



The Faint Fuzzy

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The Official Newsletter of the West Kentucky Amateur Astronomers

June 2008

From the Editors:

It was great to see such a large turnout of club members at Astronomy Day last month. Twenty people from the club--out of a current membership of 51--showed up to help throughout the day. That's nearly 40% of the club! Well done! Let's continue the outreach support with Summer Nights!

—Bob & Melissa

Note: We'd like to wish a speedy recovery to Jackie Mathis, who recently underwent heart surgery.

UPCOMING MEETING:

Next meeting: June 7. The meeting starts at 7:00pm, with Summer Nights observing afterwards if it is clear. Visitors are welcome (as always).

LAST MEETING HIGHLIGHTS: May 3rd

Eighteen people attended the meeting, including visitor Evan Meek, from Bowling Green, KY, who has been to meetings and the Star Party before. It was great to see Jim and Sandy Phfistner at the meeting as well.

David Paessler reported the treasury is in good shape and there were no ALCOR awards pending. Much of the remaining meeting time dealt with finalizing Astronomy Day plans.

Astronomy Day

Jackie Mathis, Astronomy Day Coordinator, said that preparations were going well and asked for volunteers to arrive early for setup.

Jim Hall agreed to repeat his well-received "Getting Started in Astronomy" planetarium session from last year.

(See below for a full report of Astronomy Day 2008 events.)

Summer Nights

Summer Nights Program Coordinator, Harold Meyers, was unable to attend the meeting but sent the signup sheet, which was passed around. Enough people signed up to cover the Saturdays through the June meeting.

(See below for Summer Nights reports.)

Public Outreach

The planned Dawson Springs sidewalk astronomy event was rained out.

Debbie Stockdale, from Bethel College in McKenzie, TN, contacted club president Dale Baltimore about having someone from the club come and present a 45 minute talk on astronomy to the preschoolers attending the Bethel summer reading program (date to be announced). If anyone is interested in helping, please contact Dale.

Club member Art Pallone is on the grant committee for the Murray State Teacher Quality Institute, whose aim is to improve middle school education by providing continuing education opportunities for the teachers. The committee has pursued an NSF grant for the summer of 2009 that would include an observing night with WKAA members. This could be done in conjunction with the Summer Nights program. The club is generally agreeable, and looks forward to further information.

(Additional outreach events are being planned. Look for details in future *Faint Fuzzy* issues.)

Club Goals for 2008

Much of the rest of the meeting centered around a discussion of goals for the club. Goals include a membership drive, increased club publicity, and beginning to look at ways to improve the facility for our outreach programs.

Other Business Items

Dale talked about observing field etiquette, including the safe and judicious use of laser pointers, flashlights, and brightly lit imaging computers.

Club members are reminded not to park on the grass on the observatory side of the road to prevent ruts from being created.

Club members who would like to observe on non-meeting nights are encouraged to send a note to the Big List, inviting others to join in.

If you plan to volunteer at LBL and have not signed an insurance form for Golden Pond liability coverage, please contact Planetarium Director Don Partain. Also, please remember to record your volunteer hours on the sign-in sheet, including your travel time.

Sandy Phfistner has made a beautiful astronomy signature quilt to be raffled off at the 2008 Twin Lakes Star Party.

Clear Night for Observing!

The skies were clear and club members enjoyed a night of observing after the meeting.

UPCOMING EVENTS—MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

- ★ **June 17:** Astronomy night at the Girl Scout Camp Hazelwood, near Paris, TN. If you can help, please contact Harold Meyers at hambone10100[[@](mailto:hambone10100@yahoo.com)]yahoo.com.
- ★ **June 27:** Paris Library event to be held at Memorial Park in Paris, TN. Contact Harold for more details on location. Viewing will start around 9:00pm, so plan to meet by 8:00pm to give plenty of time to set up. There is a possibility of having as many as 200 children and adults, so help is appreciated!

ASTRONOMY DAY 2008

Astronomy Day 2008 was a big hit, no doubt due in large part to the number of club members, LBL and Forest Service staff who helped out before, during, and after the day's events. A reported 500 people attended the event throughout the day. Jackie Mathis, with help from Harold Meyers, coordinated the day, and at least 20 club members showed up to lend a hand with the various activities:

- ★ **Telescope Viewing:** Despite intermittent clouds and a lack of sunspots or flares, the crowd enjoyed seeing the sun through the filtered telescopes, and the daylight lunar viewing. Attempts to find Mars and Sirius were unsuccessful, however.
- ★ **Vince's Pyrotechnics Show:** Lest anyone not be familiar with *why* it is not a good idea to look directly at the sun, Vince Medlock repeated his annual demonstration of how the telescope at the right angle makes a great fire starter.
- ★ **Planetarium Shows:** Don Partain and Sonya Wood-Mahler presented various planetarium shows throughout the day. Jim Hall presented an updated "How to Get Started in Astronomy" talk again this year--and did a great job--again.
- ★ **Educational Tables:** Sonya had set up four learning areas and had volunteers ready to guide visitors through astronomy quizzes, relative planet size demonstrations, coloring for the kids, and a display of consumer products with astronomical names.
- ★ **WKAA Information Table:** Laura Dietrich and Carol Baltimore provided PR for the club.
- ★ **Planet Walk:** Once again, Golden Pond visitors had the opportunity to take a guided tour of the planets and walk all the way to Pluto and back.

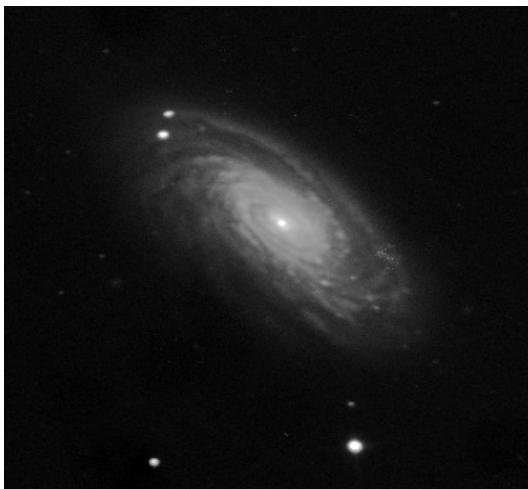
Other highlights of the day included the unveiling of the new club banner, Jackie's Astronomy Quiz (complete with prizes for correct answers!), and food! Harold Meyers, unofficial club chef, provided barbecue, tenderloin, huge sandwich buns (no "wimpy" buns here!), baked beans, and a mighty-fine multi-layered chocolate cake that complemented the banana pudding that Jeremiah Viger and his girlfriend, Stephanie, brought. In addition to being a very tasty meal, this provided a lovely break for club members.

Unfortunately, the skies got progressively cloudier as the day wore on, so there was no observing that night.

Astronomy Day is one of the club's premier events that we do in conjunction with LBL. Its success is only possible when club members pitch in and help--Thanks to EVERYONE who helped in any way to make this day another showcase event!

Note: WKAA would like to welcome its newest member, Randy French, from Charleston, MO, who joined on Astronomy Day.

OBSERVING REPORTS



Bill Brockman's Astrophotography

Bill Brockman has sent us two more of his pictures.

⇐ Messier 88: Galaxy in Coma Berenices

May 25, 2008

Camp Nelson, KY

Distance: 60 million light years

10" Reflector, F/4.7 @ 200x

CCD, DSIP2, Luminance = 50 x 30 seconds

NGC 2770: Galaxy in Lynx ⇒

May 25, 2008

Camp Nelson, KY

Distance: 90 million light years

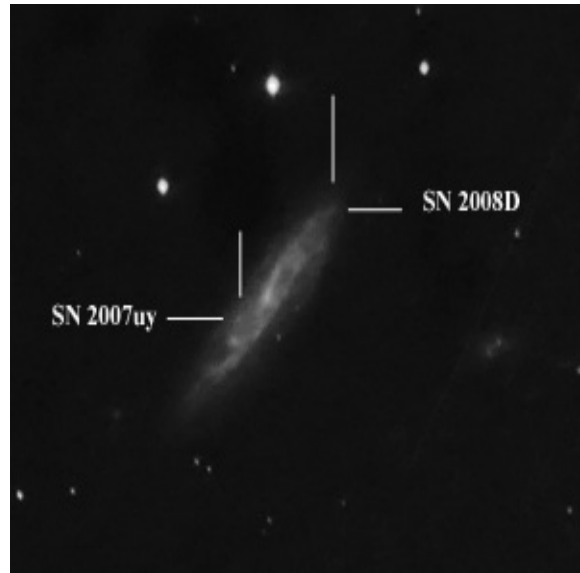
10" Reflector, F/4.7 @ 200x

CCD: DSIP2, Luminance = 50 x 30 seconds

Note the two supernovas in this photo! Bill adds, "SN 2008D has faded rapidly and is probably more visible in x-ray. The SN 2007uy must have been quite a crowd pleaser, it is still visible, but just slightly. I think both were type Ibe (iron core collapse) resulting in neutron stars or black holes."

All photography by Bill Brockman

Thank you again, Bill, for sharing these beautiful pictures!



SUMMER NIGHTS BEGINS!

The first two Summer Nights of the 2008 season have gone well. Stan Sprei and Don Partain have provided reports:

May 24 (From Don Partain): We had five members there: John Holland, Alan Dudenhofer, Ken Billings, Art Pallone, and Jacque Day. I ran my [planetarium] show until 9:30pm, thinking the sky was going to be cloudy, but it cleared up and was a great sky after all.

May 31 (From Stan Sprei): It didn't look too promising when I got out of work, but by 6:00pm, the western sky was clearing, so I decided to try it. It was clear when I got to the site at 8:00, and stayed clear until 10:00, when clouds moved in. Vyron Mitchell, and John Holland were there. John took the dome scope. Vyron had his ETX-60, but it wasn't cooperating, so he set up his 8" Dob. I had the pea-shooter [Questar]. About a dozen audience members plus Sonya showed up from the planetarium. We showed them Saturn, Mars, the Hercules cluster, the Ring Nebula, and the Sombrero Galaxy. At 10:00, it clouded up, so we called it quits. When I got home at midnight, the sky had cleared some, but there was a lot of lightning to the south in the direction of Tennessee, and also to the north. Not a bad night.

Note: Please sign up to help out with as many of the Summer Nights programs as you can this year.

Correction: We misspelled Planetarium assistant Sonya Wood-Mahler's name in the last issue of the *Faint Fuzzy*. Our apologies to Sonya!

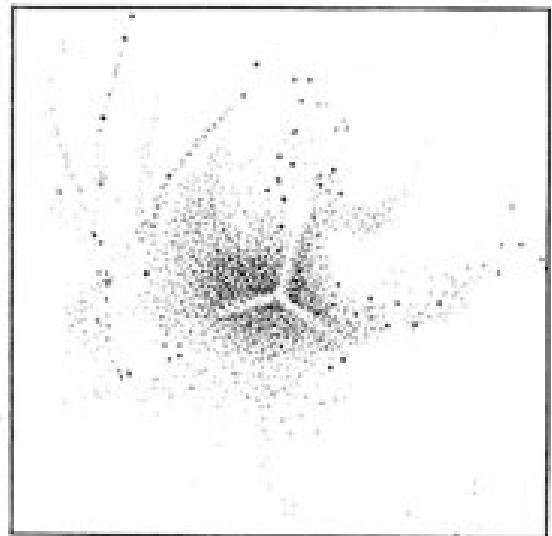
THE NIGHT SKY NATURALIST, by Bob Vickers

M13 – The Great Hercules Cluster

The quiet, peaceful nights of winter have now been replaced by summer nights full of the sounds of life. Cicadas, crickets, whippoorwills and barred owls provide a symphony for our ears while the stars of summer provide a symphony for our eyes. Go outside on a warm June night and look up at the stars. Everything you see is just a small part of the much larger collection of stars called the Milky Way Galaxy. Our star, the Sun, is only one of more than a hundred billion other stars in the Milky Way. This galaxy of ours is shaped like a flat, circular disk with a bulge at the center and arms that spiral around it like a pinwheel. On a clear, dark summer night in the country, you can see a pale glow arching overhead from South to North. This is just the glow of that disk of a hundred billion stars seen edge-on. When we look at this band of light we are looking out along the plane of the galaxy.

Surrounding the core of our galaxy are about 150 star clusters (called globular clusters), most of which lie close to the core but some lie beyond the spiral arms. One of the closer and brighter globulars is M13 (the thirteenth deep sky object in Charles Messier's famous list), also called the Great Hercules Cluster, or NGC 6205. Of the many jewels in the summer skies that are worthy of study with a telescope, M13 is one of my favorites. Located along the western edge of the Keystone of Hercules, it appears as a small, round "fuzzy" spot easily seen in binoculars. Through a telescope, on a clear, dark, moonless night, this fuzzy spot resolves into a beautiful sphere of stars and looks like diamond dust poured onto black velvet. Several long sparkling strings of stars curve out and away from its core. Discovered by Edmond Halley in 1714, M13 lies about 23,400 light years away from us and is about 140 light years across.

Looking closer at this grand cluster, you may notice three very faint and oddly straight dark lanes which converge just to the southeast of the core. Described as a "Propeller Structure," it looks to me like a slightly off center Mercedes Benz logo. This strange feature was first noticed by Bindon Stoney in 1850 while using Lord Rosse's 72 inch telescope at Birr Castle in Ireland. As unbelievable as it sounds, the propeller apparently remained unnoticed for 136 years after M13's discovery. After many years of observing I had not noticed it myself until reading a March 2003 Sky & Telescope article by Richard Jakiel. After reading his article on *Tips and Techniques for Sketching the Deep Sky* and seeing his sketch of the propeller, I looked for and found it myself. Now, I can't *not* see it! Every time I look at M13 I automatically look for it.



An exaggerated sketch of the propeller structure in M13, drawn by Bindon Stoney in 1850.

More recently, I have heard about the "Little Propeller", a small group of stars just southwest of M13's core which is supposed to form a cross. I have looked for this little asterism but so far have not been able to identify it. If anyone out there can describe it better and tell me how to find it I would be grateful.

Lastly, check out the nearby 11th magnitude spiral galaxy NGC 6207. It lies just 30' to the northeast of M13 and can be seen along with M13 in the same widefield eyepiece view. It has an elongated halo extending about 3' NE/SW and a fairly bright, elongated core with a bright stellar nucleus. At a distance of 46 million light years, NGC 6207 is almost 2000 times farther away than M13!

"It was as if a globe had been filled with moonlight and hung before them in a net woven of the glint of frosty stars..."

--- J.R.R. Tolkien's description of a jewel called the "Arkenstone of Thrain," from The Hobbit (prequel to The Lord of the Rings)

Contact Bob at cosmosbob[[@](mailto:cosmosbob@hotmail.com)]hotmail.com.

CLUB RESOURCES

Loaner Scopes/Imager

The club has two Dobsonians (6", 8") and a Meade Deep Sky Imager available for club members to borrow. Anyone who has been a club member for six months, completes a training/safety session, and signs a written agreement may borrow one of the scopes or the imager.

Library

The club has several books and magazines available to members for reference or checkout. Take a look and see what we have at the next club meeting.

Magazine Discounts

Club members who subscribe to *Sky & Telescope* or *Astronomy* magazines through the club receive a discount! Annually you can save \$10 on *Sky & Telescope* and \$9 on *Astronomy*. Contact David Paessler for more information.

CLUB OFFICERS

President: Dale Baltimore—Paducah, KY; 270-554-6603; w.daleb[[@](mailto:w.daleb@comcast.net)]comcast.net

Vice President: Jim Phfistner—Hardin, KY; 270-354-6860; phfistners[[@](mailto:phfistners@gmail.com)]gmail.com

Treasurer/Astronomical League Coordinator: David Paessler—Kevil, KY; 270-488-3784; dcpaessler[[@](mailto:dcpaessler@yahoo.com)]yahoo.com

Secretary: Bob & Melissa Vickers—Huntingdon, TN; 731-986-3082; Vickers[[@](mailto:Vickers@aeneas.net)]aeneas.net

Star Party Coordinator: David Paessler—Kevil, KY; 270-488-3784; dcpaessler[[@](mailto:dcpaessler@yahoo.com)]yahoo.com

Assistant Star Party Coordinator: Bill Kassebaum; Paducah, KY/Key West, FL; ngc1952[[@](mailto:ngc1952@bellsouth.net)]bellsouth.net

Website: John McCubbin—Hopkinsville, KY; mccubbin.astronomy[[@](mailto:mccubbin.astronomy@gmail.com)]gmail.com and John Holland—Hopkinsville, KY; yojohn_ng[[@](mailto:yojohn_ng@newwavecomm.net)]newwavecomm.net