

# RVAS NEWSLETTER



Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society (RVAS)  
News About Amateur Astronomy  
In Southwestern Virginia



Vol. 24 - No. 4

April 2007

## ECLIPSED MOON RISING OUTREACH

*By Mike Overacker - RVAS President*

Among the many sciences, astronomy is one science that the general public can grasp and enjoy. For the average viewer, there is no greater event than a lunar or solar eclipse. Lunar eclipses are more common than solar eclipses, and most lunar eclipses have a tendency to either not be visible at all, or to take place when the moon has risen and is in the night sky.

On Saturday, March 3, 2007, our area received a rare opportunity



*Photo by Michael Overacker*

*A large crowd gathered at Cahas Mountain Overlook for the Eclipsed Moon Rising.*

to see an already eclipsed moon as it was rising in the East. The RVAS decided to provide an area for the general public to watch this event, and set forth to promote the outreach through local media outlets.

I arrived at Cahas Mountain overlook on the Blue Ridge Parkway just before 4 PM on the evening of the eclipse. I was surprised to see several members of the general public had already arrived to secure their spot for the viewing. Not long after I arrived, many more members of the general public started to arrive, as well as members of the RVAS. The overlook parking lot was soon full, and later arrivals had to

either park on the overlook entry road, or on the sides of the Blue Ridge Parkway. We made several attempts to count the number of cars and the number of people at the event, but the people were arriving faster than we get an accurate count. As the time for moonrise approached, several members went out to get a car count. We had over 100 cars for the event, equating between 250 and 300 people attending. This is an outstanding turnout for an event that required attendees to drive around 20 miles away from Roanoke.

The time for moonrise arrived, but we had to wait patiently for

*See Eclipse, Page 5*



*Photo by Michael Overacker*

*Margaret Ramsey points out Venus in the west as the crowd awaited the moonrise.*

Don't forget to start getting your astrophotography and night sky images together for the RVAS Photo Competition. The competition takes place at the April RVAS meeting.

# CLUB INFORMATION AND NEWS

## *RVAS has a Yahoo Group*

The RVAS has added a Yahoo Group for members to keep in touch. All RVAS information will be posted to this group first. If the information warrants a club email, that would occur next. The Webpage will then get the info if it needs to be placed in Public. Go to [groups.yahoo.com](http://groups.yahoo.com) to apply for the RVAS Yahoo Group.



## MYSTERY OBJECT

This object is an easy guess if you are fond of Canada's favorite sport, eh?

Send your best guess to Dave Thomas, our Mystery Object Columnist, at

[ka-8-inl@hotmail.com](mailto:ka-8-inl@hotmail.com)

## *New RVAS Webmaster*

The RVAS webhost server, Netbunch, has ceased operations. The RVAS website had to be moved immediately, and since the RVAS President has a webserver, that is where the site will be hosted in the foreseeable future. Look for a slightly different look on our website.

Thanks to Roger Pommerenke for his great work as webmaster. He added a great new look to the site, and did a fantastic job of updating the website in a timely fashion.

## *New RVAS Newsletter Editor*

The new newsletter editor for the RVAS is Dave Thomas. He will be taking over the NL, starting with the May 2007 NL. Send all NL correspondence and articles to Dave at [ka-8-inl@hotmail.com](mailto:ka-8-inl@hotmail.com)

# ASTRO-QUIZ

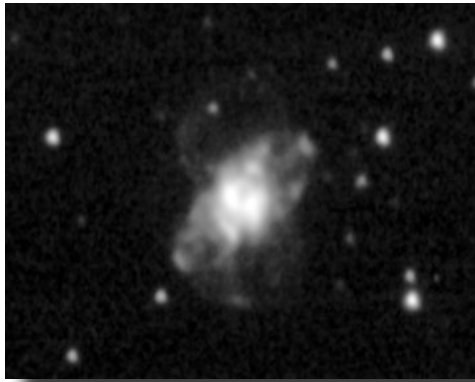
One of the planets of our solar system has moons that are all named for literary characters. What is the planet and who are the literary figures who created the characters?

Answer to Last Month's Astro-Quiz: Last month we asked what you might respond if someone asks you what the distance to the constellation Orion is. Well, you'd probably have to gently indicate that the question makes no sense. The constellation Orion exists only as a chance pattern of physically-unrelated stars visible as such from our region of the galaxy. Moreover, the stars are mostly all of different distances from us. For example, Betelgeuse is about 420 light-years distant, while Rigel is over 770. Asking about the distance to a constellation is different from asking the distance to a cluster of stars, since these stars are physically related and an average distance can be meaningfully determined.

The Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society is a membership organization of amateur astronomers dedicated to the pursuit of astronomical observational and photographic activities. Meetings are held at 7:30 p.m. the third Monday of each month at Center in the Square in downtown Roanoke, Virginia. Meetings are open to the public. Observing sessions are held one or two weekends a month at a dark-sky site. Yearly individual dues are \$20.00. Family membership is \$25.00; student membership is \$10.00. For information, call the RVAS Message Line at 540-774-5651. Articles, quotes, etc. published in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the RVAS, its editor, officers, or individual members.

**RVAS web page:** <http://www.roavas.org>

**Officers/Executive Committee:** Mike Overacker, President / Newsletter Editor / Webmaster (776-3092); Vacant, Vice President (000-0000); Mark Hodges, Secretary (774-5039); Jeff Suhr, Treasurer (563-0079); Dave Thomas, EC Member-At-Large (434 237-5135); Katherine Hix, Immediate Past President (334-2443); Paul Caffrey, Past President (345-2847)



## LAST MONTH'S MYSTERY OBJECT

The hottest white dwarf star known is at the center of the mystery object for this month. The central star in the nebula NGC 2440 has a surface temperature of over 200,000 degrees celsius.

The nebula is located at RA 7h 41m 54s, Dec -18 deg 12m 29s in the constellation Puppis. It shines at magnitude 9.3. It is easily visible in 6" or larger scopes.

Our own Sun will share the same fate as NGC 2440's central star. In about 4 billion years or so perhaps a nebula similar to this will surround our Sun.

## RVAS MARCH MEETING MINUTES

*By Mark Hodges - RVAS Secretary*

There were 22 members and 1 guest present at the meeting.

**Mike Overacker** opened the meeting and welcomed our guest.

**John Goss** presented the deep sky object of the month, M48 in Hydra and M50.

**Jeff Puuri** presented the constellation of the month, Canis Major.

Then **Mike Overacker** gave the main program, Telescopes, Mounts and things to see.

**Mark Hodges** presented a short video of the Astro-Physics manufacturing facility.

**Jeff Suhr** gave the treasurers report, and **Mike Overacker** reported that we may have to look into getting insurance so the club members can use the ARF Observatory.

Meeting was adjourned.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### NEAF - NORTH EAST ASTRONOMY FORUM - SUFFERN, NY - APRIL 28 - 29, 2007



NEAF (North East Astronomy Forum) is an annual event held by the Rockland Astronomy Club in New York. The event is held at the Rockland Community College at 145 College Road in Suffern NY. This event is heavily attended by astronomy enthusiasts from up and down the east coast and by astronomy vendors from around the world. Information will coming soon at the Rockland Astronomy site at [www.rocklandastronomy.com](http://www.rocklandastronomy.com).

### GREEN BANK STARQUEST - GREEN BANK, WV- JULY 4-7, 2007

One of the closer star parties to our area, this event is in the shadow of the Green Bank Radio observatory. This event seems to get better every year, so if you plan on hitting a star party this year, this one is a good choice. Various speakers are scheduled, as well as four of the original "Rocket Boys". For further information, visit [www.greenbankstarquest.org/](http://www.greenbankstarquest.org/)

### MASON DIXON STAR PARTY - WELLSVILLE, PA - JULY 11 - 15, 2007

The 18th Annual Mason Dixon Star Party is The Star Party for all members of the family. This location offers a flat and level camping /observing area with unlimited space for attendees. This is a Star Party for all members of the family. There will be workshops, speakers, field trips and raffle prizes for all ages. We also have camping areas, bunk houses, food, showers and facilities, horse shoe pits, sand volley ball courts and a swimming pool too!

[www.YCAS.org](http://www.YCAS.org) and <http://www.masondixonstarparty.org/>

## MEET THE MEMBER - JEFF PUURI

*By Katherine Hix - Immediate Past President*

**Q. What aspects of the field of astronomy are you most interested in?**

A. Right now I am most interested in learning the constellations and their component stars, the feature names on the lunar surface, and the Messier deep sky objects.

**Q. When did you become interested in astronomy?**

A. The Apollo years occurred while I was in elementary school, so I have always had a fascination with space. However, I never really dived into obtaining more specific astronomical knowledge until this current year mainly thanks to Santa Claus bringing our family a telescope this past Christmas.

**Q. Tell us a little bit about yourself – your family, interests, hobbies, etc.**

A. My wife, 8 year old son, and I live on a small farm in the Copper Hill section of Floyd County. In the fall of 2006 I switched careers after 21 years as a software developer to become a stay-at-home dad and part-time farmer. My main interests are serving Jesus Christ through active involvement in our church, serving my family by being the best father and husband that I can be, and in my free time studying to learn as much as I can about astronomy and agriculture. On our farm we have a dog, cat, mule, goat, and

some chickens.

**Q. Do you have any formal education do you have in astronomy, or are you learning about it on your own?**

A. Learning on my own and with the help of the fine folks in the RVAS, of course.

**Q. Is the field of astronomy related to your job?**

A. Partially - as I am a stay-at-home dad whose primary task is home educating our son, I use astronomy quite a lot in the science curriculum of our studies. The field trips to Cahas or just the backyard are fun and educational for both of us.

**Q. What observing equipment do you own? How would you improve it?**

A. Santa brought us a Tasco 60x600 mm refractor telescope for Christmas. The only improvement I could desire for this scope is a different mount that could provide better fine tuning adjustments. I also use a pair of Pentax 8x21 binoculars. I really enjoy binocular observing and getting a bigger pair of binoculars might be my next big astronomy-related purchase.

**Q. Are you interested in astrophotography?**

A. I enjoy astronomy and also photography, so someday it might be nice to combine the two interests. But that will be later after I learn my way around the nighttime sky a little better.

**Q. Are your spouse and children stargazers, as well?**

A. Yes, all three of us like to go out and view together, especially when there is some special celestial occurrence. We really enjoy trying to find the celestial objects reported by John Goss in his newspaper column.

**Q. What are your favorite astronomy-related books?**

A. I now own two astronomy books. H.A. Rey's 'The Stars' (thanks to the RVAS member's recommendations page from the website) and the 2007 Astronomical Calendar, which is packed from cover-to-cover with useful astronomical information. I have also checked out some astronomy books from the library, of which my favorite was Stephen Hawking's 'A Briefer History of Time'.

**Q. Favorite Movies?**

A. StarMan, Good Boy, and Apollo 13

**Q. Star Trek or Star Wars?**

A. Star Trek – Jean-Luc Picard and I have the same initials.

**Q. As a new member of the RVAS, have you participated in many of its activities? If so, which ones, and did you enjoy them?**

A. Yes, I have been to three monthly meetings so far and enjoyed them all. My son and I have also been to one members-

*See Jeff Puuri, Page 5*

## ECLIPSE

*Continued from Page 1*

the sky to darken, and for the moon to clear some light haze that had settled in the valley east of our point of observation. Mark Hodges called "first sighting" and informed the crowd where the moon was in the East. The crowd rapidly started catching sight of the eclipsed moon, and the vast array of cameras started clicking away to secure visual memories of this rare event.

As the moon started exiting from its full umbral phase, the members of

the general public started heading back home to the Roanoke Valley. They were soon followed by members of the astronomy club and their families. I was last leave the overlook at around 8:30 PM, and the vacant overlook was in stark contrast to the way it looked just two hours earlier.

I want to thank everyone who helped to make the March 3, 2007 lunar eclipse an amazing outreach event. If you did not make it to this event, I'm sorry. You missed a truly spectacular event, both with the moon, and with the turnout of the public.

Thanks to our Public Outreach Chair, Mark Hodges, for his work towards putting on this outreach. Also, thanks to RVAS members: Paul Gensurosky, Katherine Hix, David Thaler, Dave Thomas (Lynchburg), Fred Davis, Bob Young, Carol Mesimer, Roger Pommerenke, Jeff Suhr, Matt Fleenor, Jeff Puuri, Carl Puuri, Gary Hatfield, Richard Zue, Debbie Zue, Rick Rader, Dave Godman, and John Goss. Also, thanks to Margaret Ramsey for helping us out at this event as part of her school project at Franklin County High School.

## RVAS WITHDRAWS ARF TELESCOPE DONATION

*By Mike Overacker - RVAS President*

The Executive Committee of the RVAS had a meeting on Thursday, March 29, 2007, to discuss several issues, one of which was the status of the donation of the telescope to Apple Ridge Farm (ARF) for use in the ARF observatory. The RVAS had sent an agreement to ARF almost a year ago stating the conditions for the donation of the telescope. This agreement was never signed and returned to the RVAS. Additionally, there

was an agreed condition that there would be liability coverage of RVAS members under the ARF liability policy. Recent statements from ARF indicated the RVAS would have to get their own liability insurance to cover RVAS members while involved with the ARF observatory.

The RVAS Executive Committee voted to withdraw the offer to donate the telescope to ARF. We still wish to support ARF and their programs to teach astronomy, as was the original request to the RVAS by the Apple Ridge Farm

group. Any future support will have to be worked out in a new agreement between Apple Ridge Farm and the RVAS.

The RVAS Executive Committee is waiting to see if Apple Ridge Farm wishes to purchase the telescope that was bought with RVAS funds. The RVAS still has \$1900 invested in the telescope and accessories, and that is the price that the RVAS will sell it to ARF, if they should wish to buy it. The RVAS Executive Committee has set a date of April 30, 2007 for Apple Ridge Farm to purchase the telescope.

## JEFF PUURI

*Continued from Page 4*

only viewing at Cahas, and although no one showed up, it was a beautiful evening and the observing was spectacular. Finally, we went to the recent public outreach viewing of the lunar eclipse and had a real good time.

**Q. How often do you have the opportunity to observe? Where do you go?**

A. Since joining RVAS and

developing a significant interest in astronomy, I probably do some level of observing on just about every single clear night. >From my own back yard I like to look up and, at a minimum, inventory all the stars and constellations that I recognize. If I have a few extra minutes, I will try to look up some new objects that I do not recognize in my Starry Night software or using one of my astronomy books. A few times, my son and I have gotten real ambitious and headed over to a Parkway overlook.

My observing sessions will use some combination of telescope, binoculars, and/or just my eyes.

**Q. Have you ever attended a star party? If so, tell us a little about it. Also, would you be interested in attending any star parties with RVAS groups?**

A. No star parties yet. They sound like great fun though. I hope to attend one sometime in the near future with my new friends from the RVAS.

# ***Society Events and Activities for April 2007***

**MONTHLY MEETING:** Monday, April 16th, 7:30 p.m. Fifth floor meeting room, Center In The Square, Roanoke. The evening's program will be the Spring Social and Astrophotography Competition. We ask all members to bring a snack or dessert to share with the members. Bring your best astrophotos or astronomy related photos for the competition..

**"MEMBERS ONLY" WEEKEND OBSERVING SESSIONS:** Unless otherwise noted, observing sessions are held at Cahas Mountain Overlook, milepost 139 on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

Friday and Saturday, 6th and 7th. Sunset is at 7:48 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 9:18 p.m. The Moon rises at 11:59 p.m. and 12:59 a.m., respectively.

Friday and Saturday, 13th and 14th. Sunset is at 7:54 p.m. Astronomical twilight ends at 9:26 p.m. The Moon sets at 3:35 and 4:48 p.m., respectively.

**May Sessions:** 11th and 12th.

**FRANKLIN CO. PARKS DEPT./RVAS PUBLIC STARGAZE:** Next session: June 9th, 9:15 p.m., Franklin Co. Recreational Park)

**ROANOKE CITY PARKS DEPT./RVAS PUBLIC STARGAZE:** Saturday, April 14th, 8:30 p.m., Cahas Overlook, milepost 139, Blue Ridge Parkway. For City, County and other area residents; RVAS members welcome to participate. Call the RVAS Message Line, 540-774-5651, for information. (Next

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