

Event Horizon

March 2003

Volume 10 Issue 5

THE HEAT OF THE NIGHT *by Glenn Muller*

Not yet dimmed by morning light, bits of constellations curiously skewed by latitude glimmered through Live Oak limbs draped with Spanish Moss, and distracted.

With the tent packed, pegs bagged and poles counted, we left the State park to join the line forming on the shoulder of US 1. There were over six hundred entries registered for the Nineteenth Annual Winter Star Party and we were twenty-seventh from the gate. It wouldn't open for five hours but, with a beautiful sunrise and people wanting to chat, the time soon passed. At the front of the queue was another Canuck, "John" from Toronto. He'd driven two, fourteen hour, shifts and spent a couple of nights in his Jetta to claim the pole position. Now with only hours to go his car battery was dead. Hardly worth mentioning since there were probably more power packs on this stretch of road than the rest of the Florida Keys combined.



Just before Noon the RV's and large trailers were admitted and parked where they would block some noise and stray light from the highway. The vendors had gone in early and, naturally, the organizers had already set up but when it came to our turn we were surprised at how few good spots were left. The remaining open areas were quickly staked by tripods and only fellow HAA club members, Lou and Ollie Darcie who had managed to snag their usual spot, saved us from being crammed in behind an RV. Once they'd unhitched their camper there was room for our tent and we couldn't have wished

for more congenial neighbours.

At three p.m., founder Tippy D'Auria made his welcome speech. He started with an emotional remembrance of astronomical friends recently passed and the astronauts of the shuttle Columbia, "who are now among the stars", and finished with a review of the usual star party rules which included no alcohol since we were on Girl Scout property. Security was provided by the Munroe County Police Department who had an officer at the gate for the duration of the event. This provided peace of mind only until you went somewhere, at which point paranoia of being nailed for speeding was ever-present. Zealous in their protection of the "Key Deer", blue lights and sirens were as common as boat sounds and gull cries.

But there were no worries about the weather. With a slight onshore breeze rippling the palms we basked under mainly clear skies. Shade was where you made it and, while the Sun didn't so much set as was forced down by the settling moisture, the air was still and the seeing steady. Most nights, equipment began dewing up at dusk and heaters worked hard to keep pace. Blow dryers were pressed into service but didn't help much - bad hair days would become the norm. Lacking such devices I found that a couple of disposable Hot Pad® hand warmers, suspended behind the primary of our 6" f8 Newtonian with a Saran Quick cover (looks like a shower cap), extended our viewing time. They also de-fogged eyepieces quite nicely.

When the seeing was good, it was great. In our modest scope Cassini's Division was razor sharp and Jupiter's Great Red Spot wasn't just visible, it jumped out at you. Seeing them through bino-viewers in a 20" Skymaster was absolutely mind-blowing, but for me the best image through this set-up was of the Lunar surface. Forget all those incredible photos you've seen of the Moon; nothing compares to an up close view processed by your own eyes. As if hang-gliding over the craters I even began to pick out spots to land. Gail and I also wandered over to The Yard Scope, a behemoth of

Chair's report page 3
 Web Watch page 4
 Astronomical Highlights of 2003 page ??

NASA: Enlightened by the Darkness page ??
 Upcoming events page 6
 Calendar page 7

a dob with a 36" mirror. We only got to see the Orion Nebula through this giant but what a sight. The 2" 35mm Panoptic couldn't contain the interstellar cloud, and the Trapezium became the four brightest stars of a small open cluster.

My sky charting program told me the best time to catch Omega Centauri was at three a.m. Like many, we crashed at Midnight for a few hours sleep then forced ourselves up. This got easier each night and I kept at it, hoping for better transparency, but humidity practically obscured Crux, the Southern Cross, and though the Eta Carinae nebula was apparently visible for a short time we managed to miss it. You can't miss Omega Centauri. It squats in the center of your FOV like a fat bullfrog on a lily pad. While I couldn't get the same resolution through the murk that I've enjoyed with M13 at zenith there is no doubt that *this* is the granddaddy of globulars. I happily logged it along with the eleven Messier objects and eighteen other DSO's that we had not previously seen.

The daytime sights were just as good. Once we'd had our fill of astronomical equipment, and visited the vendors (I bought a Desert Storm scope cover), we ventured further afield. The ramshackle charm of Hemmingway's days can still be found yet I fear much of it has been blown into the Gulf by hurricanes. This only means you have to look a little harder for it. Though Key West can't help being a tourist trap, handsome B&B's, open air bars, and the tall ships at Schooner Wharf help to retain its Old World Caribbean appeal. And there is so much to do. Kayakers can venture miles out into the calm waters and fishermen, closely watched by pelicans, hang over every bridge. Snorkeling charters seem to outnumber gas stations and, on the day

we went to the Dolphin Research Centre, Lou and Ollie went deep sea fishing and brought back a feast of fresh filets for our group.

Back at the camp there were also plenty of daytime activities. The Southern Cross Astronomical Society had arranged a variety of programs for kids and, for the adults, there was a range of lectures including a three day, image-processing, course. Most popular among the Northerners, however, was the week long tan-processing course! There's something to be said for sandals in February after four months of The Great Indoors.

Friday afternoon was the door prize giveaway. Software, eyepieces, whole libraries of books, and two ETX 90 scopes were among the sponsor donations. Sometimes our ticket numbers were close. The Grand Prize; a Meade LX 200 8" SCT went to a chap who had turned fifty-six that day and, as he made his way to the podium, the crowd began singing "Happy Birthday".

Saturday was the last viewing night and turned out to be the best of the week. The Moon went down about one a.m. and a gentle wind kept the dew at bay. Giving up on horizon hugging targets, I concentrated on an upside down Ursa Major and Virgo's galaxy cluster. Camp Wesumkee was now half-empty; many astronomers having Monday work commitments. We'd leave too, in just a few hours, but for now quiet voices surrounded and the light of my computer attracted friends to share one last look, in the heat of the night.

Glenn and Gail highly recommend the WSP as a cure for cabin fever. For pictures of the event they invite you to visit their website at <http://home.interlynx.net/~mullers/wsp/wsp2003.html>



Chair's Report

Doug Welch

Doug Welch is the current chair of the HAA and also a founding member. You can find out more about Doug at: http://www.physics.mcmaster.ca/people/faculty/Welch_DL_h.html



HAMILTON AMATEUR ASTRONOMERS

Event Horizon is a publication of the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers (HAA).

The HAA is an amateur astronomy club dedicated to the promotion and enjoyment of astronomy for people of all ages and experience levels.

The cost of the subscription is included in the \$25 individual or \$30 family membership fee for the year. Event Horizon is published a minimum of 10 times a year.

HAA Council

Hon. Chair Jim Winger
 Chair Doug Welch
 Second Chair Grant Dixon
 Secretary Margaret Walton
 Treasurer Cindy Bingham
 Observing Dir. . . Stewart Attlesey
 Publicity . . Glenn and Gail Muller
 Editor/Web . . . Anthony Tekatch
 Membership Dir. . . . Ann Tekatch
 Councillor Ray Badgerow

Web: amateurastronomy.org

Mailing Address:

PO Box 65578
 Dundas, ON
 L9H 6Y6

Domain Name and Web hosting for the Hamilton Amateur Astronomy club supplied by

Axess Communications

Corporate and Residential DSL and Web Hosting

<http://www.axess.com>

support@axess.com

WebWatch

I was shocked and saddened to hear of the loss of the space shuttle Columbia on 2003, February 1. NASA has a special web page devoted the STS-107:

<http://www.nasa.gov/columbia/>

The Galactic Core Gazette <http://my.core.com/~carhart/>

This 12 minute tour of the universe is well worth the time. <http://spacewander.com/USA/english.html>

Seven Strangers? by Dr. Tony Phillips

At the dawn of the space age some 40 years ago, we always knew who was orbiting Earth or flying to the Moon. Neil Armstrong, Yuri Gagarin, John Glenn. They were household names—everywhere.

Lately it's different. Space flight has become more routine. Another flight of the shuttle. Another visit to the space station. Who's onboard this time? Unless you're a NASA employee or a serious space enthusiast, you might not know.

Dave Brown, Rick Husband, Laurel Clark, Kalpana Chawla, Michael Anderson, William McCool, and Ilan Ramon.

Now we know. Those are the names of the seven astronauts who were tragically lost on Saturday, Feb. 1st, when the space shuttle Columbia (STS-107) broke apart over Texas.



Before the accident, perhaps, they were strangers to you. But if that's so, why did you have a knot in your gut when you heard the news? What were those tears all about? Why do you feel so deep-down sad for seven strangers?

Astronauts have an unaccountable hold on us. They are explorers. Curious, humorous, serious, daring, careful. Where they go, they go in peace. Every kid wants to be one. Astronauts are the essence of humanity.

They are not strangers. They are us.

While still in orbit Dave Brown asked, jokingly, "do we really have to come back?"

No. But we wish you had.

Please see the NASA Home Page <http://www.nasa.gov> for more information on the Columbia Investigation.

Upcoming Events

Date Friday, June 13th, 2003

Speaker Dr. Peter Brown of UWO

Topic Meteor Infrasound and Satellite Observations of Fireballs

Location Hamilton Spectator Building

Date Saturday, April 12, 2003

Location Delphi Hall in Niagara Falls

Details See Feb-2003 Event Horizon issue for details

Speaker Ivan Semeniuk

April 2003

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday																																																																														
		1	2	3	4 Observing Night	5 Observing Night																																																																														
6 DST begins	7	8	9	10	11 HAA General Meeting	12																																																																														
13	14	15	16	17	18	19																																																																														
20 Easter Sunday	21	22	23	24	25 Observing Night	26 Observing Night																																																																														
27	28	29	30																																																																																	
For observing info, call Stewart Attlessey 827-9105, Rob Roy 692-3245, Ann Tekatch 575-5433				<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th colspan="7">March 2003</th> <th colspan="7">May 2003</th> </tr> <tr> <th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th> <th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th><th></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>8</td> <td>1</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td>1</td><td>2</td><td>3</td> </tr> <tr> <td>9</td><td>10</td><td>11</td><td>12</td><td>13</td><td>14</td><td>15</td> <td>16</td><td>17</td><td>18</td><td>19</td><td>20</td><td>21</td><td>22</td><td>23</td><td>24</td> </tr> <tr> <td>23</td><td>24</td><td>25</td><td>26</td><td>27</td><td>28</td><td>29</td> <td>30</td><td>31</td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>			March 2003							May 2003																							2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1						1	2	3	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31							
March 2003							May 2003																																																																													
2	3	4	5	6	7	8	1						1	2	3																																																																					
9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24																																																																					
23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31																																																																												