Al Sufi, first documented the discovery of the Andromeda Galaxy, M31. That this object was never recorded over a period of twelve or thirteen hundred years of astronomy seems beyond belief since it is one of the most prominent deep objects that can be seen with the unaided eye. Al Sufi also mentioned a nebulous star near Delta Velorum, which is now thought to be the open cluster, IC2391. His documentation included six of Ptolemy's objects and a new one in Vulpecula that we commonly call the Coathanger Cluster.

On July 4, 1054, a remarkable thing happened in the sky: a supernova. We now know this object as the Crab Nebula. Listed as the first object in Charles Messier's catalog, this remnant is still a favorite object of modern observers. Historically the Crab was observed and mentioned by the Chinese and probably Native Americans but the official discovery was made by John Bevis in 1731.

There is another gap of almost 200 years before more deep objects were recorded. It is certain that native people in the southern part of the world saw these objects but the first mention of the Large and Small Clouds goes to Magellan in 1519 (hence the names Large and Small Magellanic Clouds). Incredibly enough, at this point in time, the sum total of discovered and recorded deep sky objects was only eleven. But the stage was set for change within the next 100 years.

Many of us have stood on a winter's night and stared at the constellation Orion. One of the most beautiful in the sky, Orion's group of stars contains one of the brightest objects we will ever observe: the Orion nebula, M42. How this was missed and never recorded before 1610 is a complete mystery. But it was independently found by two astronomers, Nicholas-Claude Fabri de Peiresc and J.B. Cysatus. Unfortunately, neither discovery was publicly known for a long time.

Galileo Galilei is credited with the first astronomical use of the telescope. Actually invented in Holland by Hans Lippershey, this instrument revolutionized the science of astronomy. Other than Galileo, one of the first to utilize this optical aid for observing was Giovanni Batista Hodierna, who lived from 1597-1660. Giovanni was the court astronomer of the Duke of Montechiaro and his work has only recently been discovered. He used a simple refractor of about 20 power and compiled a catalog of 40 entries published in 1654. Among these was independent discovery of M31, M42, one of Brocchi's clusters, the Alpha Persei Moving Cluster, and as many as 15 independent discoveries: M6, M36, M37, M38, M41, M47, NGC2362,

(continued on page 4)

(continued from page 3)

NGC6231, and NGC6530, the cluster associated with the Lagoon Nebula. He may have also discovered M33, M34, NGC742, and NGC2451, NGC2169, and NGC2175.

In 1656, Christian Huygens independently rediscovered M42 and also noted three of the four stars in the Trapezium Cluster, imbedded in the heart of the Orion Nebula.

A Dantzig astronomer, John Hevel (whom we know as Hevelius), compiled one of the earliest star catalogs. Posthumous publication in 1690 of his atlas, Uranographia, which included Prodomus Astronomiae, listed 16 entries, two of which are M31 and M44. The other 14 were either asterisms or non-existent and caused Charles Messier considerable consternation in his later search for the objects.

John Flamsteed, known for his intemperance of both Isaac Newton and Edmond Halley, published, in 1712 and later revised in 1725, his catalog, Historia Coelestis Britannica. In it, he refers to several nebulae and nebulous stars. These included several already known objects but also three independent discoveries (or rediscoveries as the case may be) of NGC6530, M41, and a true discovery of NGC2244, associated with the Rosette Nebula.

The Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society for 1715, published a list of six "luminous spots" discovered by Edmond Halley. The six included his discovery of the giant globulars, Omega Centauri and M13 while on a trip to the island of St. Helena.

In about 1731, Jean-Jacques Dortous de Mairan found a nebulous star north of M42 which turned out to be the object listed today as M43. In this same time frame, John Bevis discovered the Crab Nebula and subsequently published a star atlas called Uranographia Britannica. At least he tried to publish a star atlas. Unfortunately, the publisher went bankrupt and only a few printings were ever made. It's seems that Messier had a copy of this atlas because he refers to it as the "English Atlas" in descriptions of objects M1, M11, M13, M22, M31, and M35.

William Derham published a list of 16 nebulae in the Royal Society transactions in the year 1733. Most of these turned out to be bogus and Charles Messier (among others) was again fooled by these listings.

Between Derham's publication and about 1764, many of the so called discoveries were actually rediscoveries. Eight original discoveries were made, though, by Philippe Loys de Cheseaux, among them M4 and M17. His list was presented to the French Academy of Sciences on August 6, 1746 but was otherwise unpublished.

Two globular clusters, M15 and M2 were discovered by Jean-Dominique Maraldi in September, 1746 and Le Gentil found the Andromeda Galaxy's companion, M32 in the year 1749.

The last great discoveries before Messier began his catalog were made by Lacaille who observed from South Africa and compiled a catalog of 42 entries includ-

ing several southern constellations. Among the entries were NGC3372, the globular 47 Tucanae, the Tarantula Nebula in the LMC, and the spiral galaxy M83.

Comet hunter, Charles Messier's original discovery of M3 in 1764 marked the beginning of his efforts to catalog "fixed objects" in the sky. He had previously found M1, the supernova remnant from 1054, and M2, the compact globular in Aquarius. He had been seriously chasing comets since 1758 and at that point decided to begin his list.

During the year of 1764, Messier continued his list, cataloging M3-M40. Nineteen of these were original discoveries, the rest were taken from his predecessors catalogs. He also continued to search for some of the non-existent objects entered in these catalogs either by oversight or vivid imagination. Some think this could account for why the double star M40 was placed in his list.

By 1769, his catalog had grown with the addition of M42-M45. A year later his work was finally recognized by the Paris Académie Royale des Sciences, which he entered in June 30, 1770.

By April, 1781, Messier's list was up to 100 objects and he was in a frantic effort to get it ready for publication. Just as the catalog was going to press, he hastily added three more objects, M101-M103. Observed by Pierre Méchain and unconfirmed by Messier, this led to one of the mistakes involving M102 that crept into the document.

By 1786 the catalog was up to 107 objects but by then William Herschel was beginning to overshadow most of the astronomical community. Messier began to lose interest in that part of his work and stopped adding objects. The catalog existed in that form until the twentieth century when some objects were corrected and M108-M110 were added.

The journey from Aristotle to Herschel has been a long one. It seems astounding that during the course of a thousand years, only 152 deep sky objects were cataloged. But then, thanks to Herschel and his contemporaries, in less than a century, the list had grown to thousands.

Today, as amateur observers, we are the beneficiaries of the men (and women, too) who dedicated their lives to the science of astronomy. And the work goes on. We are still making discoveries in the night sky. As Isaac Newton so aptly spoke: We are standing on the shoulders of giants."

Notes and attributions: Most of the material in this piece is freely adapted from "A History Of The Discovery Of The Deep Sky Objects" which I found on the SEDS (Students for the Exploration and Development of Space) web site. Unfortunately, I was unable to ascertain the author's name.

Obsolete Constellations

Part 2

In part 1 of this series, we talked about two constellations, **Antinous**, and **Argo Navis**. It was also stated that there were 24 constellations that were obsolete, further research has revealed that there were more than 100 constellations that are no longer on modern star maps. There are one or two that may still show on some charts. More about that in a later episode. I have been only able to find data on 24.

—CERBERUS—

Cerberus is a constellation representing the three-headed dog that guarded Hyades. It is shown being held in the outstretched hand of Hercules, who tamed the dog as one of his 12 labors. Cerberus was introduced by Johannes Hevelius on a star map in 1687, replacing a branch from the tree of the golden apples that was previously in the hand of Hercules. Although Cerberus was supposed to be a dog in mythology, Hevelius and all later map makers changed the dog into a three headed snake. The English engraver John Senex, a friend of Edmond Halley, combined Cerberus with the apple tree branch in 1721 to show the serpent being wrapped around the apple tree branch. Nothing was permanent even in the 16th century.

—CUSTOS MESSIUM— *the harvest keeper*

This constellation was introduced in 1779 by French astronomer Joseph-Jerome de Lalande on his celestial globe. The name of the constellation is a reference to his countryman Charles Messier, and in fact the constellation was often know as Messier. Custos Messium lay between Cassiopeia and the north celestial pole, next to another obsolete constellation, Rangifer the Reindeer.

FELIS — *the cat* —

Invented at the end of the 18 century by Joseph-Jerome de Lalande because he said that he was fond of cats. It was made from stars between Antlia and Hydra. Lalande did not himself show this constellation on any globe or chart. It was first shown on Bode's atlas in 1801.

Gallus — *the cockerel* —

Petrus Plancius, a Dutch theologian, formed this constellation in 1613 to represent the cockerel that crowed for the second time after Peter had denied Jesus three times. Gallus lies in the Milky Way, in the northern part of what is now known as Puppis. It was adopted by a number of astronomers, but was not shown on Johann Bode's charts.

-Leonard Pattillo

Help Stamp Out Light Pollution

By John Lane, North Houston Astronomy Club

Your help is urgently needed to convince The Commissioners of Fort Bend County Commissioners Court to adopt a "light ordinance". All that is needed is for you to (if you haven't already did it) make a short (please help us, nice and sweet-thank you very much) phone call to each commissioner listed below.

Brazoria County Commissioners Court	Fort Bend County Commissioners Court
<p><u>County Judge</u> Hon. John Willy Brazoria County Judge 111 East Locust, Suite 308 Angleton, TX 77515</p> <p>Tel: 979-864-1200</p>	<p><u>County Judge</u> Hon. Bob Hebert 301 Jackson Street Richmond, TX 77469</p> <p>Tel: 281-341-8608</p>
<p><u>Precinct 1 Commissioner</u> Hon. Dude Payne Brazoria County Courthouse C/O County Clerk's Office 111 East Locust, Suite 200 Angleton, TX 77515</p> <p>Tel: 979-388-1523</p>	<p><u>Precinct 1 Commissioner</u> Hon. Tom Stavinoaha 701 South Fourth Street Richmond, TX 77469</p> <p>Tel: 281-344-9400 Fax: 281-342-0587</p>
<p><u>Precinct 2 Commissioner</u> Hon. James Clawson Brazoria County Courthouse C/O County Clerk's Office 111 East Locust, Suite 200 Angleton, TX 77515</p> <p>Tel: 979-864-1548 or 281-489-7163</p>	<p><u>Precinct 2 Commissioner</u> Hon. Grady Prestage 303 Texas Parkway Missouri City, TX 77459</p> <p>Tel: 281-403-8000 Fax: 281-403-8009</p>
<p><u>Precinct 3 Commissioner</u> Hon. Jack Harris Brazoria County Courthouse C/O County Clerk's Office 111 East Locust, Suite 200 Angleton, TX 77515</p> <p>Tel: 281-331-3197</p>	<p><u>Precinct 3 Commissioner</u> Hon. Andy Meyers 1809 Eldridge Road Sugar Land, TX 77478</p> <p>Tel: 281-494-9076 or 281-494-1199 Fax: 281-242-9060</p>
<p><u>Precinct 4 Commissioner</u> Hon. Larry Stanley Brazoria County Courthouse C/O County Clerk's Office 111 East Locust, Suite 200 Angleton, TX 77515</p> <p>Tel: 979-864-1529</p>	<p><u>Precinct 4 Commissioner</u> Hon. James Patterson 12919 Dairy Ashford Sugar Land, TX 77478</p> <p>Tel: 281-980-2235</p>

Can we get involved if we don't live in Fort Bend County? **YES!** In an e-mail interview with Phil Inderwiesen, the web master of the site *Light Ordinance Support Resource page at: http://people.txucom.net/tovinder/light_ord.htm* I asked him that very question. He responded "Yes, you may express your concern about light pollution around the George Observatory and support for the light ordinance to the Fort Bend County Commissioners Court, even though you do not reside in Fort Bend County. Just let them know that the George Observatory is important to you and you visit it as did 33,000 other people did last year. Only a short telephone call is needed to count". So, how about we all get after it and give them a call. Please visit Phil's site for more information on light pollution.

If the light ordinance is passed about the time you read this article; we will need to retake the night skies of Brazoria County. Their just waiting to see what Fort Bend County does with it. Can you see where we can go with this? It's called the "domino effect". One by one each county in our region could adopt a light ordinance.

Remember to be nice when contacting the Commissioners. We don't want to come across as a bunch of spoiled children that just want their way. Nevertheless, we do have legitimate concerns that need to be addressed. For example, if a Commissioner tells me that they are not going to support a light ordinance (and no one has yet). I will simply ask them to please reconsider their position and thank them for their time. The trick is not to get upset or discouraged. Personally, I will not volunteer information that might suggest that I am a member of an astronomy club or any other or-

ganized effort. We are truly representatives of our own interest, the interest of our families and even our community. Calling on Mondays are sometimes not a good ideal (because a lot of people are in a bad mood on Mondays). However, we can't all call on Friday. That would look like something more organized. Use your best judgment. Perhaps write a letter. **The worst thing to do is nothing.** Let us not be found guilty of committing the sin of complacency. So, please help.

On a final note thought; light pollution is the nocturnal beast that seeks to destroy the night sky, harm the environment, and drag us all off like hunted prey. Join with us and exemplify the fact that **WE WILL NOT GO SILENTLY INTO THE NIGHT!** Seize the night!

Minutes Of The January, 2004 FBAC Meeting

As you all probably already know, the main item of excitement from the meeting was that our club president and vice-president are simultaneously stepping down. Dennis Borgman and the surviving two club officers, Terry Hiserodt and myself, Joe Dellinger, are meeting Monday night to draw up a new slate of possible candidates for voting on at the next regularly scheduled club meeting. (Per my proposal made at the meeting, and seconded by Don Selle, and passed by voice vote without dissent from those present.) We already have more than one possibility for each of the two positions, so we're ahead of the usual situation. :-)

Sunday, February 8, there will be a "painting work party" at the George, to paint the East and West domes. If you're interested in participating, contact Barbara at gobserve@txucom.net.

The Ft. Bend County light ordinance is approaching a critical phase. Phone calls to the County Commissioners are vital. You can do this even if you aren't a resident of Ft. Bend county. Here is a web page for more information: http://people.txucom.net/tovinder/light_ord.htm

The BEST thing you can do is actually go physically present yourself at one of their weekly 1PM Tuesday public meetings. Several people are planning on going on Jan 27.

A "By laws" committee has been formed to look at the club's rules to see if any of them need clarifying. Members are Wes Whiddon, David Morrell, and David Jenkins.

Monday, Jan 19 was the TSP reservation deadline. Web site is www.texasstarparty.org.

Steve Goldberg is participating in a Muscular Dystrophy Association mall walk. If you're interested in sponsoring him or joining the walk, contact him at goldberg@infohiwy.net.

Feb 7 is the HAS banquet. Cost is \$26. If you're interested in joining, contact Judy Dye at judydye@aol.com.

Leonard Pattillo needs help waiting in line booking our meetings. To reserve the meeting room, someone from our club who lives in Sugarland has to wait in line starting WAY WAY EARLY in the morning. Non-Sugarland folks can probably hold places in line, though. Consider volunteering to help him in this unglamorous but vital task, especially if you are a Sugarland resident.

Don D'etremont gave the novice program on the Zodiac versus The Ecliptic. Larry Mitchell talked on the life and discoveries of William Herschel and his sister Caroline.

The treasurer reports that the club has approximately \$800 in its checking account, a another hundred or so in other accounts, and just received a check for \$500 from TSP (not counted in the \$800).

The research teams reported the naming of two more asteroids, "Svenders" and "Ruthanna". Below are the official citations. It was reported that each observatory is going to be limited to proposing one name per month. If you don't propose a name for 10 years, you lose the right to name it. So, we need to start regularly naming our club's asteroids, or some of them are going to go unnamed!!!

If you want to know more about the names "Ruthanna" and "Svenders" (and have a relatively fast internet connection), you can read more about them here:

<http://sepwww.stanford.edu/oldsep/joe/Astro/Named/Svenders.html>

<http://sepwww.stanford.edu/oldsep/joe/Astro/Named/Ruthanna.html>

Svenders 54820 Enders Robinson and Sven Treitel, Geophysicists (54820) Svenders = 2001 NV1

Discovered 2001 July 11 by Joe Dellinger and William G. Dillon at the George Observatory, Brazos Bend State Park, Needville, Texas. Named in honor of Enders Robinson (1930-) and Sven Treitel (1929-). In 1952, Robinson became the first to ever perform signal processing on a general-purpose digital computer. Robinson and Treitel later co-authored a landmark series of papers that founded the modern field of applied geophysical signal analysis.

Ruthanna 65363 Ruthanna Dellinger Powell, beloved aunt (65363) Ruthanna = 2002 PQ11

Discovered 2002 Aug. 7 by Joe Dellinger at the George Observatory, Brazos Bend State Park, Needville, Texas.

Named in memory of Ruthanna Dellinger Powell (1933-2003), beloved aunt of the discoverer. The youngest child of a large Indiana farm family, devoted lifelong wife of Tommy Powell, and mother of three, she brought peace, love, and joy to all around her, and faced life with quiet courage through tragedy and illness.

EAST DOME SCHEDULING KEITH RIVICH

The FBAC owns and operates an 18", fork mounted newtonian telescope which is housed at the George Observatory in Brazos Bend State Park. As part of our agreement with the Observatory we are responsible for supplying volunteers during nights of public use, which includes all Saturday nights and some Fridays. In return we are allowed full access to the scope for personal use. Included with the scope are a full set of Televue eyepieces and filters, several sets of star-charts and reference books, a computer with charting programs and a CCD camera. To have access to this equipment you **MUST** go through a short training program **AND** volunteer at least once each quarter. The training can take place on the same night that you volunteer.

During the dark-moon period, which runs from several days prior to third-quarter moon to several days past new-moon, use of the scope is scheduled due to demand. At all other times the scope is available on a first come basis. If you volunteer for a public night, even during the dark-moon period, then the scope is yours for the remainder of the night. To schedule a dark moon night I must be contacted no later than the full-moon prior to the next observing runs. Each month I will publish the current East-dome volunteer schedule, observing schedule, and research team schedule.

SATURDAY NIGHT SCHEDULE

See <http://users3.ev1.net/~keithrivich/astronomy/eastdome/calender.html> for updates

DARK MOON OBSERVING SCHEDULE

This part of the schedule will be continually updated and posted at <http://users3.ev1.net/~keithrivich/astronomy/eastdome/calender.html> For more information on how to schedule dark-moon nights call me at any of the numbers posted below.

Also available are the clubs 8" dobsonian reflector and the Solaris scope (for viewing sun w/ H Alpha filter).

The clubs Meade 8" and 10" LX-200 loaner scopes are available for use. For an update on availability please call me or go to

<http://users3.ev1.net/~keithrivich/astronomy/eastdome/page3.html>

For more information or to sign up as a volunteer please contact me at: HM 281-468-8491 or WK 713-771-6944 or e-mail at icgalaxies@cs.com

Did you know that on June 8, 2004, there will be a phenomenon that no one alive today has ever seen—a transit of the Sun by the planet Venus. For the first time since 1882, the face of Sol will show a tiny black dot as Venus glides across, taking a total time of 6 hours and 12 minutes to complete it's journey. The entire transit is visible from Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. For our part of the world, it will visible as the Sun rises. Unfortunately, the transit will already be in progress and viewable only in the eastern and central parts of North America.

Minor Planets and other such things

Mars, Mars, and more Mars. Even with the Red Planet vanishing into oblivion in our telescopes, all the news nowadays is coming out of that corner of the solar system. Spirit was doing fine for the first 18 days, sending back great pictures, maneuvering itself off the lander and onto the surface, and heading cross country...until disaster struck. Seems that NASA only ran simulations up to 9 days with Spirit not realizing that things wouldn't go well in the long term. So, just as it was getting ready to take a bite out of a local rock, the rover seized up and shut up. Now some pundits have coined a new phrase, "The Spirit is willing but the flash is weak" because it looks like the problem is associated with an overload of files in the flash memory. Things are beginning to improve, though, and it looks hopeful that they will be able to get Spirit back on it's feet and rolling again. It is now sending data with it's high gain antenna and JPL says it will be perfect again.

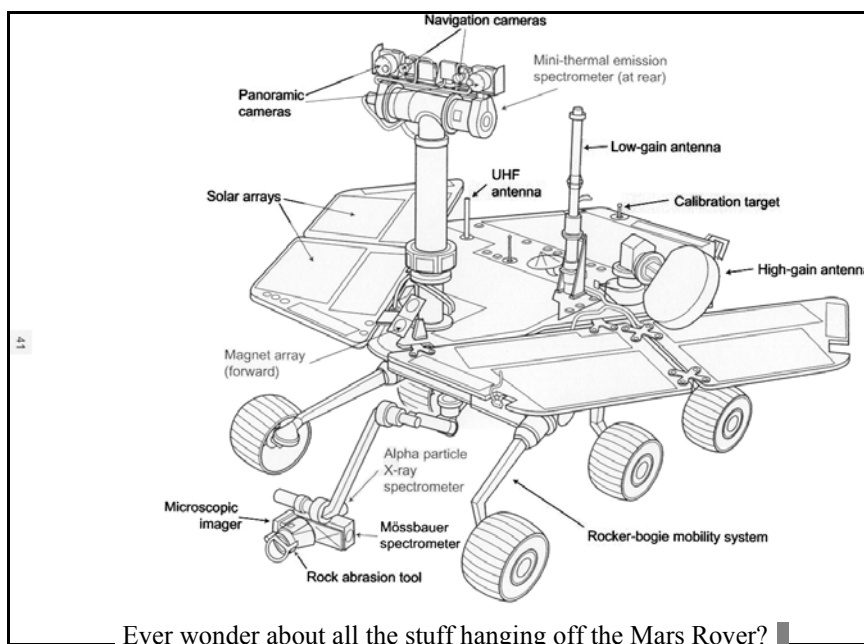
But wait, there's more news from Mars. Spirit's identical twin, Opportunity, made a spectacular landing in a bizarre and potentially fruitful spot on the other side of the planet. It's unfolded and ready to roll, maybe by late Saturday, January 31. The pictures it's sent back are spectacular.

News from the AAVSO is that one FBAC's outstanding members has been elected as President. Bill Dillon, who leads the FBAC asteroid search team, took the office last fall. Quoting Bill:

In a simple ceremony at AAVSO Headquarters this past October, Dan Kaiser passed me the historic gavel that once belonged to Harlow Shapely, a gavel that has opened many an AAVSO meeting. With it, came the Presidency, and trust and confidence of the Council which elected me. It is a great honor, and I will strive to show that trust and confidence was well placed.

Congratulations, Bill and we all wish you the best during your tenure.

The Hubble Telescope may be a dead duck. At least that's what NASA is saying. Administrator O'Keefe says all shuttle missions to the space telescope will be canceled and it will be left to die, eventually be de-orbited. But there has been a massive clamor from all astronomical quarters, amateur and professional with emails pouring in to STSI headquarters in Baltimore. Now Senator Barbara Mikulski has entered the scene with a plea to keep Hubble going. It's possible that NASA may relent on their decision. We'll see as things develop.



Ever wonder about all the stuff hanging off the Mars Rover?

The Termite Syndrome: An expression of editorial opinion

A while back, as we were beginning to decorate our home for Christmas, I bent down to do something or another and bonked my head on the window sill behind where we had placed our tree. When I did, it made a strange sound, kind of like it was hollow. I know that window sills aren't supposed to sound like that, so I figured it was either my head (I leave it to the reader to determine if my head is bereft of things internal) or there was something different about this particular window sill.

After some well placed knuckle knocks on the window, I determined that there was indeed something strange going on. When I pressed my fingers against one particularly bad sounding spot, they went straight through the wood. The only thing holding the sill together was paint. A little further investigation showed that we were suffering from the scourge of Houston homeowners: termites.

As many of you know from direct experience or if you read the first page in this newsletter, the last few weeks have been a trying time in the life of our club. Half our leadership team has resigned from office for a variety of reasons relating to personal life situations and unspecified stress directed at them from inside the organization.

By now, it's OK to ask yourself where this is headed. Well, sometimes I lay awake at night, my mind racing (usually in first gear—lots of noise but very little speed) with all the events that are part of daily living. And sometimes I have an epiphany. Not a divine one, mind you, just a plain old thought. This is what I came up with.

Just like my house, organizations can have termites. Of course, they aren't the real live, wood chewing, foundation crawling, burrowing critters we find around the house. They're kind of virtual termites. They exist only in our minds and attitudes.

If you know anything about these insects, you know they're sometimes pretty hard to spot. You can have them and not know it. And even after you find out you've got them, they're hard to get rid of. They can chew up half your house without blinking an eye—or whatever visual device they use to get around the world.

So, I figured it was time to do some checking on the different kinds of virtual termites extant in modern society. After a quick trip to the world's most powerful reference source, the internet, I found that a whole slew of these things are crawling around, so to speak. Virtual species abound and I'd like to describe a few of the ones I ran across.

The hypocritical termite: This species deludes itself into thinking it has virtues it doesn't really possess. It's usually one of the first to complain about persecution but is able to hand out plenty on its own.

The backbiting termite: Mean and spiteful, this one can cause lots of pain and anguish.

The email/listserver termite: Mainly found lurking in the background of news and discussion groups, it only surfaces long enough to launch a series of complaints or invectives.

The lackadaisical termite: These guys are only there for the show. Ask one of them for help, and they'll disappear into the woodwork.

The self-centered termite: Me, me, me, me, me.

The "I can do it all by myself" termite: A subspecies of me, me, me, me.

The "I have my own agenda" termite: Comes to a meeting with one thing on it's plate—how to get what's good for number one.

The "It'll never work" termite: No matter what it is, it's not a good idea. This species is usually against most everything.

The "It wasn't my idea" termite: Never shows up with suggestions about anything but is always around to show you how bad things really are. A subspecies of "It'll Never Work".

The obfuscating termite: Tries to muddy the water as much as possible. This tactic is also used to cover tracks and confuse others.

The flatulent termite: Full of hot air but unlike the balloon, never gets off the ground.

There are others but those are the most virulent species. It's unfortunate that we all sometimes suffer from the termite syndrome. I can personally identify with a few of them myself. But here's the real problem. If an organization becomes infested, it might be like my window sill. Held together only with a thin veneer of paint. On the surface things look good but underneath the foundation and supporting structure are riddled, weakened, and ready to collapse.

Since Derek and Cynthia announced their intent to step down from office, a lot of talk has flowed back and forth across cyberspace. Lots of people have expressed opinions, both pro and con, about how things are going in FBAC. We have to remember, though, that we all have a stake in our club. It's not a sin to oppose or disagree but discordant and uncooperative actions belie the spirit of FBAC. It may be time to regroup. Or maybe we just need to call in the exterminator.

--Wes Whiddon

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*Dedicated to the acquisition
and dissemination of
information pertaining to the
science of astronomy*

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We're On The Web
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You are invited to submit your opinions for inclusion on this page. Please be thoughtful and respectful of others in your comments. Rants will not be published. All articles should be 450 words or less and are subject to editing for clarity and length before publication. Please submit in Word format to:
stargazer411@earthlink.net

The Fort Bend Astronomy Club meets on the third Friday of every month except for those months when special meetings are called. The next regular meeting will be at 7:30 PM on February 20, 2004 at the First Colony Conference Center, 3232 Austin Parkway, Sugar Land, TX. Dues are \$30/year for the first member, \$5 per additional household member. Student dues are \$15/year.

The **Houston Astronomical Society** meets the first Friday of the month in room 117 of the University of Houston Research Building. The novice program begins at 7:00 PM and main meeting at 8:00 PM.

For the **Johnson Space Center Club**, refer to the JSCAS web site for meeting times and sites. There is a link on the FBAC web site.

North Houston Astronomy Club meets on the 4th Friday of the month at Kingwood College. The meeting starts at 6:45 PM, main meeting at 7:30 PM.

HELP!

Over the past several months that I've been editing the Observer, I've given some thought to how the newsletter should be structured and what it should contain. You've probably noticed that it's a little different each month and that has actually been by design. You may have also noticed that a good deal of the material is written by three persons, me, myself, and I.

This isn't to say that others don't contribute. Leonard Pattillo has certainly sent in his share of good articles. Dennis Borgman's article on amateur telescope making made three editions, as did Joe Dellinger's "Comet Chaser". But in the long haul, it falls on the editor to correct the grammar (as much as I can), compose the articles, get them arranged in the proper order, and print the newsletter at least 25 times to check all the aforementioned stuff. Then it has to be taken to Office Depot, copied a zillion times, folded, stamped with labels and postage, and mailed.

So when I have to write half the articles, it makes for a very long week before publication. I can truthfully say that it takes at least 20-30 hours or longer to put this thing together. I can also say that I enjoy every minute of it except for the aching back muscles from being hunched over a keyboard for hours on end.

Bottom line: I need help. Some of you can write. I know this from seeing all the stuff that lands in my email inbox labeled "FBAC Mail". Why not put some of that keyboard tapping to good use? I would like to start regular columns in the Observer. One for deep sky, one for solar system, and a novice column would be nice. I also would like to see human interest and personal articles. You don't have to be Ernest Hemingway. Simple stuff is sometimes the best and I'm good at correcting grammar—except my own—and syntax.

So, come on, guys and gals, send me some goodies. Or you might someday find these pages bare as a baby's butt.

—Wes Whiddon