

# WKAA Newsletter December 2001

*West Kentucky Amateur Astronomers*

## NEXT MEETING

The next club meeting will be this Saturday Dec 15 at 7:00 PM at the G.P. Observatory. And although we're gradually losing things like M13, The Ring, Vega, The Dumbbell, Albireo, and Mars to the Winter, they are simply de-throned temporarily by things like Saturn, Jupiter, Orion, Taurus, Auriga and Gemini. Hope to see ya' there and enjoy the crispness of a Winter sky together.

## LAST MEETING

The November 2001 Club Meeting / Chili Supper was held on the 10th and we all had great chili and plenty of desserts to celebrate our successful Star Party. I tried to limit myself to about 18 of Lori Nicholas' cookies, with little luck... Although there were only 3 pots of chili, it seemed to be sufficient because there was about one cup left when it was all said and done.

With the time change, we all got in about 45 minutes of observing before meeting time. It was hard to pull everyone away from the eyepieces long enough to have a 10 minute meeting. Not wanting to sit down and get too comfortable, we decided on the huddle method. Pres. Al started us off and we talked about several aspects of our fantastic Star Party. Our Treasurer, Mike Nicholas gave us a good report which was: A profit of about \$250 from the Star Party. And the club total which now stands at \$1768.00

The other key issues covered were: **A)** The dates for our 2002 Star Party will be October 1 - 5 **B)** Some of the trees near the observing field are being cut selectively, and if this poses a problem in the future with the security lights from the Administration Office, we'll have to start putting up tarps on the poles again. **C)** The Strobe light on the radio tower ended up cooperating on the Saturday night of the Star Party by staying red, but since then, seems to have malfunctioned again back to strobe after dark.

## LEONIDS SUMMARY by DAVID PAESSLER

November 17th about 8 PM found me pulling up to the observatory at Golden Pond. Much to my surprise there was already one hardy soul camped out on his lounge chair with a blanket, enjoying the night sky. Paul Spurlock from Nashville had arrived early, and with his radio and laptop was to keep us updated on the shower with reports from around the world as the night progressed. Not expecting much from the shower until later in the night, I set up the 8 inch Meade in the middle of the field to do some dark sky observing. I was hoping to take advantage of the clear southern horizon, but the humidity and sky transparency blocked the view of all but the brightest stars near the southern horizon. The very comfortable 65-degree temperature also carried its worth of humidity to brighten the skies. Nevertheless, several mag 10 to 11 galaxies were found in Sculptor and Cetus to make the effort rewarding. Not long after, Robert Wright showed up from Mayfield to take in the Leonids. By 11:30, I gave up on the sky for deep observing and packed up the scope for a lounge chair and blanket, and joined the others in front of the observatory. Around midnight, John Holland and Jeff and Ryan Burton also came out. We had seen several meteors throughout the night, but definitely not a "Shower" yet. Just after midnight a brilliant one was seen to streak from the SE across the southern sky. While doing so, it left a trail of sparklers and brightened 3 times throwing off many sparklers each time it brightened. It disappeared into the SW sky as quickly as it arrived. It was the most impressive single meteor of the night for me. Activity after midnight was a nice meteor at least every 30 to 60 seconds in the part of the sky I could see. It was definite that the radiant was from Leo. The shower was on! We also noticed a few going the wrong way, but the predominate meteor was from Leo. One thing we all noticed was that these meteors were FAST! By the time someone called out a particularly bright meteor, at best, all we could catch was a brief glimpse of a lingering smoke trail. This went on until about 2:30 when we noticed an increase in inbound meteors. They were coming much more regular and in batches now. It also was getting much colder and dew was forming on even our blankets. This called for some hot coffee and stirring around to get the blood flowing again. By 3:30 we were getting 30 to 60 meteors a minute in the 1/3 of sky we could see. I was glad that I had made the trip to LBL because a lot of them were faint little zips of light that city lights would have rendered invisible. Several however were bright zips that ended in a bright explosion that cast shadows on the concrete. Now this was a real meteor shower as far as I was concerned! What we didn't know was that the peak was still an hour away. It was nothing to be looking up and see two or three meteors streaking by

every 5 or 6 seconds, and that was only about a third of the sky. Leo was above the horizon by now and meteors could be seen dropping from Leo straight to the horizon. A particular favorite direction seemed to be the Big Dipper and Orion. We could always see them streaking through either constellation in twos and threes. Activity picked up and at 4:30, I stood up and slowly rotated around and from about 20 degrees above the horizon to the ground, I could see continuously, 5 to 6 very faint meteors appearing and dropping straight to the ground. Activity overhead was equally as good with batches of 3 and 4 meteors coming in all parts of the sky. During our peak between 4:30 and 5, I would estimate better than 4 per second in the whole sky easily seen. By 5:30 the sun was lightening up the eastern horizon and the last of the coffee kicked in with a caffeine rush and I thought it was head home now or I will have to crash till noon in the car here. I headed out for the hour-long drive and immediately hit light to moderate fog for the whole trip home. It didn't take long to get unpacked and about 2 seconds to fall asleep once my head hit that pillow. Later, I talked to several people in my area who got up about 4 AM to look, and were greeted with thick fog. Needless to say, they didn't see many meteors. That is one trip to LBL that I will remember the rest of my life. Thanks to the people that came down and shared it with me!

***(PLEASE SEE 2002 CLUB MEETING SCHEDULE ON BACK OF PAGE)*** 

Clear Skies, John Holland, Secretary 270-886-7419 yojohn@wkaa.net