



ASTROFILES

Auburn Astronomical Society Newsletter

November 2015

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Welcome to the November issue of Astrofiles! I don't know about you, but fall and winter are about my favorite times of the year for astronomy. We've finally left those hot, muggy, mosquito-laden days behind and can now look forward to cool crisp nights with generally clearer air. And as an added bonus, it gets dark a lot earlier in the evenings, giving us more available time under the stars. We've got a couple of recent AAS events to share in this issue, but first we need to take care of the all-important meeting reminder for this month and it's a little different than normal, so read on...

As most of you know, we normally meet in Davis Hall on the AU campus, but the month of November is pretty well occupied in Auburn by home football games and in addition, we have the Thanksgiving holiday coming up at the end of the month. So to avoid all of the local congestion in town, we've decided to hold the November meeting at another site. AAS President Allen Screws has secured permission for us to meet in the fellowship hall of his church (**Shady Grove Christian Church**) outside of Opelika and the meeting will be there on **Friday, November 20, 2015**. This will also avoid a conflict with Thanksgiving the following week. **The meeting time is still 7:45 PM CT**, so make plans to attend. The directions are fairly simple: From I-85 N, take exit 64 and keep right on Highway 29. **Important: after about 500 feet or so, Hwy 29 turns left at the Sonoco gas station.** Then continue on 29 for about two miles. The church will be on your left just off the highway. You will actually turn left onto Lee Road 177 and you should be able to see the church from that intersection. If you want to put the address in your GPS, here is the info:

Shady Grove Christian Church
2194 Lee Road 177 (just off Hwy. 29)
Opelika, AL 36804

There is also a link on their web page to Google maps: <http://www.shadygrovechurch.com>

The AAS was recently asked to assist in putting on a star gaze for a local Girl Scout troop in Auburn. The location was to be in Chewacla State Park in Auburn on Friday, November 16th. Since this was on rather short notice and was also the night before our scheduled star gaze in Tuskegee National Forest, AAS President Allen Screws graciously volunteered to help out since he lives nearby. According to Allen, there were about 30 scouts at the campout in the CCC area of the park. The site had moderate light pollution from the city of Auburn and some nearby car dealerships. He estimated that the limited magnitude at the site was about +4. Still, they were able to view the crescent moon, M13, M8, M31 and M57. He reported that everyone enjoyed viewing the objects (especially the adults), and he received two boxes of Girl Scout cookies! Thanks Allen for helping to share the wonders of astronomy with the public!

Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site presents

A Night under the Stars

Saturday, October 17th at 6:30 PM
at Tuskegee National Forest (Forest Road 902)

Join Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site staff, Tuskegee National Forest, and the Auburn Astronomical Society for this stargazing event. Learn the connection between the Tuskegee Airmen and astronomy. Amateur astronomers, youth, seniors, sororities and fraternities, school groups and the community-at-large are invited. The Auburn Astronomical Society will assist guests in locating and identifying visible constellations.

This event is FREE and open to the public.
Bring your telescopes, binoculars, and flashlights.

For more information, visit www.nps.gov/tuai
or call 334-724-0922.

Tuskegee Airmen
National Historic Site

1616 Chapple James Avenue
Tuskegee, AL 36083

National Park Service
US Department of the Interior

On Saturday, October 17, 2015, we were finally able to conduct a star gaze for the group at the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site and perhaps fittingly, it was in the Tuskegee National Forest just southwest of Auburn off of I-85. We had looked at potential sites in the Forest earlier and picked an elevated area that was relatively free of trees with a fairly good view of the sky. The days leading up that Saturday were almost perfect as far as being clear and free of

cloud cover, but as we arrived at the site on Saturday evening, there were some high, thin clouds that threatened to spoil the view. We had about ten AAS members to show up with all of their scopes and other gear and we were joined by a small group of staff from the Tuskegee Airmen Site. Unfortunately, due to some delays in publicizing the event, there were not any students or other members of the public that attended. The cloud cover gradually improved to the point that we were able to view the crescent moon and numerous star clusters and some of the brighter nebula and galaxies. The site itself was fairly good, but there was some sky glow from the city of Auburn to the northeast. Also, since the site was several feet above the level of the road, it made it difficult to transport all of the equipment from the vehicles to the site. In addition, the access road is rather narrow and did not allow for much in the way of parking. However, I think that everyone had a good time. Below are a few pictures taken while we were setting up the equipment.



Panorama photo of viewing site - Courtesy of Wes Schwarz









During the star gaze, park ranger Christine Biggers give the group a brief overview of the history of the legendary Tuskegee Airmen during WWII, and also outlined the mission of the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site. It is a fascinating history, and if you want to learn more about them, you can go to their website <http://www.nps.gov/tuai/>

If you have had an opportunity recently to look up at the eastern sky in the mornings before sunrise, you have surely seen the striking display of planets - Venus, Jupiter and Mars, and occasionally joined by the moon. I have personally had a number of people ask me about those bright "stars" that they have been seeing as they were leaving to go to work. It has given me the opportunity to tell them that they are in fact planets, and a little information about them. Unfortunately, most people these days are so busy with work and other activities that they are sometimes unaware of the spectacle on display just over their heads. That is why public outreach is so important in astronomy today, and with more and more people living in heavily light-polluted urban areas, they are denied the opportunity to appreciate the night sky.

While we are on the subject of light pollution, I have noticed that in my location (Columbus, GA), Georgia Power Company has already started replacing some of the mercury/sodium vapor street lighting with the newer LED fixtures, and the goal is to have most all of them replaced in the next few years. Agreed, the cost savings in terms of electricity usage and maintenance are sure to drop, but I'm a little concerned as it relates to astrophotography. Currently, we amateurs

can purchase special filters that are specifically designed to effectively minimize or block the emission spikes from the mercury/sodium vapor lighting, thus permitting astrophotography from many urban sites. However, from what I have been reading, the emission spectra from the new white LED fixtures are more like a full-spectrum source, therefore making it almost impossible to block with a filter without also blocking most everything else in the process. If the design of the lighting fixtures themselves would direct more of the illumination down where it is needed, that might help the overall situation. I guess that we will just have to wait a while and see what the overall effect will be on our hobby.

Finally, a reminder that it is rapidly approaching the time to renew your annual dues to the AAS or perhaps join as a new member. The annual dues cycle begins on January 1, 2016 but 2016 dues can be accepted anytime before then. An AAS membership application can be found on our web page <http://www.auburnastro.org> Dues are \$20 per year, payable to the Auburn Astronomical Society. The applications can be mailed to me at the following address:

John Wingard
c/o Auburn Astronomical Society
#5 Weston Court
Columbus, GA 31907.

If you are a new member, we encourage you to fill out the membership application with your name, address, and contact information so that you can be put on the mailing list for the Astronomical League Reflector magazine. This is a special benefit of being a paid-up member of the AAS. The Astronomical League is the national organization representing many astronomy clubs through the country and their quarterly Reflector magazine has many good articles and news about astronomy clubs and their activities.

That's it for another issue. If you have any items of interest, astro photos or equipment for sale, etc. please forward them to me at my e-mail address at the top of this newsletter. Until then...

Clear skies!