

PRINTED MATTER

**Hamilton Centre RASC
BOX 1223
Waterdown, ON L0R 2H0**

Orbit

Orbit

June/July/August 1997

Volume 30, Issue 4



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of the Hamilton Centre
of
the Royal Astronomical
Society of Canada



**M57 Fluke Shot
- Satellite
Caught on CCD
Image July 07/97**

The Centre's
CB245 CCD
Camera snapped
a 20 second expo-
sure of the Ring
Nebula, and just
happened to get a
Satellite trail in
the same frame.
CCD Image by:
Colin Haig

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Welcome one and all! Its time for another membership year to begin, and this marks the beginning of another great year.

We are looking for a volunteer with a PC and Windows 95 to put the Orbit newsletter together, as I will be retiring from this position soon (and I'm sure some of you are grateful!) Best wishes to all of you, and keep looking up! - *Colin Haig* ☆

From the Keyboard of the President

Ah, Summer, when the days are warm, the nights are glorious with the Milky Way at its best and the dew stays liquid, and my thoughts turn toward....Starfest!

This year will be a little different for me, as I will be bringing my daughter along. It has been several months since I first broached the idea to her, and she was very enthusiastic about going. So, if you see a nine-year old girl wandering around, looking a little lost, point her toward where the Hamilton contingent camps.

This year, there is the possibility that the Hamilton Centres CCD camera will show up. Although we have a number of people in the Centre who have used it, it would be nice to be able to show it to some people and get some hints and tips about how best to use it. Since I am going to step down from the Board come October, I want to use some of that spare time to convert photons to electrons and then back again.

There is also a chance that we will be setting up a 'Starfest Area Network'. So if you have a laptop, and an Ethernet adapter for it (10base-T), bring it along and we'll see if we can get you hooked up. My reason for wanting to do this was that I recently won, in a contest, an IBM ThinkPad laptop computer. It has an incredible display, and is quite capable of displaying all the levels of gray that the CCD camera can deliver. What I don't have are things like CD-ROMs, and so on. I figure that if we can network a number of machines together, we can all benefit!

Membership Application

Application for Membership in the Hamilton Centre of the RASC. Annual membership officially commences October 1. We welcome people of all ages, skills, and interests in things Astronomical. Please make your cheque payable to: "RASC Hamilton Centre" and mail to the Treasurer c/o the address on the back. Associate membership is for those in other Astronomy Clubs. Please state the club. Full members receive: The Observer's Handbook (\$20 value), Journal of RASC (\$70 value), SkyNews (\$22 value), and many other great privileges, including discounts on popular magazines, supplies and cool stuff. There is a Free 3 month Trial available - send no money! Info: Leave a message at: (905) 689-0266. ☆

MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION		
NAME:		
ADDRESS (1/2):		
ADDRESS (2/2):		
CITY:		
POSTAL CODE:		
DAY PHONE:	()	
EVE PHONE:	()	
E-MAIL:		
PAYMENT OPTIONS		
ADULT	@ \$49.00	
ASSOCIATE	@ \$30.00	
YOUTH (under 21)	@ \$35.50	
VOLUNTARY DONATION:		
TOTAL:		
Circle one:	NEW Member	RENEWAL

Centre Calendar

Orbit - Summer 1997

Monthly Meetings are held by The Hamilton Spectator Auditorium at 8pm on the First Thursday of the month.

Observatory Directions: From Hamilton or Guelph:

- ◆ Hwy 6 N of Hamilton, take Concession 7 East eastbound, cross Centre rd.
- ◆ Continue on 7E, keep going past the rail tracks, proceed to near the end.
- ◆ Our gate is on the south side on the last lot (south west).

From Mississauga or Milton:

- ◆ Britannia Road past Hwy 25, Guelph Line, Cedar Springs to end
- ◆ South 1 block on Milborough TownLine to Concession 7 East.

Our gate is on the south side on the last lot (south west)

Hamilton Centre Observatory 43° 23' 26" N 79° 55' 22" W

NAME	Phone	E-mail Address
Observatory	689-0266	http://ad-here.com/RASC/
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Orbit - Summer 1997

Also, just in case it is cloudy, bring the brightest source of portable light that you can....we still want to show those guys from London a thing or two about candlepower!

Hmmm, what else? Next spring I am planning to get into a bit of construction at home. I was recently bequeathed a small inheritance, from an Aunt in England who had always been fascinated by my hobby. In her memory, I will be building a small Observatory. Nothing extravagant, just a small roll-off roof sort of building, where I can keep my C-8 more or less permanently mounted and polar aligned. Phone, power and network connections too. I am looking forward to the winter when I will design the thing. Should be fun.

On to RASC business. There has recently been a lot of time spent by people on the RASList about the benefits (or not) of receiving SkyNews with your RASC membership. I, for one, am all for it. I like the Canadian news in it, the pictures, and the articles. It is not just me who likes it, as my daughter enjoys the pictures and some of the other stuff. I take it into work, and let people there have a look. All in all, I get a bit of mileage out of my copy. Come the fall, my kids school library will be getting my back issues. What I would like to know are your thoughts about it. Not necessarily if you think it is worthwhile for you, but for others, as well.

Actually, I would like to know if you consider the package of periodicals, publications and facilities to be good value for money. Is the Observers Handbook, the new Journal, SkyNews, Orbit, Observatory access and its equipment, meetings and special events worth the money? Is there anything else you would like to see the Hamilton Centre do or offer? If so, would you be willing to help bring it about?

The last sentence brings me round to the subject of the Centres Board of Directors. Not only will I be stepping down from this position, I will be leaving the Board entirely. Dave Coulson, our secretary, has also stated that he will not be returning. Ellen Ricks, and her husband Mike are moving to Bobcaygeon in August, and will not be able to help out. Dave, Ellen and Mike will be greatly missed, but it leaves a number of positions wide open. The Centre works best when we have a turnover of personnel, and a dose of new ideas and enthusiasm is always needed.

Being on the Board is far more fun than work, trust me, and with our membership at a four year high (we are over the 70 member mark), the future of the Centre looks better than it has in quite some time. Please, consider volunteering....being on the Board adds a whole new level of enjoyment to our hobby.

Thanks should go to Dave C., for keeping his eyes open one afternoon at the Observatory in getting the license plate of a pickup truck that drove into the Observatory and quickly turned around when the driver noticed Dave. Thanks to Colin for putting in the new security system.

The one finger salute goes to the people who have made the addition of a security system at the Observatory so necessary.

Lastly, send a thought to Les Nagy. Les was recently involved in an accident while on his motorbike. Apparently, a car cut him off, and Les went over the handlebars when he tried to avoid hitting the car. Les' back hasn't been the strongest of late, to say!

Nothing of carrying the load of being treasurer. Hopefully, he will be better soon.

Clear skies to all, and see you at the Observatory!

- Roger Hill email: hillr@sx.com
voice: (905)878-5185 fax: (905)878-3974 ☆

Mirror, Mirror in my Scope

You know it's time to clean your mirror when your 6" is seriously outperformed in light gathering by a 4". Normally the rule of thumb is that a little dirt on the mirror is normal and that one is better to live with a little dirt than to do damage to the mirror coating by repetitious cleaning. Such was the case for the club 6" Dob, when it was compared to Bert's well kept Tasco.

I took the 6" home and removed the mirror which was so laden with dust and hair (possibly rodent) that when viewed from a sharp angle, resem-

- 16 - Asteroid 5349 Paulharris Closest Approach to Earth (1.625 AU)
- 16 - Possible Mars Occultation of SAO 159135 (8.9 Magnitude Star)
- 17 - Galileo, 3rd Callisto Flyby (Orbit 10)
- 17 - Asteroid 52 Europa at Opposition (10.9 Magnitude)
- 17 - Konstantin Tsiolkovsky's 140th Birthday (1857)
- 18 - Moon Occults Saturn
- 18 - Asteroid 27 Euterpe Occults PPM 094351 (9.3 Magnitude Star)
- 18 - Asteroid 532 Herculina Occults SAO 187475 (9.4 Magnitude Star)
- 18 - [Aug 30] Comet C/1997 P2 (Spacewatch) Perihelion (4.195 AU)
- 18 - Cassini Lecture, Pasadena, California
- 19 - Asteroid 1386 Storeria Closest Approach to Earth (0.870 AU)
- 20 - Ames Research Center Open House, Moffett Field, California
- 20 - Galileo, Orbital Trim Maneuver #33 (OTM-33)
- 20 - Progress M-38 Launch (Russia)
- 21 - Mars Global Surveyor, Mars Aerobraking Begins
- 21 - Kuiper Belt Object 1996 TO66 at Opposition (44.748 AU - 21.1 M)
- 21 - Kuiper Belt Object 1993 RO at Opposition (30.484 AU - 22.9 M)
- 21 - Possible Mars Occultation of SAO 159278 (9.2 Magnitude Star)
- 22 - Autumnal Equinox (23:56 UT)
- 22 - Kuiper Belt Object 1994 TB at Opposition (29.408 AU - 21.8 Magnitude)
- 22-24 - Io During The Galileo Era Conference, Flagstaff, Arizona
- 22-25 - 31st ESLAB Symposium, Noordwijk, The Netherlands
- 22-26 - [Sep 04] Euro. Symp. on Aerospace Remote Sensing, London, UK
- 23 - [Sep 04] Intelsat 803 Ariane 4 Launch
- 24-27 - Starfest '97 Planetarium Conference, Hutchinson, Kansas
- 25 - STS-86 Launch, Atlantis, 7th Shuttle-Mir Mission, Logistics Module
- 25 - Iridium-4 Launch
- 25 - Asteroid 3619 Nash Closest Approach to Earth (0.853 AU)
- 25 - Asteroid 2693 Yan'an Closest Approach to Earth (0.944 AU)
- 25 - 5th Anniversary (1992), Mars Observer Launch
- 25-28 - [Sep 02] International Meteor Conference, Belgrade, Yugoslavia
- 26 - Kuiper Belt Object 1996 TR66 at Opposition (34.957 AU - 23.5 M)
- 27 - Asteroid 2100 Ra-Shalom Near-Earth Flyby (0.1705 AU)
- 27 - Asteroid 8 Flora at Opposition (8.1 Magnitude)
- 27 - Kuiper Belt Object 1993 SC at Opposition (33.481 AU - 22.3 Magnitude)
- 28 - Kuiper Belt Object 1996 TK66 at Opposition (41.472 AU - 23.8 M)
- 29 - Echostar-3 Atlas-2AS Launch
- 29 - Comet Wolf-Harrington Perihelion (1.582 AU)
- 29 - Kuiper Belt Object 1992 QB1 at Opposition (39.898 AU - 23.1 M)
- 29 - 20th Anniversary (1977), Salyut 6 Space Station Launch (USSR)
- 29 - 35th Anniversary (1962), Alouette 1 Launch, 1st Canadian Satellite
- 30 - [Sep 03] AMSAT Ariane 502 Launch ☆

29-Sep 01 - 11th Annual Nova East Star Party, New Brunswick, Canada
 30 - Comet Grigg-Skjellerup Perihelion (0.997 AU)
 30 -[Aug 28] Asteroid 2938 Hopi Closest Approach to Earth (1.437 AU)
 30 - 5th Anniversary (1992), Discovery of 1992 QB1 by David Jewitt and Jane Luu, First Kuiper Belt Object
 30-Sep 05 - Large Meteorite Impacts and Planetary Evolution, Sudbury

September 1997

01 - 5th Anniversary (1992), Issue of Theodore Von Karman Stamp
 02 -[Sep 03] Hot Bird-3/ Meteosat-7 Ariane 4 Launch, Successful
 02 - Partial Solar Eclipse, Visible From Australia & New Zealand
 04 -[Sep 04] GE-3 Atlas IIAS Launch, Successful
 04 - Asteroid 1 Ceres at Opposition (7.7 Magnitude)
 04 - Kuiper Belt Object 1996 RR20 at Opposition (42.352 AU - 23.3 M)
 05 -[Sep 03] 20th Anniversary (1977), Voyager 1 Launch
 05-10 - 16th European Symposium on Occultation Projects, Cambridge, UK
 06 -[Sep 04] Mir Spacewalk
 06 - Asteroid 258 Tyche at Opposition (10.9 Magnitude)
 06 - 6th Euro.Society for Astronomy in Culture (SEAC), Gdansk, Poland
 08 - Kuiper Belt Object 1995 QY9 at Opposition (28.629 AU, 21.7 Magnitude)
 08 - 30th Anniversary (1967), Surveyor 5 Launch (Moon Lander)
 09 - Asteroid 1996 FG3 Near-Earth Flyby (0.356 AU)
 09 - 105th Anniversary (1892), Barnard's Discovery of Jupiter Moon Amalthea
 09-12 - Synoptic Solar Physics Workshop, Sunspot, New Mexico
 10 - Asteroid 130 Elektra at Opposition (10.5 Magnitude)
 10 - Asteroid 4033 Yatsugatake Closest Approach to Earth (1.389 AU)
 10 - Comet Arend-Rigaux Closest Approach to Earth (2.218 AU)
 10 -[Sep 04] James Keeler's 140th Birthday (1857)
 11 - Comet Grigg-Skjellerup Closest Approach to Earth (1.761 AU)
 12 - Mars Global Surveyor, Mars Orbit Insertion
 12 -[Sep 04] Asteroid 1997 QK1 Near-Earth Flyby (0.155 AU)
 12 - 5th Anniversary (1992), STS-47 Launch (Endeavour)
 13 - Galileo, Orbital Trim Maneuver #32 (OTM-32)
 14 -[Sep 03] Asteroid 3288 Seleucus Closest Approach to Earth (1.699 AU)
 15 - GFO-1 Taurus Launch
 15 - Asteroid 70 Panopaea at Opposition (10.8 Magnitude)
 15-18 - 11th Annual AIAA/Utah State U. Conference on Small Satellites, UT
 15-22 -[Sep 03] Burgasov Space Electric Propulsion Seminar, Moscow
 16 - Lunar Eclipse, Visible From the Eastern Hemisphere
 16 - Closest Full Moon of 1997 (356,966 km)
 16 - Comet 1997 G1 (Montani) Perihelion (4.300 AU)
 16 - Mercury at Greatest Western Elongation (18 Degrees)
 16 - Asteroid 40 Harmonia at Opposition (9.4 Magnitude)

bled very coarse and dirty sandpaper. I took the mirror outside and layed it horizontal on the ground. I looked at my overhead reflection from the distance of the mirror's focal length and was amazed at how dark the reflection was.

I cleaned the mirror via Les Nagy's instructions: removal of any large bits of debris with clean, dry pressurized air; followed by a lengthy rinse under luke warm tap water. Next a little soaking in a diluted soapy solution, followed by another water rinse. The most persistant bits of debris were removed with a very gentle rubbing with cotton balls and solution, all the time being flushed with tap water. A final rinse with distilled water from the dehumidifier and a blast of air left the mirror free of any dirt, smudges or blue streaks commonly left behind when using camera lens cleaner. I remounted the mirror in its' cell and recollimated the scope. All that's left is to do a visual check on the next clear night.

- Bob Botts ☆

Jupiter's Missing Satellites

Jupiter "Without a Visible Satellite"

This rare situation in which the 4 large Galilean moons are not visible from will occur this summer. Here is a summary of the event.

		Last to		First to		Satellite Situations			
Date	Duration(min)	Disappear	Reappear	I	II	III	IV		
1997 Aug 27	20	I 21:39UT	IV 21:59UT	O	T	OE	E		

For more information read Roger Sinnott's article with the same name in the September 1982 issue of Sky and Telescope.

- Ray Badgerow ☆

Minutes of the June General Meeting

Minutes of RASC General Meeting June 5, 1997 Rm. 1A4 McMaster

Roger opened the meeting at 8:09pm.

We have drawings and slides of Hale-Bopp tonight. He gave notice to the members regarding the bundling of Skynews with our membership and said it was less expensive than previously thought. An RASC motion was being proposed to give all Youth members a copy of the Beginner's Observers Guide rather than the Handbook as it is less technical. A pile of proxies for the Kingston GA is available for anyone who wants them.

Mike was not here to talk about the trees, but the cutting will start soon.

Our view of the sky will be greatly improved by this operation.

The CCD is operational thanks to Colin. Les informed everyone that if they any membership questions to see him afterward.

Dave told everyone that the North Bay/Sudbury Astronomy Association is holding a star party on July 4, see him for details.

Colin brought us some samples of native foliage from the Obs. parking, and urged all keyholders to come out and do their part at cutting the grass.

We also have a 386 computer for the CCD, and the photometer is ready to be sold.

Dave handed Roger a container with 2 Hale-Bopp posters and a box with the NASA publication of the 1999 Solar Eclipse.

Bert showed some transparencies of his sketches of comets Hyakutake and Hale-Bopp. Doug Welch informed everyone of the HAA Star Party this wknd (June 6, 7, 8) in Arthur, Ontario. The next HAA meeting is Friday the 13th at Spectator, 7:30pm.

Bigbang is back online. To subscribe, send an email to:

bigbang-request@physics.mcmaster.ca

Put the word "Subscribe" in body of message.

Mike DeVillaer showed some of his comet slides, especially Hale-Bopp.

- 15 - Possible Mars Occultation of SAO 158218 (8.6 Magnitude Star)
- 16 - Possible Mars Occultation of SAO 158243 (9.2 Magnitude Star)
- 17 - [Sep 04] Asteroid 1997 RT Near-Earth Flyby (0.062 AU)
- 17 - 120th Anniversary (1877), Asaph Hall's Discovery of Mars Moon Phobos
- 18 - [Aug 30] Comet C/1997 P2 (Spacewatch) Closest Approach to Earth (3.197 AU)
- 18-30 - 23rd General Assembly of the IAU, Kyoto, Japan
- 19 - [Aug 29] Asteroid 1992 QN Closest Approach to Earth (0.862 AU)
- 19 - 15th Anniversary (1982), Soyuz T-7 Launch (USSR)
- 20 - Agila 2 Long March 3B Launch, Successful
- 20 - Iridium-3 Delta 2 Launch, Successful
- 20 - Asteroid 3747 Belinskij Closest Approach to Earth (2.658 AU)
- 20 - [Sep 03] 20th Anniversary (1977), Voyager 2 Launch
- 21 - Moon Passes 0.008 Degrees South of Saturn
- 21 - Mars Pathfinder Lecture, Pasadena, California
- 22 - Mir Spacewalk, Successful
- 22 - Moon Occults Saturn
- 22 - Asteroid 4209 Briggs Closest Approach to Earth (1.864 AU - 14.5 M)
- 22 - Asteroid 5 Astraea at Opposition (11.0 Magnitude)
- 23 - Lewis LMLV-1 Launch, Successful
- 23 - Asteroid 1996 TY11 Closest Approach to Earth (0.706 AU)
- 23 - Asteroid 19 Fortuna at Opposition (9.4 Magnitude)
- 23 - [Aug 29] 35th Anniversary (1962), Gravity Assist Theory Proposed at JPL
- 24 - Asteroid 1997 NP10 Near-Earth Flyby (0.352 AU)
- 24 - Asteroid 138 Tolosa at Opposition (10.6 Magnitude)
- 24 - Asteroid 5738 Billpickering Closest Approach to Earth (2.925 AU)
- 24-28 - SPS '97 - Space and Electric Power For Humanity, Montreal, Canada
- 25 - ACE Delta-2 Launch, Successful
- 25 - Mars Global Surveyor, Trajectory Correction Maneuver #4 (TCM-4)
- 25 - Moon Occults Gamma Tauri (3.9 Magnitude Star)
- 25 - Moon Occults Aldebaran
- 25 - Northern Iota Aquarids Meteor Shower Peak
- 25-31 - The Queensland Astrofest, Linville, Australia
- 26 - Asteroid 2966 Korsunja Closest Approach to Earth (1.413 AU)
- 27 - 35th Anniversary (1962), Mariner 2 Launch (Venus Flyby Mission)
- 28 - [Aug 28] Panamsat-5 Proton-K Launch, Successful
- 28 - Progress M-37 Launch (Russia)
- 28 - Asteroid 1986 PA Near-Earth Flyby (0.2061 AU)
- 28 - Asteroid 3750 Ilizarov Closest Approach to Earth (2.089 AU)
- 28 - Asteroid 1094 Siberia Closest Approach to Earth (1.706 AU)
- 28-30 - 10th Annual Oregon Star Party, Indian Trail Springs, Oregon
- 29 - [Aug 31] Forte Pegasus XL Launch, Successful
- 29-31 - 9th Annual Swiss Star Party, Bernese Alps, Switzerland

Space Calendar

Courtesy of NASA
<http://newproducts.jpl.nasa.gov/calendar/>

There's Something Happening Just about Every Day!

[Note: M = Magnitude, Occ. = Occults]

August 1997

- 04 - Mars Pathfinder, End of Primary Mission
- 04 - Asteroid 2 Pallas Occults PPM 104597 (7.5 Magnitude Star)
- 04 - Asteroid 306 Unitas at Opposition (10.7 Magnitude)
- 04-15 - 8th Scientific IAGA Assembly, Uppsala, Sweden
- 05 - Soyuz TM-26 Launch (Russia), Successful
- 05 -[Aug 28] Comet C/1997 P1 (SOHO) Perihelion (0.0067 AU)
- 05 - Moon Occults Mercury
- 05 - Asteroid 67 Asia at Opposition (10.0 Magnitude)
- 06 - Southern Iota Aquarids Meteor Shower Peak
- 07 - STS-85 Launch, Discovery, CRISTA-SPAS, Successful
- 07 - Galileo, Jupiter Magnetotail Exploration
- 07 - Panamsat 6 Ariane 4 Launch, Successful
- 07 -[Aug 28] Comet Gehrels 2 Perihelion (2.000 AU)
- 07-10 - Starfest '97, Mount Forest, Ontario, Canada
- 08 - Galileo, Orbital Trim Maneuver #31 (OTM-31), Successful
- 08 - 20th Anniversary (1977), Burnup of Salyut 5 Space Station (USSR)
- 08-10 - Northwoods Starfest '97, Fall Creek, Wisconsin
- 09 - Jupiter at Opposition
- 10 - 5th Anniversary (1992), TOPEX/Poseidon Launch
- 10 - 5th Anniversary (1992), Kitsat A Launch, 1st Korean Satellite
- 10 - 25th Anniversary (1972), Observation of First Meteor Known to Enter and Leave Earth's Atmosphere (Utah, Canada)
- 11 - Asteroid 4168 1979 EE Closest Approach to Earth (2.133 AU)
- 11 - 35th Anniversary (1962), Vostok 3 Launch
- 11 - 120th Anniversary (1877), Asaph Hall's Discovery of Mars Moon Deimos
- 11-13 - AIAA Guidance, Navigation and Control Conference, New Orleans
- 12 - Perseids Meteor Shower Peak
- 12 - Asteroid 19 Fortuna Occults PPM 206231 (8.9 Magnitude Star)
- 12 - Asteroid 3834 Zappafra Closest Approach to Earth (1.587 AU)
- 12 - 20th Anniversary (1977), HEAO-1 Launch (X-Ray Astro. Observatory)
- 12 - 35th Anniversary (1962), Vostok 4 Launch
- 13 - 150th Anniversary (1847), Hind's Discovery of Asteroid 7 Iris
- 14 - Cosmos 2345 Proton-K Launch (Russia), Successful
- 15 - Comet C/1997 N1 (Tabur) Perihelion (0.395 AU)
- 15 - Comet Haneda-Campos Perihelion (1.267 AU, Lost Comet)

Our main speaker Doug George is well known around the RASC as he is the current President. His talk "Astronomical Imaging" dealt with the pros and cons of conventional astrophotography and CCD imaging. He also provided tips and advice on improving telescopes for CCD imaging. There was also a show on image processing, including processing standard photos with a Photo CD and appropriate software.

The talk was followed by questions from the audience.

Les thanked Doug for his informative talk.

The next board meeting will be in the 2 wks @ Observatory 8pm.

This will be the last meeting at McMaster as we will be meeting at the Spectator starting in September.

Bob Botts told everyone to participate in ground maintenance or skip the trees.

The highlight for tonight was Dave sleeping, he did eventually wake up.

The meeting ended at 10:02 pm.

- Ray Badgerow ☆

RASC Journal Call for Articles

The RASC Journal needs your articles!!

This message is a general call for popular-level material for the RASC Journal. The April issue is at press and we're short a couple of items for the June issue. That could be feature articles, notes of interest, centre reports, reports on astronomy activities in your area, photos, suggestions for column ideas, reprint suggestions from your centre newsletter, letters, observing techniques, etc. You can send your ideas or material to me (dlane@ap.stmarys.ca) or to the editors: Pat Kelly (pkelly@tuns.ca) and Dave Turner (turner@ap.stmarys.ca). It *is* your Journal, now let's support it!

Dave Lane, Halifax Centre, Editorial Board, RASC Journal

The Orange Blossom Special

by Mike and Ellen Ricks

The St. Petersburg Astronomy Club was our gracious host during the weekend of Feb. 6 to 9th at their Hickory Hill observing site north of Tampa. We pitched our tent at the edge of an orange grove and near the dome which houses a 14 1/2" reflector. Also nearby is a clubhouse including showers, a kitchen, a dormitory, and a couple of club rooms plus a library.

These events are always successful because many volunteer members work so hard to make it so. And always a few individuals seem to stand out.

On arrival we were greeted by another Ellen. Ellen Farr, club librarian was wearing the hat of Registrar and we swear she had her hands on our registration form before we even introduced ourselves. It was a most pleasant start to a great weekend.

Their president, Wayne Tripp, seemed to be here, there, and everywhere but was never too busy to stop and answer questions from a couple of Canadians, or to invite us to view M33 or whatever else his 'scope was focussed on.

Michael Davis, director gave an absorbing talk about "how to build a 'scope". Apparently a storage warehouse found themselves with some unclaimed goods including a 17 1/2" mirror in the original packing crate. They recognized its significant value and offered it as a donation. Together with a secondary mirror that SPAC had on hand, they had the makings of a telescope. So, Mike Davis was assigned to turn the pumpkin into a Royal Carriage. All components except the 2 above mentioned mirrors came from local hardware stores or they were fashioned in Mike's basement, and we could sense this was done with a lot of TLC. Anyway, SPAC now has a 17 1/2" DOB that would sell for many thousands of

dollars; of course they have no thoughts of selling.

During the day there were many interesting talks and Dan Bricker led a couple of hikes. On one of these hikes we had a conversation with a nearby ostrich farmer who invited us to visit the big birds, really big birds. Don't ask what this has to do with astronomy, but we enjoyed it just the same.

There is one in every crowd. A bubbly individual who makes you feel good because she looked through your 'scope. Such was Dee Stephens who described herself as a rank amateur. She knew volumes about Messier objects for a rank amateur. We have a feeling she was trying to view all the M objects in one weekend by going from 'scope to 'scope and also "borrowing" members' 'scopes when the owner was busy doing his or her part to keep the party flowing smoothly.

During the first two nights seeing was pretty good until Hale Bopp was scheduled to rise. Then the haze settled in. The Saturday forecast was for rain so we dispaired seeing the comet at all. At 5:00am Sunday someone went through the camp shoutnig "Comets up!". It was a glorious sight and a fitting finale to a wonderful weekend.

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