

THE FBAC OBSERVER

MAY, 2003 VOL 17, NO. 5

Fort Bend Astronomy Club, P.O. Box 942, Stafford, TX 77497-0942

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MAY!

Thursday, May 1—New Moon at 7:15 a.m. CDT. The most distant Moon of the year from Earth, 262,605 miles or 406,529 km.

Monday, May 5—Autumnal equinox for the planet Mars' northern hemisphere, and spring for its southern hemisphere. Mars' south polar cap is near its maximum extent, and through a telescope appears as a bright spot near the south limb of Mars' disk. Mars southern pole is tipped 17° toward Earth, and is in good view.

Wednesday, May 7—Mercury is at inferior conjunction. The Mercury transit across the solar disc will not be visible in our area.

Thursday, May 8—The Moon is approaching First Quarter (3:11 a.m. on the 9th). Jupiter is 20° west of Regulus and is low in the WSW.

Sunday, May 11—Mars is in gibbous phase, almost 87% full all month. Mars now reaches its least phase of the current apparition, which lasts from September 2002 until July 2004.

Monday, May 12—Jupiter and Saturn are 43° apart in mid-May, their least separation until mid-September 2018. That's 27 months before their next conjunction, on December 21, 2020 when they will appear to be just 0.1° apart.

Thursday, May 15—Lunar Eclipse only partially visible from our area.

FRIDAY, MAY 16—**FBAC MEETING AT ELDRIDGE ROAD CENTER. POT LUCK DINNER, SO BRING YOUR FAVORITE. TELESCOPE BUILDING, AND A SWAP FEST. BRING YOUR NO LONGER NEEDED ASTRO STUFF.** Full Moon 10:36 p.m. CDT, known as Planting Moon or Milk Moon.

Wednesday, May 21—Mars is in Capricornus. Look early in the morning before sunrise.

Thursday, May 22—The Moon is in Last Quarter at 7:02 p.m.

Tuesday, May 27—40 minutes before sunrise, look for a near paring of Venus and Mercury that are 1.3° apart.

Friday, May 30—In the predawn sky, use your binoculars to spot 4th mag. Mars in Capricornus.

Saturday, May 31—New Moon at 1120 p.m. CDT

At the next New Moon, May 30-31, there'll be Annular Solar Eclipse. Unfortunately it will not be visible here in our area, but hop on a Jet and go to Great Britain, where it will be visible.

DON'T FORGET THE TELESCOPE WORK SHOP AND SWAP MEET AND GOOD FOOD AT THE FBAC MAY 16 MEETING. SEE YOU THERE. UNFORTUATELY I WILL BE IN DAYTON, OHIO—SO HAVE FUN....LP

More Random Thoughts from the President

On The Eve Of TSP

This year will be my fourth trip to the great star in the western sky, commonly known as TSP. And it's been a nail biter all the way.

I say that because, during the past year or so, a half-dozen trips went down the toilet at the last minute. We've scrubbed two to Hawaii, one to Leakey, and at least two to San Antonio. I didn't even try to go to Las Vegas for the annual broadcasters convention and, as Martha Stewart says, it's a good thing because I'd have been coughing my lungs out the whole time I was there. (Actually she just says the "it's a good thing" part. No mention of lungs.)

So, until yesterday, it was looking pretty bleak for TSP because Ellie was going through tests to determine if she had a problem with the human body's most important organ—her heart. On Wednesday she had one of those "get on the tread mill, walk real fast, and let us inject you with radioactive isotopes" tests. That afternoon she got a call from the doctor's office saying the test was abnormal and he wanted to see her on Thursday. This brought on more chest pains and a night of fret and worry. Her appointment finally arrived and guess what? The problem was a glitch in the EKG but the images of her heart were fine. Thirty six hours of teeth gnashing for nothing. Diagnosis: Stress and acid reflux. So after a couple of weeks of being poked, prodded, electroded, ultra-sounded, and irradiated, she and I both breathed a huge sigh of relief as we left the hospital. Texas Star Party here we come. But there is one problem. Ellie glows in the dark. Hmm...if I can just find a big piece of red plastic somewhere.

Get Out The Picnic Basket

If you've been coming to meetings for the past several months, you know we're meeting in the club house at Eldridge Road Park. I personally like the meeting place but the room is a tad small. So next month, we are going to expand. Leonard Pattillo made arrangements for us to use the pavilion behind the building for the evening and, instead of a formal meeting, we will gorge ourselves on food. And if you are inclined, you can bring all those old eyepieces, mirrors, and other assorted junk you stashed in the closet back in the last century and we will have a swap fest. There's also going to be a telescope building class. Derek Newton and Dennis Borgman will demonstrate how fast they can put an 8" dob together. There's a caveat with this, though. Derek has a primary mirror and that's about all. We need other stuff to finish the project. If someone has a secondary, a secondary holder, and a spider they would like to donate, please contact Derek. We also need a focuser. Please try to help out because a deserving club member will be the recipient of this scope when it's finished. We'll have more as meeting time draws nigh.

Apples, LCD Projectors, and Dr. Freeman

Since I wasn't at the last meeting (see the third paragraph above for my reason), I missed Dr. Freeman's talk. But so did everybody else. Seems that our LCD projector didn't like his Apple Power Book and he had to scrap his presentation. But that's only a temporary thing. We will have him back in July. By the way, many thanks to Derek for standing in for me. And to all who do their part by helping with setting up and tearing down chairs and tables.

Its Time to Go

TSP beckons and there are many boxes to load. Oh, and one other thing. Will all club members please refrain from purchasing new telescopes or even eyepieces for the next week? It would be nice to have clear skies for a change.

Wes Whiddon

FBAC MEETING FRIDAY, MAY 16 ELDRIDGE ROAD CENTER

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.

MAY SATURDAY NIGHT SCHEDULE

MAY 3	DILLON / OPEN / OPEN
MAY 10	MACKAY / OPEN / OPEN
MAY 17	OPEN / OPEN / OPEN
MAY 24	HISERODT / OPEN / OPEN
MAY 31	OPEN / OPEN / OPEN

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

Not that deep south anymore

I ran out of targets. I mean, the southern reaches in May are rather devoid of deep-sky targets, save for absolute beauties like Omega Centauri and NGC 5128, and I (sort of) covered those last year. I had of course a go at them and will gladly report them here but to look at new objects, we'll have to look higher, at least a bit.

The Centaurus riches

To get an idea on how **Omega Centauri** is different to any other globular cluster in the sky, let's just say that I stumbled on it by error, trying to slew from one place to another at the finder, and suddenly this HUGE patch of light appeared. While it is not unusual to spot globulars through the finder, Omega Centauri (13h26.8m, -47°29') does not show up like any other one. It is, simply said, way bigger, way brighter than any other, and shows up easily with the naked eye even through so-so skies as a blurred star on our southern horizon. In my lowest power (37x, new toy, Plössl 55mm from televue...can't help it) the cluster practically fills the field of view and looks clearly mottled (the cluster being a loose one). Outright resolution is attained with any subsequent power I used (58x, 78x, 145x), the highest power resolving it to the core, which looks distinctly asymmetrical.

NGC 5128 (13h25.5m, -43°01') is a must of any coffee table book on astronomy, thanks to a huge band of dust crossing in front of what is one of the closest active galaxies : Centaurus A ; it is listed as a very respectable seventh magnitude, but to me it has always proven elusive, difficult and although I had logged it I was still not totally sure I had actually seen it. Well, no more. At 38x, the galaxy is distinctly noticeable as a weak patch of light very near an 9th magnitude star. When zooming in a bit (best view at 58x), averted vision will fleetingly but definitely reveal the dark dust lane (in fact what is clearly revealed is the « weaker » side of the galaxy nucleus behind), which appeared to me to run a broadly east-west direction. The whole thing is quite weak for its listed magnitude, appearing as a very large object (18'x20', or a third of the full moon's area), but it's there and visible.

Last year I also spoke highly of NGC 4945 near ξ Centauri. Well, I shouldn't have. While I was able to see it in a 3,5 inch from Australia, the 8-inch failed to show it to me this time. Seems like this large edge-on galaxy needs nothing less than perfect skies to be grasped from here. I didn't have that, and so...

Some other pretty sights

While not as enthralling as the preceding showpieces, there is a host of galaxies that the southern may skies offer. Here's a very incomplete (and somewhat biased by my logbook) sample of what's in there. The good thing with galaxies is that you can always find one close to where you're at (except in the milky way, but in the milky way you do not usually lack targets).

One galaxy that is easy to star hop to is **NGC 5102 (13h22m, -36°38')**. Center ι Centauri (one of the 2 bright stars at the top of the Centaur's figure) and you're done : the galaxy is only a quarter of a degree away, and forms a nice rectangle triangle with Iota and a eight magnitude star. Now here's a small, compact galaxy that packs its 9th magnitude into a 9x4 area. Furthermore, its nucleus is very bright. At 38x, the galaxy appears quasi-stellar, and only averted vision shows a hint of nebulosity. 58x reveals this galaxy as an elongated patch embedding a really bright core, which invites for power. 145x all but washes out the external part of the galaxy and shows the core only. This object is interesting to look at, would warrant some more careful observation (structure ?) and is probably neglected only for being uncomfortably close to a bright star.

We'll wrap up with another deceptive legend of the skies. Higher up in Corvus lies **the antennae**, or ring-tail galaxies, that have become famous since Hubble showed this colliding pair's central regions bursting with star formation. But common knowledge has it that it is a faint, uninteresting object to look at with an amateur scope. **NGC 4038-9 (12h01.9m, -18°52')** is listed as a 3'x2' mag. 10.7 galaxy. My limit at Brazos Bend being about mag. 11.5 for galaxies this size, I was not expecting much more than to be able to see it, but I was wrong. The star-hop is not too difficult, locate 31 Crt (actually within Corvus border) a mag. 5.3 star forming a regular triangle with γ and ϵ Crv as your home base, and then venture north a little less than 1° (the trail being signposted by two faint stars) and you're there. The ring-tail is clearly visible at 38x as a small patch of light. The colliding pair is best seen with my setting at 60 to 80 power, which will definitely reveal that it does look odd, with one side definitely bended, warped, « not right ». Very close lies another galaxy that is more challenging, **NGC 4027 (11h59.5m,-19°16')**, right in the middle between 31 Crt and a 7th mag. field star. It will show best at around 80x as a weak elongated patch of light and will test your averted vision skills, although its listed magnitude of 11.6 seems a bit severe to me. Nothing to go for halfway through the skies but since it was so close...

Pierre Dessemontet

FBAC OFFICERS & OTHER CLUBS

FORT BEND ASTRONOMY CLUB

The next meeting will be Friday, May 16 at Eldridge Road Park Community Center, 2511 Eldridge road. The time is 7:15 p.m. Dues are \$30/ year for the first member of a household, \$5 for each additional member at the same address, \$15 for students.

HOUSTON ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

The HAS meets the first Friday of the month in room 117 of the University Of Houston Research building. The Novice program begins at 7:00 and the main meeting at 8:00.

JOHNSON SPACE CENTER ASTRONOMICAL SOCIETY

Refer to the JSCAS web site for meeting sites. There is a link on the FBAC web site.

NORTH HOUSTON ASTRONOMY CLUB

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

FBAC OFFICERS AND PHONE NUMBERS

President: Wes Whiddon	265-7614	Newsletter Editor: Leonard Pattillo	980-1175
Vice-President Derek Newton	313-1765	Librarian: Alec Cruz	713-702-9069
Treasurer: Terry Hiserodt	495-4012	George Observatory	242-3055
Secretary: Joe Dellinger	531-5417	Membership Chairman: John Harrison	835-0577
Alcor: Tracy Knauss	(409)-798-7917	Refreshments: Jack McKaye, Jayne Lambert	
East Dome Cord. Keith Rivich (K2)	468-8491	FBAC loaner scopes: Keith Rivich	468-8491

All phone numbers A/C 281 unless otherwise indicated.

FBAC HOME PAGE: <http://www.fbac.org>

Derek led the meeting in the absence of our president.

Keith Rivich did the novice program, on the visual classification of Galaxies, Open Clusters, and Globular Clusters.

Our scheduled speaker was unable to present due to computer-projector incompatibilities, so Don d'Entremont presented "what's up in the summer sky". Don't forget the total lunar eclipse in May!

Terry Hiserodt gave the treasurer's report, \$750 in checking, basically 0 in savings, and \$170 in petty cash.

We will be changing the locks on the E-dome soon. Terry will be posting a list of all the names of people who will get the new combination. If you think you should be on the list and aren't, talk to him.

Star party on the 25th, organized by Leonard, at Colony Bend.

Leonard is also interested in putting together a Krause springs trip after labor day sometime. K2 is trying to put together another Clearwater ranch trip, possibly on the weekend of Sept 25.

The A-team is now up to 205 asteroids. One of the recent discoveries, 2003 FL42, appears to be a Trojan (following Jupiter's orbit 60 degrees ahead of Jupiter).

The GRB team imaged a super-bright GRB twice, although not when it was still super bright, but after it had faded a bit.

Remember next month we are having a special outside meeting... bring food to share and junk / good stuff to sell / swap!

Joe Dellinger