

AURORA

On the Road to the Okie-Tex Star Party by Dan Taylor

The promise of dark pristine skies has been known to move us astronomers to mental salivating. Yet in today's civilized world getting away on a trip of the breadth of this sort can be a logistical nightmare. Unbelievably, not only did I actually put together a week and a half of time off work, I coordinated with Carol, my wife, so that I could set out for the Okie-Tex Star Party. Wow! Dana Willis agreed to travel there too, comfortably I might add in his well stocked motor home.

Aside from the usual traveling appendages, preparing observationally for just such a trip is crucial to its success, or so one would have thought. I have been collecting observing goals for some time. Goodies such as the RASC challenge list, palomar globulars, the planetary GJJC1 in M22, revisit Pease 1 in M15, and the crab nebula pulsar to name but a few. Charts and lists were made to facilitate the plan. In the back of my mind little alarms were sounding off though. You see it seems that too often when an observing session is planned, fate conspires to spoil these very same efforts.

Early on September 27, rousing before the roosters, we motored off while in the grasp of a gentle rain. I had some apprehension about U.S. Customs in light of redoubled border security. Can you imagine, there we were, rolling up to the customs booth on the U.S. side of the Ambassador bridge. Stopped, we heard in stern tones and were beheld by wary eyes, "What is the purpose of your visit? Reply: "Ahem, ahem, ahem, and so forth". "I see, thank you very much enjoy your stay". That's it! So off we went.

Two days later with our shadows on our backs, Camp Billy Joe lay before us. It is a religious camp that is set into a box canyon, along the beautiful countryside of the Oklahoma panhandle. The geology deserves some explaining so more on the geology shortly. The camping/observing field covers about 10 acres and is bisected by the camp road which leads up to the hall and cabin complex. Parked and unencumbered with the usual camp trappings, we strolled toward the main cabin. This is where Dana and I encountered our first little surprise, meeting one of the wee denizens - a desert tarantula. Apparently, as we were told, these arachnids are randy lads, making for the canyon walls where the girls await to be impressed. Apparently it works. He seemed standoffish and things being what they were, we obliged him.

I can't say enough about the friendliness of all the participants. This was exhibited from the day we arrived until the morning of our departure. In Oklahoma or at least at the Okie-Tex it apparently is customary to introduce oneself by first name only. That took a little getting use to. I was able to meet many, many people from far and wide in the U.S. The natural unpretentiousness was a real treat and definitely enhanced this partygoer's experience.

The Okie-Tex sports most of the usual star party trappings such as observing contests, photo contests, talks and door prizes. It was over the latter that Dana scored a win by taking away a gift certificate donated by Kendrick Astro Instruments.

The talks were all well done. We even had Peter Ceravolo present a talk on his new software program DeskTop Universe. Briefly he and his team procure CCD images and use them as the basis for a chart/planetarium type program.

Observing report: Below is a synopsis of the nasty details:

Saturday - Sucker holes, both large and small (for the eclectic sucker hole observer). But the show stopper could be seen just west of Antares in a small section of the mighty Milky Way. This is the naked eye presentation of the pipe nebula. Of which I routinely see a variation that I fancy as a galloping horse. For the first time since the Texas Star Party in 1992, it was a naked eye spectacle for me - awesome! However curious as it may seem, between these pesky clouds the milky way was brighter that night than it was all week.

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Calendar of Events

Our next meeting...

Tuesday, January 21, 2003
8:00 p.m.
at
St. Stephen's Church
Howard Road, 1.4 kms. south of
Hwy # 3

Main Speaker...

Milica Rakic

Topic...

"The Aurora"

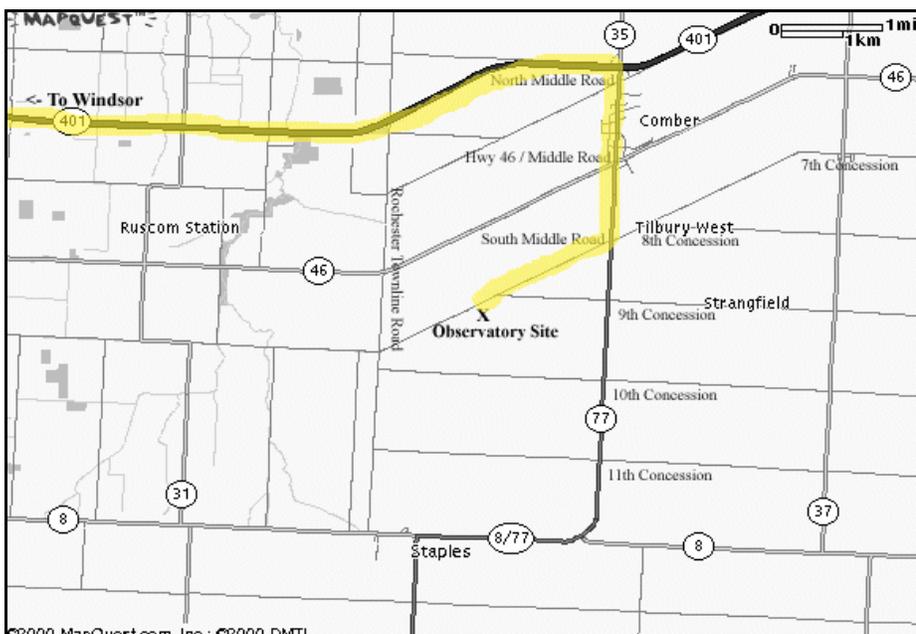
Activities...

Earth: The Earth will reach perihelion (closest distance to the Sun) at midnight on January 3rd/4th.

Jupiter's Moons: We are now in a period of a number of double shadow transits so look at page 205 of your Observer's Handbook for details. January has the following dates with favourable times for observers in our area: 1st, 7th, 8th, 14th, 16th, 21st and 24th.

Council Meeting: Our next council meeting will be held on Tuesday February 11th at 7:30 p.m. at Steve Mastellotto's house.

February Meeting: A reminder that our February meeting will not be on the 3rd Tuesday but will take place on Tuesday February 25th to accommodate our National President Rajiv Gupta's schedule.



Hallam Observatory Site

At left is a map showing the Comber area and it includes the major highways (401, 77, 8 and 46) that are in the area of the observatory. I "highlighted" the most direct route from Windsor on this map which is to take 401 East to Highway 77 South to South Middle Road. While on South Middle Road you will cross some railroad tracks (they just removed the tracks) and just after the barely discernable point where Concession 9 joins it you will find the observatory site on the South side of the road. If you hit the Rochester Townline Road (i.e. you come to a stop sign and have to turn left or right) you have gone too far. On most clear nights someone is usually out there observing but if it happens to be a clear, moonless, weekend night you should have many observing buddies.

Submissions

Aurora is published monthly except for August. The September, November, January, March, May and July issues are full newsletters (usually 6 pages) with a number of member submitted articles. The October, December, February, April and June issues are short flyers (2 pages) with one short article. Submitted articles can be of any length from a paragraph to multiple pages. I can scan pictures and/or diagrams (both prints and film) to support your article and the originals will be returned to you.

Submission deadline is the 1st of the month. I will accept Emails at the address below, floppy disks, or written submissions.

Editor: Steve Mastellotto

Email: mmastellotto@cogeco.ca

Membership

The Windsor Centre of The Royal Astronomical Society of Canada meets on the 3rd Tuesday of every month (except July and August) at St. Stephen's church. In addition to regular meetings the centre hosts a number of observing nights, a picnic and a December social. Members receive a copy of the Observer's Handbook, the RASC Journal, a subscription to SkyNews magazine and access to the Centre's library and telescopes.

Annual Membership Fees are Regular - \$44.00, Youth - \$27.50 and Life - \$880.00.

Contact Ken Garber at (519) 966-3478 or visit our website at: www.mnsi.net/~rasc for more information.

On the Road to the Okie-Tex Star Party (continued)

(Continued from page 1)

Sunday/Monday - Coupled together because they were so alike. In a word -windy. Too windy, turning your scope into a weather vane windy or blowing your scope over windy, a real pain in the #\$\$%@ windy, skies so clear but I can't let go of my scope to check my charts windy. Rocks and eyepieces become substitute paper weights an on and on. Can you imagine seeing these 7th magnitude skies and NOT observing. The frustration was almost unimaginable!

Tuesday/Wednesday - A common theme here too- clouds. Wednesday's variation included rain. Fortunately Dana's motor home provided for diversions in comfort i.e. movies! With respect to the crappy weather, and to heal our low spirits we broke open the "grog" and made the best of it.

Thursday - Clear!! Although partly windy, partly good seeing, and partly lousy seeing that is, real lousy.

Friday - This is where I sort of lose track. You see although it was clear, once again seeing was distressingly poor.

Saturday - Winds and seeing problems were back. This time variable cloudiness was an alternative too.

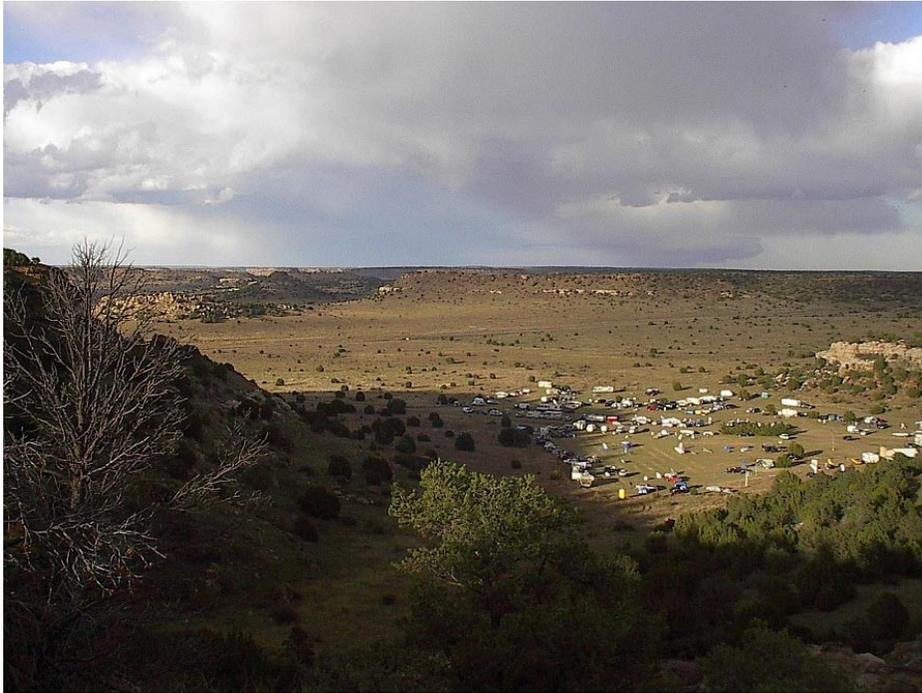
Dana summed it up rather succinctly "we had maybe six hours of clear, steady seeing". To be fair, this wasn't a normal week all over North America what with hurricane Lily mucking things up. The regulars, party officials, and even locals, assured us that this was not typical panhandle fall weather either. Would I go back-you bet. However I would be more cautious about pre-observing planning!

The geology of the Kenton area is fascinating. It was once part of the short grass prairie that is until a local volcano deposited a layer of basalt, capping the sandstone strata. Erosion has worked artistic wonders, creating dramatic canyons and bluffs, and nifty rock pillars too. Kenton is rather infamous for dinosaur digs. There are several tracts of dinoprints about the area.

There is a gentle subtlety to the land that is insidious. I thoroughly enjoyed walks atop the bluffs, finding it most contemplative. It can enchant you with its wide open skies and dramatic rock walls and if you are willing, it speaks to your soul. Indeed the spirit of this old west panorama transcends time and makes it easy to imagine oneself amid the glories of the old west. In fact, much old west history was played out in this region, as the Santa

Fe Trail passes nearby.

Did we meet any of our observing goals? A resounding yes! Some neat independent discoveries were uncovered along the way too. Goals met included the aforementioned planetary nebula GJC 1 in M22, several RASC challenge objects, and two palomar globulars are but a brief sampling. Among the missed object were RASC challenge object number 29, Abel 1656, a galaxy cluster in Corona borealis, and Maffei 1 in Cassiopeia. They were both piteous victims of the fickle seeing. Dana had considerable success as he now is digitally encoder enabled. He bagged a whopping 75 Herschel objects! We wondered if the skies were more generous just how many Dana could have notched.



Overview of the Okie-Tex Star Party camping and observing fields. Photo by Dan Taylor.

Walking the field at night, vicariously enjoying observing objectives of others is a star party pleasure. In having done this over the years certain trends can readily be seen. Gone are the SCT multitudes, replaced today by dobsonian hoards and if you will, covering a rainbow of variations on the theme. At the Okie-Tex not only do dobs rule, a majority utilize some form of digital setting circles. The future of star hopping is clear, it is to be a quaint and old fashioned practice much like 19th century conventions are viewed today.

Independent deep sky discovery of the trip was the dark nebula, b168 in Cygnus. Does not ring a bell? If you are ever under such pristine skies scanning with bino's say 10x50's a smallish distance above the North America nebula, this little dark streak of a nebula will shock you at just how dark, inky dark it is. The wow factor is still fresh in my mind!

My crowning achievement however had to do with a simple star in Andromeda. Working with Aaron Price at the AAVSO, I selected a battery of stars to challenge the limit of light gathering power of my scope. Beset with trials and tribulation of capricious weather, I manage to positively ID a magnitude 17.2 star on the v402 Andromedae chart. This is the faintest star I have ever seen. Indeed it is among the very faintest stars ever reported to the AAVSO! Yet through a fortunate coincidence of circumstance I was viewing with Carl's (remember the first name thing) 24 inch Dob while seeing and transparency were cooperative. Remarkably a magnitude 17.8 star was seen just scintillating at the edge of visibility.

Revenue	
Membership Fees	\$ 1,655.64
Associate Fees	17.50
Life Member Grant (2)	35.20
Donations	11,795.05
Fundraising	2,546.41
Educational Activities	0.00
Interest and Dividends	1.31
Handbooks	0.00
Calendars	141.50
Beginner's Observing Guide	0.00
Advertising	0.00
General Assembly	0.00
Miscellaneous	205.00
Sky & Telescope	(63.00)
Total Revenue	\$16,334.61

Expenditures	
Library	\$ 60.00
Meetings	500.00
Newsletter	260.61
Annual Dinner	0.00
General Assembly	0.00
Equipment & Supplies	0.00
Office Administration	0.00
General Expense	12.00
Educational Activities	0.00
Insurance	188.00
Awards and Donations	0.00
Observatory/Telescopes	13,580.56
Miscellaneous	240.68
Total Expenditures	\$14,841.85

Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ 1,492.76
Balance last Year (2001)	\$ 4,815.53
Balance to the end of this Year (2002)	\$ 6,308.29

Elected Officers

President	Randy Groundwater
1st Vice-President	Steve Mastellotto
2nd Vice-President	Robin Smallwood
Treasurer	Ken Garber
Secretary	Joady Ulrich
National Council Rep.	John Welsh

Councilors

Paul Preney	Susan Sawyer-Beaulieu
Henry Lee	Steve Pellarin
Peter Bondy	Rev. Harry Brydon
Tom Sharron	Ken Roung

Appointed Officers

Honorary President	Dr. William Baylis
Past-President	Susan Sawyer-Beaulieu
Librarian	Tom Sharron
Recording Secretary	Dave Panton
Public Education Director	Randy Groundwater
Public Relations Director	Robin Smallwood
Newsletter Editor	Steve Mastellotto
Assistant Newsletter Editor	Paul Preney
Director of Observing	Steve Pellarin
Assistant D. of O.	Robin Smallwood
Alternate Council Rep.	
Webmaster	Steve Mastellotto

For Sale

The following telescope components are for sale: 10" f/6 Coulter mirror, mirror cell with matching secondary mirror, spider and diagonal holder, and focuser. Everything is in great condition. Asking \$500.00. Call Bob Penketh at 944-7753 or email at bobnjoy@mnsi.net

Celestar 8 with all the accessories, case, scope and tripod. It is worth about \$2,500. I am asking \$1,500. Call Nicole Renaud at 251-4613 or email at nickyrenaud@sympatico.ca

8 inch telescope on an equatorial mount with enhanced coatings on custom mirrors, JMI focuser, telrad and remote power supply. Asking \$1,300. Call Ken Roung at 738-3479 or email at kenroung@yahoo.com

A Message from the President

As I write this in the late afternoon on the final day of 2002, a magenta sunset blankets the western horizon, providing a striking contrast to the cold, deep blue of a sky struggling to clear itself of cloud and haze. Alas, we've spent much of the last few weeks staring into overcast skies, rather than savouring starlight.

Let's hope we're spared a few clear nights soon, that we can dust off our neglected telescopes and point them skyward once again.

Perhaps this will happen in time to see some of the very interesting mutual events currently underway with Jupiter, rising in the east these evenings. As we cross through the plane of the orbits of Jove's Galilean moons, there have been a few opportunities to see some double transits. Opportunities, that is, had we been somewhere clear! These will continue into the opening weeks of 2003, before the cycle ends. Surely we'll have at least *one* good night?

Al DesRosiers spent a few days at Hallam Observatory in December. His good work resulted in some nice touches and improvements in the dome room. He applied sealer to the concrete floor, installed pull-chains to the interior lighting, and cleaned and lubricated the dome to the point that it moves and functions like new.

If you have code access to the observatory, you'll notice that there is now a record book as well as an event calendar in the warm room. The event calendar records special nights such as guest school groups, etc. There are five such evenings already scheduled for the month of February. As for the record book, all members should sign in whenever they use the facility, indicating the date, time, names of those in their party, as well as any pertinent comments.

Looking ahead in 2003, we have not one but *two* total lunar eclipses (May and November), as well as a late summer perihelic opposition of Mars, the likes of which not rivaled in thousands of years.

A Happy New Year to all the members of the RASC Windsor Centre!

Randy Groundwater

UNIVERSAL SCIENCE

Windsor's Astronomy And More Store

New Hours! Please call ahead...

Friday 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. and Saturday 10:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m.

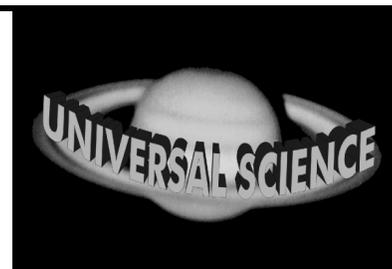
New - \$899.00 Awesome Viewing. 10" Dobsonian by SKYWATCHER, f4.7, tension central balance system, pyrex mirror, 2" focuser, 2" 28mm Erfle eyepiece and 9x50 finder

8" Skywatcher DOB \$599.00

6" Skywatcher DOB \$399.00

Used Meade Pictor autoguider and Meade autofocuser. Contact Robin for email address of current owner.

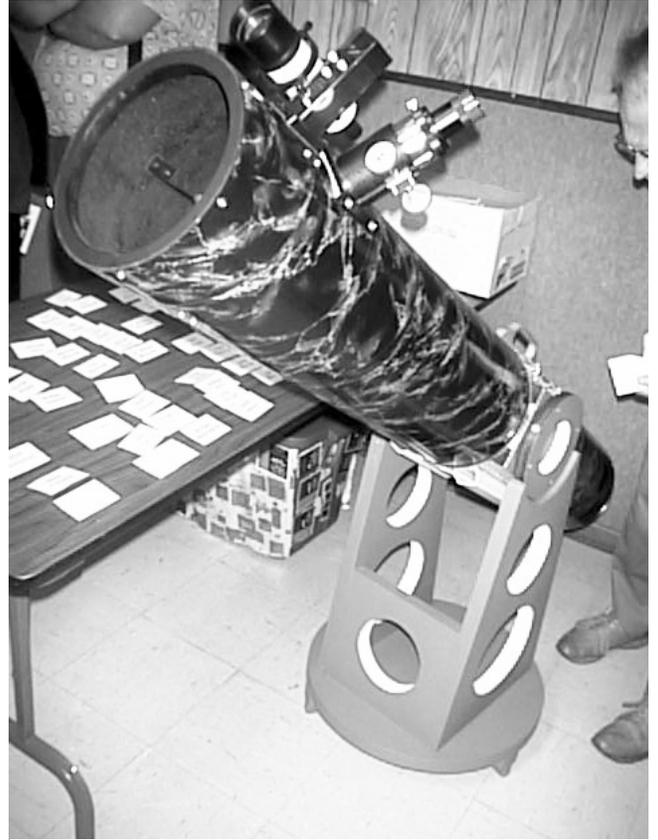
**Contact Robin Smallwood
Telephone: (519) 967-1655
Email: unisci@sympatico.ca**



Recent Photos



On the night of the December Social President Randy Groundwater presented Al DesRosiers with the Centre's "Certificate of Merit Award" with members of the Awards Committee Joady Ulrich and Paul Preney looking on. Photo by Rod Clark.



Dave Panton presented the club with his latest creation at the November General Meeting. Dave converted the old Gus Nyberg telescope into this very lightweight and portable 8" dobsonian style reflector. Members in attendance at the meeting got a chance to share in the "first light" views through the telescope by observing the penumbral lunar eclipse.



On the morning of December 1 Dave Williamson caught the conjunction of the Moon, Mars and Venus with his new Olympus C5050 digital camera. The settings were: f2.6, 2 seconds, HQ resolution, focal length equivalent to 105mm in 35 format, with the camera mounted on a tripod.



As described in his article starting on page 1 Dan Taylor had an opportunity to investigate the local geology at the Okie-Tex Star Party last fall. Dan is seen here atop a rock pillar. Photo by Dana Willis.