

# Rappahannock Astronomy Club

## Minutes, January 9, 2013, Meeting

In attendance:

- Benjamin Ashley
  - Terry Barker
  - Bart & Linda Billard
  - David Buckwalter
  - Scott Busby
  - Don Clark
  - George Clarke
  - Joe Fordham
  - Rob Friedel
  - Leigh Gettier
  - Ranny Heflin
  - Jerry Hubbell
  - Scott Lansdale
  - Melvin McDaniel\*
  - Tim Plunkett
- \*New member joined this evening

President Jerry Hubbell began the meeting at 7:00 p.m. Fourteen members and 2 visitors were present. One of the visitors joined at the meeting.

## Program

For the program, we had an open forum on new astronomy gear and what members have been doing lately. Ranny Heflin led off by showing an ETX 90 Maksutov-Cassegrain telescope he brought in. He said his older son also has one, and this one was a present for his younger son. It can be controlled by a computer and equatorially aligned or used in an altitude-azimuth configuration. It has a narrow field of view and could use a better finder, but is suitable for viewing planets in bright skies, and it fits his older son's apartment location because it is easy to pack up and go with the optional case. Ranny also showed a new set of filters he got for his DSLR camera, including hydrogen-alpha, oxygen-III, and sulfur filters.

Rob Friedel told us he got a new Telrad finder. He also described an Apple Telrad App. It adds the finder bulls-eye pattern to the view of the sky on the screen. It lets him aim his telescope within a degree or two of his target. He was able to get extra base mounts fitting the Telrad finder for his other two telescopes so that he can easily switch the finder from one scope to another.

Scott Busby said the astro photos he sent out recently reflected his main activity of late. He was also working on tweaking his telescopes and autoguiding techniques. However, he found he keeps going back to manual guiding. With his telescoping pier to adjust the height of the eyepiece, he is able to get very comfortable for manually guiding long exposures. However, he brought up a drawback he discovered with the pier. It has a large mass of metal that takes a long time to change temperature. When the morning sun reaches the dome, the humidity inside goes up and often condenses moisture on the pier. He found that a dehumidifier makes it colder, and he was considering other options.

Jerry showed the Byrch *Great Atlas of the Sky*, which was recently reduced in price. (Some were still available.) It included an overlay for measuring positions, and a clear holder. The large charts, covering 10 by 15 degrees, are removable, and the holder can be used to temporarily mark the chart. The atlas includes 70,000 deep-sky objects.

Joe described a new setup with 20x100 binoculars, mount, and chair. He can cover a quarter of the sky at a time in comfort from the chair. He also added Fuji 16x70 binoculars for better image quality views, though not as good for faint galaxies. David Buckwalter did not have new gear to mention, but in part it was because he was busy moving. He said he was going to be living in a dark sky location not far from Scott Busby. Ben Ashley described a project to build a high-power green laser pointer. Linda had a new sealed lead-acid battery for the Club NexStar and an iPad to use for accessing SkySafari.

Scott Lansdale had perhaps the most unusual gear to discuss. He built a VLF antenna for observing flares and solar storms. It picks up various manmade sources to reveal effects of the Sun on the ionosphere. He said it can also pick up strange things like earthquakes, if they happen during the day and are located between the antenna and the VLF source to which it is tuned. He said he also picked up what he thinks is a neighbor's invisible dog fence.

## Old Business

- Treasurer's Report—Tim reported two dues payments for next year. Ten members have paid dues for the new year, (One has also paid dues for next year.)
- Star Parties, Events, and Meetings—The star party scheduled for Belmont on December 15 was cancelled because of weather, as was the January 5 date at Caledon.
- Hobby Town USA—Scott Busby said he was planning a visit to the hobby shop but had nothing to report at this time.
- Status of Club Loaner Equipment—Ben Ashley brought the Personal Solar Telescope to the meeting to be available for someone to check out. Don Clark checked it out.
- Scheduled Star Parties and Outreach Events—The outreach for Post Oak Middle School was not held because of cloudy weather. They would like to reschedule. The next outreach was scheduled for Friday, January 11, at the Library. Jerry will do a presentation on the Constellations for children in grades K–6 assisted by Linda. Others could volunteer if interested in attending and possibly answering questions on astronomy.
- Web Site Maintenance—Linda distributed a survey covering content on the Club website front page that was to be completed at the meeting or sent in afterward. Jerry and Linda reported that the Library server went down on the previous Friday. Fortunately, it was back up Saturday morning in time for posting the star party cancellation. The Yahoo group was available to get word out as backup. Scott said he had finished putting 2013 event dates into the calendar for the Yahoo group site. He was asked about some features that were discontinued. He said they were beta versions of potential additions to the Yahoo groups, but they were discontinued instead of being permanently implemented, although he had found some of them useful for our group.
- RACLUB *StarGazer* Newsletter—Linda said the next issue is nearly complete. She was waiting on 2 or 3 promised submissions.
- Potential New RAClub Meeting Location—The room available at the Heritage Center in the lower level of Maury School was originally discussed at the December meeting. Linda recapped that discussion for members present at this meeting. Don Clark suggested holding a meeting there on a trial basis. Meeting there would require a change of night. Scott noted that permanently changing the meeting night could require a change in the Bylaws. The 3rd Wednesday in March (the 20th) appeared to be an acceptable choice for a trial meeting. Scott moved to hold a trial meeting at the Heritage Center on the 3rd Wednesday in March and was seconded by Don. The motion carried on a voice vote with no objections.

## News/New Business

- Star Party Requests and 2013 Schedule—Jerry mentioned requests were still a ways off. He mentioned a Westmoreland request for the summer and a Northumberland request for the fall.
- Don Clark said he was updating Club officer email forwarding addresses for the Club website. He noted that the process involves a confirmation email sent to the officer involved that requires a response to complete the update. He wanted the officers to be on the lookout for the confirmation email and remember to respond so the update would not have to be started over.

## Next Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, February 13, 2013, at the Central Rappahannock Regional Library Headquarters, 1201 Caroline St., in Fredericksburg.