



# The Faint Fuzzy

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*The Official Newsletter of the West Kentucky Amateur Astronomers*      November 2007

## From the President:

We had a great star party with wonderful weather this year! I want to give a special thanks to David Paessler who did a superb job as TLSP coordinator. I also want to thank Bill Kassebaum for his support as co-chairman and his hard work soliciting door prizes. Thanks to all the club members who helped keep things running smoothly during the event—David Paessler, Bill & Lynn Kassebaum, Jim & Sam Hall, John Holland, Harold Meyers, Bob & Melissa Vickers, Jackie Mathis, Carol Baltimore, and Alan Dudenhofer. I would also like to thank TLSP attendees Carl Davis, John Molt, and Kathy Delor who jumped in and helped out during the week. Special thanks go to club members Bob Vickers, Art Pallone, and Jackie Mathis who gave talks – they all did a great job. Thanks to Carol and Lynn who kept the warm room food supply stocked. I am already looking forward to next year!

—Dale Baltimore

## From the Editors:

In case you missed the Star Party this year, or would like to relive some highlights, this issue of *The Faint Fuzzy* features stories and reports from the week. Also, starting this month Bob will be writing a new on-going column called "The Night Sky Naturalist." Each column will feature a different astronomical object.

We would also like to invite other club members to submit articles or observing notes to share with our readers. Please send them to [vickers@\[aeneas.net\]](mailto:vickers@[aeneas.net]).

—Bob & Melissa

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## TWIN LAKES STAR PARTY: October 6-14, 2007

### Star Party Coordinator, David Paessler, reports:

"Our star party was a great success. We had 48 registered parties and at least 13 members on the field. We had a record 22 family registrations. We also had record good weather with only one night clouded out, and only a light sprinkle of rain then. The club purchased a projector to show movies and computer presentations and it will be available for our meeting use. We have received several emails from participants complimenting the club on the successful party. I left copies with Dale to read at the meeting."

### TLSP: Welcome to "Pleasant Valley" by Melissa Vickers

WKAA knows how to put on a Star Party! We heard positive comments from many of the attendees throughout the week. Not only did they enjoy the beautiful weather (which WKAA can't take credit for, but it sure was beautiful for star-gazing!), but they enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere, the friendly people, and the little extras, like snacks and a microwave.

I spent some time talking with one participant, Terry Steadham, one of the “Indiana contingent.” Terry is semi-retired, and has been to many star parties across the country. This was his 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> trip to attend our TLSP. If WKAA ever wanted to make an infomercial to advertise the Star Party, Terry would be a natural choice.

Terry refers to the observing field location in the midst of Pennyrile Park as “Pleasant Valley.” He explained, “I like the warmth and hospitality here, and this club is tops for making you feel welcome. Everyone seems really genuine. It’s something intangible.” Terry likes the smaller size of our party as well, as this makes for a more laid-back atmosphere. He added that if there is a problem, it is always going to be taken care of—sometimes before it becomes a problem. He remembers seeing former Star Party Chairman, Ross Workman, clipping stubbles on the field to make it smoother and safer.

Terry said, “The skies are pretty darn good,” although he came one year when the weather was bad most of the week and had a good time anyway! Now THAT’s the measure of a successful Star Party! Terry summed up his assessment, “I’d give this Star Party a real A+!”

Thanks, Terry, and we hope to see you again next year!

### **“What a Remarkable Universe!”**

TLSP attendees were treated to a special talk given by Dr. Marvin W. Russell, retired professor from West Kentucky University, who spoke about some of his astronomical impressions. In addition to his explanation of exponential functions (the rate of change depends on how much is there) as it relates to our understanding of the universe, he also told a wonderful story about the launch of Apollo 6. Dr. Russell received a 2 page telegram from none other than Werner von Braun, inviting him to attend the launch of Apollo 6 (and later Apollo 12). He sat in the box reserved for special guests “as close as we were allowed to get.” It was an incredible sight (and sound!) that inspired him so much that a poem “gushed out” of him, and he scribbled down the lines as fast as he could.

The local Rotary Club asked Dr. Russell to speak about his experience and he read his poem. Someone asked him for a copy of the poem. Two years later he was surprised to discover his poem had been published in the Rotary International Magazine, *The Reward*.

Dr. Russell traveled to Columbia, South America, as a consultant to the university there. When he arrived at the university, the president had the magazine open and asked if he was the same M. W. Russell of Bowling Green, KY, listed as author of the poem.

“Guilty as charged!” Russell replied.

Dr. Russell says he has the distinction of being the only scientist who is also a poet. And now he can add “Special Guest of the 2007 Twin Lakes Star Party” to his long list of accomplishments!

*Apollo Six, with fleeting beauty  
The course is made, complete your duty.  
You give the earth a gentle throb  
Thrust engineers to mental sob—  
And increasing skill  
That likely will  
Yield earth the chance  
To know herself  
And her kind  
In universe identity,  
To give of herself  
In space–time’s advance  
Outward to infinity.*

—Excerpt from “Apollo,”  
by Marvin W. Russell

**From the Former Club President and Star Party Coordinator:**

I believe that with the new leadership, not only within the club, but with the star party, WKAA and TLSP will continue to grow and become more well known and respected within our region and eastern US. The new ideas this year were simply wonderful and I encourage more for next year. Everyone involved with the star party did an absolutely wonderful job.

While the club hasn't seen me for quite some time, I am still an avid supporter of the club, the leadership, and its members. I have been associated with WKAA since before the first star party. I have attended meetings when only three members were present on a really good night to what it has become now. It really made me feel good knowing that I could finally walk away from the leadership role and fall back into a regular membership role and not worry about the club or star party falling on its face and dying.

I'm very proud of what our club has become and the direction in which it is heading.

Clear skies to all.  
Ross Workman

**The WKAA 2007 Twin Lakes Star Party By the Numbers:**

Statistics can be used to tell a story. Take a look at some Star Party numbers:

- ★63 Registrants (22 of these were family groups)
- ★100+ Total number of people attending
- ★10 states represented  
KY: 21 IN: 15 IL: 9 TN: 8 OH: 3 MI: 2 MO: 2 SC: 1 NY: 1 TX: 1
- ★11854 total one-way miles traveled by non-club members, with an average of 289 miles.
- ★15 Astronomy Clubs represented
- ★56 T-shirts sold (there are still a few left)
- ★50 Telescopes of all shapes and sizes
- ★8 Daytime Talks
- ★11 Sponsors donating terrific door prizes (see the [WKAA website](#) for list)
- ★2 Vendors (Chris Brownwell, 20/20 Telescopes; and Rex McDaniel, Astro Stuff)
- ★1 Wonderful Catered Meal from Country Cupboard in Madisonville, KY
- ★7 Clear nights!
- ★6 Different opinions concerning the apparent color of the same star
- ★1 Smoking telescope
- ★Billions and billions of stars!

**Mark Your Calendar. . .**

Next year's Twin Lakes Star Party will be held at "Pleasant Valley," aka Pennyryle State Park observing field, from Saturday, September 27th to Saturday, October 4th, 2008. We look forward to seeing you then!

**TREASURER/ALCOR REPORT**

David Paessler reports that the club's finances remain solid. If there are any outstanding star party bills he hasn't reimbursed yet, please bring receipts to the meeting and give to Dale.

ALCor news is exciting. We have 3 candidates for awards. Harold Meyers has submitted his full Messier list, Bob Vickers and Melissa Vickers have both submitted the Binocular Messier list. We are waiting on certificates and pins to be issued from the AL.

## **PUBLIC OUTREACH**

### **John Dobson Report**

John Dobson participated in a special planetarium show at Golden Pond on Tuesday, October 2. Don Partain led the evening with a planetarium show. Dobson then entertained an overflow crowd with his talk. Afterwards, everyone headed to the observing field where Club members Art Pallone, Donald Watkins, and Harold Meyers were waiting to assist with guided tours of the night sky.

### **Astronaut Jan Davis at Challenger Learning Center in Paducah!**

Despite stormy weather that cancelled the outside observing, a large crowd enjoyed hearing Astronaut Jan Davis speak at the Paducah Challenger Learning Center on the evening of October 18th. We appreciate club members' willingness to help out, had the weather cooperated.

## **UPCOMING EVENTS**

### **Hopkinsville Boy Scouts Invading Golden Pond--A Reminder**

Sixteen to eighteen Boy Scouts from Hopkinsville are coming after the November 10th club meeting to work on their Astronomy Merit Badge. They are hoping for clear skies so they can do some viewing, with the help of our club members. If you would like to know what is involved in earning this badge, see the Boy Scout website:

<http://www.usscouts.org/usscouts/mb/mb022.asp>

Please plan on staying after the meeting and helping out.

### **Chili Supper November 10th**

WKAA's Annual Chili Supper will be held at 6:00 pm on November 10th before the regular meeting at 7:00pm. Carol Baltimore is coordinating this potluck meal. Please let her know what you will be bringing. Contact her at [cjbaltimore@comcast.net](mailto:cjbaltimore@comcast.net).

### **Sidewalk Astronomy at Caldwell County Elementary**

Mike Armstrong and Ross Workman have a scheduled program at the Caldwell County (KY) Elementary Family Reading Night on November 15 at 7:00pm if it is clear. Contact Ross at [planetman@bellsouth.net](mailto:planetman@bellsouth.net) if you would like to help.

## **COMET 17P/HOLMES--THREE PERSPECTIVES**

**Harold Meyers:** Harold alerted the WKAA Big List to a report on [www.spaceweather.com](http://www.spaceweather.com) about the sudden brightening of Comet 17P/Holmes from mag 17 to mag 2.5 in 24 hours. Unfortunately, this announcement came during the middle of a rainy week. When the weather finally cleared, he gave us periodic updates on his observations of the comet:

October 27: "It is 3:05 AM right now and I just came in to warm up a bit. Shorts, coat, hat, and shoes are not cutting it tonight. Right now I have intermittent clouds but other than that the transparency is pretty good. The Moon glow has reduced my naked eye limiting magnitude to about 1.5. I could not see the comet without binoculars and had trouble finding it. I kept using Capella as a guide star; wrong one. I finally found it after checking my Planetarium program, and it is something to behold. It is big and bright in my 11x50's. I could see a big bright central region with a slight halo and it is definitely yellow in color, I think we will all be able to agree on this one (Star Party joke). I decided to get the telescope out and

take a look and WOW! It has a small bright starlike nucleus with a bright central coma and a dimmer outer coma. A darker ring in the outer coma gives it a bullseye effect. The nucleus is on the northwest edge of the brighter part of the coma. The comet seems to have a fan-like brighter part extending out from the coma to the southeast and the coma in that part seems to have a small bulge, I don't know if that is me or the comet! Clouds have rolled in and the transparency has gone down. I can't see any star in Perseus but can still see the comet in the scope."

October 27, evening: "The clouds cleared out and it is a beautiful fall evening! The comet is a bright naked eye object. You can't miss it in binoculars and it is a sight through a scope. I highly recommend seeing it. This is one object that is worth setting up the scope to view, even with the Moon out and bright. I viewed it tonight before the Moon came up and could see what I thought I saw last night."

**Ross Workman:** Later in the evening of October 27, Ross took an image of the comet:

"Hi All.

I took my first serious image this evening of Comet Holmes.

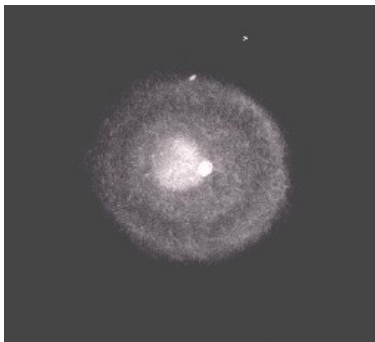
Here are the specifics:

Five ten-second, five two-second, nine one-second shots combined with DeepSkyStacker. Minimal processing in CS2. Stock 20D @ ISO 400. Meade 12.5" f/6 Research Grade."



**Jeff Burton:** Jeff first recorded his observations of the comet on October 24th. He later made a sketch on October 30.

October 24: "I went outside at 8:30 p.m. with a pair of 7x35 binoculars to look for comet 17P/Holmes. I certainly didn't need binoculars to find it, even with the nearly full moon almost directly overhead. The comet is an easy naked eye "star" forming a nice triangle with Alpha and Delta Persei. I estimated the magnitude of the comet to be near that of Delta Persei, which is magnitude 3.0. With 7x35 binoculars, the comet still appears stellar, but its yellow color is very noticeable, especially when contrasted with the blue-colored Delta Persei, which lies within the binocular field of view with the comet. I decided to brave the cold a little longer and setup my 20x70 binoculars on the mount. In the 20x70 binoculars, the comet no longer appears stellar, but looks like a bright, fuzzy, yellow ball approximately one arc-minute in diameter. No tail is discernible with adverted vision. The comet lies approximately one degree northeast of the fifth magnitude star 43 Persei."



October 30: "With the 368mm reflector, observed comet 17P/Holmes at 77x with the 24mm eyepiece, 115x with the 16mm eyepiece, and 142x with the 13mm eyepiece. The comet has grown tremendously in size since the last observation several days ago. The comet appears as a large, diffuse, yellow-colored ball of light. The nucleus is a very bright and nearly stellar, but presenting a small disc shape. A fan-shaped bright region extends from the nucleus to the southwest. An annular ring is very evident along the outer edge of the diffusion lying about one-quarter of the radius from the outer edge. The northeast side of the diffusion appears to be sharply defined,

while the southwestern side of the diffusion is ill-defined and blurred. A triangle of eleventh magnitude stars lies at the edge of the comet's halo to the southeast with one star just involved in the edge of the coma. The estimated size of the coma is eight arc minutes in diameter."

## **The Night Sky Naturalist, by Bob Vickers**

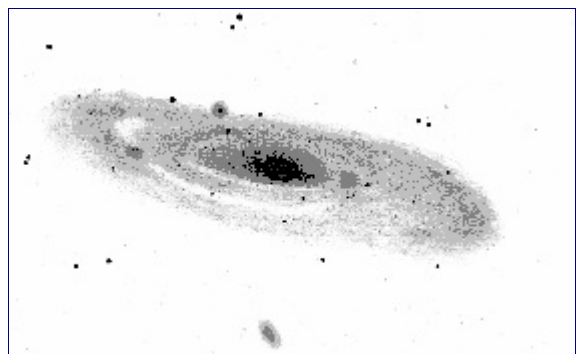
### **The Great Andromeda Galaxy**

While autumn brings colorful foliage and blue skies to our days, it also brings many crisp and clear starry nights. I try to utilize the exceptional transparency of these evenings to take a closer look at some familiar deep sky objects. One of my favorites is the *Great Andromeda Galaxy*, also known as M31 or NGC 224. This showpiece galaxy is interesting on several levels.

First, it can be seen easily without a telescope. Just follow the line from Beta through Mu Andromedae to find its faint, hazy form. Even with the unaided eye it appears elongated along a northeast to southwest axis. This elongation attests to the fact that it is a spiral galaxy tilted only thirteen degrees from edge-on to our line of sight. At a distance of about 2.3 million light years, the Andromeda Galaxy is one of the most distant objects visible to the naked eye. But we only see the bright inner part of the galaxy. Photographs reveal its actual size in the sky to be between three and four degrees or more than six times that of the full moon!

Even a small pair of binoculars will confirm the elongated shape of M31 and show its large, bright core. In addition, binoculars will also show M32 (NGC 221), a small roundish satellite galaxy. In my pair of 7x35 birding binoculars this elliptical companion galaxy appears with averted vision just to the south of the larger galaxy's core. In a telescope it has a bright stellar nucleus surrounded by a much dimmer halo.

Through my 12.5" Dobsonian, M31 takes on its characteristic "street lamp in the fog" look, showing a very elongated shape with a huge, bright, round core and a bright stellar nucleus. The entire surrounding halo, especially to the northeast and southwest, is a dim haze and has a patchy, mottled appearance. After your eyes are fully dark adapted, you can get some idea as to the extent of the galaxy by sweeping back and forth across its width and length. Curiously, the northeast tip curves slightly to the north and the southwest tip curves slightly to the south. One readily apparent feature is the sharper northwestern edge of the galaxy. I had seen this many times before but recently I made a closer examination and saw that this is just the innermost of two dust lanes beginning well north of the core and extending in a gentle sweeping arc to the southwest. To me, they look like someone has exhaled on a dark pane of glass and made two long, parallel marks with their fingers. Near the southwestern end of the outer dust lane is a slightly brighter, irregularly shaped patch of light. Actually a part of M31, this star cloud has its own NGC number of 206. A darker void, a little larger than the star cloud, is just visible adjacent to its eastern side. A Skyglow filter may help bring out some of the details here by providing more contrast.



An additional nearby treat is NGC 205 (M110), another elliptical companion galaxy to M31. It is larger than M32 but it is not as apparent because it is less concentrated and has a lower

surface brightness. It is elongated north-northwest to south-southeast and can be made out just to the northwest of M31. At low power, all three galaxies can be viewed in one field and make for an impressive sight!

Even objects that may already be familiar to us will often bear closer inspection. New details that we haven't seen before (or thought we couldn't see) will sometimes emerge if seeing conditions are right. A good reference, such as *The Night Sky Observer's Guide* by Kepple and Sanner, or *Burnham's Celestial Handbook* by Robert Burnham, Jr., can suggest some more subtle features to try for. I would love to hear from you about any lesser known details you have observed of familiar objects. You can email me at [cosmosbob\[ \]hotmail.com](mailto:cosmosbob[ ]hotmail.com).

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## **ASTRONOMEDIA**

### **TLSP Star Party Pictures on the WKAA Website**

*If you see an interesting website, article in the news, or upcoming tv show you think club members would like to know about, please send it to us at [vickers\[ \]aeneas.net](mailto:vickers[ ]aeneas.net)*

## **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.

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## **CLUB OFFICERS**

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

**Vice President:** Jim Phfistner—Hardin, KY; 270-354-6860

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

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

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