



Roanoke Valley Astronomical Society

News About Amateur Astronomy
In Southwestern Virginia
<http://rvasclub.org>



Vol. 25 - No. 9

September 2008

RVAS Changes Leadership

By **Mary Crouch**,
RVAS Secretary

Two members were appointed by the RVAS Executive Committee to important club positions:

RVAS Meeting Minutes Meeting Date: 8/18/08

Members present: 34

Mark Hodges, our new President, called the meeting to order.
(Read Mark's statement on Page 9 herein.)

Introduction of the new Executive Committee

- **Mark Hodges** - President
- **Randy Sowden** - Vice Pres.
- **Paul Caffrey** - Past President
- **Dave Godman** - Past-Past Pres.
- **Jeff Suhr** - Treasurer
- **Mary Crouch** - Secretary
- **Dave Thomas** - Memb. at large

- **Clark Thomas** was introduced as RVAS Newsletter Editor.

- **Roger Pommerenke** was introduced as RVAS Web Master.

Recent Events Discussed

Discussion was held regarding the recent resignations of four club members, and upcoming changes of club control with shared responsibilities among members.

John Goss gave a quick presentation on his view of "Civility," and on his desire to end character assassinations within the club. We all agreed we do not want this type of dissent within our club.

In the general discussion that followed several members spoke of their level of participation within this volunteer club. Ways the club can move forward were discussed in an atmosphere of concern and optimism.

One member asked if the *Yahoo group* will continue. There was general agreement that this forum has excellent potential. **Mark Hodges** stated that he will work on it.

New Business

Mike Good gave a short and lively update on *Apple Ridge Farm observatory*, on Bent Mountain.

He and others also brought the membership up to date on the relationship between RVAS and the *Lynchburg College observatory*.

Mechanical issues with the 20-inch RC telescope need to be resolved. Club member docent activity, or lack thereof, was discussed. Problems with the undersized mount for the heavy scope, and even with some angry neighbors on the rural access road are yet to be resolved by the Lynchburg College group.

"Members Only" observing sessions will be renamed "Club Observing" sessions to encourage anyone interested in coming up to Cahas to observe with the club. This is not a change in policy, but rather a way of clearly saying that we are not discouraging individuals who want to come by when we are out there as a club. *Public viewing sessions and special events* will continue, being advertised as such.

Paul Caffrey gave a wonderful presentation on *"The Leviathan of Parsontown."* The 72" telescope

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. on the third Monday of each month, at the 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 dues are \$25.00. Student dues are \$10.00. Articles, quotes, etc. published in the newsletter do not necessarily reflect the views of the RVAS or its editor.

RVAS web page: <http://rvasclub.org>

Officers/Executive Committee:

Mark Hodges, President (president@rvasclub.org)

Randy Sowden, Vice President (vicepresident@rvasclub.org)

Mary Crouch, Secretary (secretary@rvasclub.org)

Jeff Suhr, Treasurer (treasurer@rvasclub.org)

Paul Caffrey, Past President (pastpresident@rvasclub.org)

Dave Godman, Past-Past President (pastpastpresident@rvasclub.org)

Dave Thomas, Member-at-Large (memberatlarge@rvasclub.org)

was completed in 1844 in Ireland, and was for many years the largest telescope in the world. It had a bronze mirror, and required up to eight people to work it! Paul and his wife visited the restored scope several years ago, and he showed us some very cool photos he took.

Randy Sowden discussed the *upcoming calendar* for 2009 and 2010, as well as openings for presentations by club members.

Observing Reports

Mike Good – good views of Perseid meteors.

Rand Bowden – viewing at Cahas of ISS pass over, Ring Nebula, and Cigar Galaxy.

Frank Baratta – if clear skies, will again be holding Roanoke County Parks & Rec public observing sessions.

Next Meeting

Saturday, September 20th at Franklin County park for our annual summer picnic and observing session. This gathering will also be our September meeting, which means we will not meet in Roanoke on the third Monday.

Mary Crouch is the contact for member sign-up. E-mail her with how many will attend with you and what you plan to bring.

Several members already have signed up. We will need a head count to plan for food more accurately.

RVAS will provide hot and juicy hamburgers and hot dogs. The club will also supply paper products and drinks.

Members are requested to bring something yummy to the picnic. In this way, a fabulous feast will be had by all.

Door prizes will be awarded. Last year, everybody got a really nice door prize!

Mark adjourned the meeting shortly before 9 pm.

Quick Executive Committee Meeting

Thereafter, the revitalized Executive Committee met briefly to discuss the new website, as well as details regarding the upcoming annual picnic.

The new URL for our club will be *rvasclub.org*. **Roger Pommerenke** is now working on it. ★

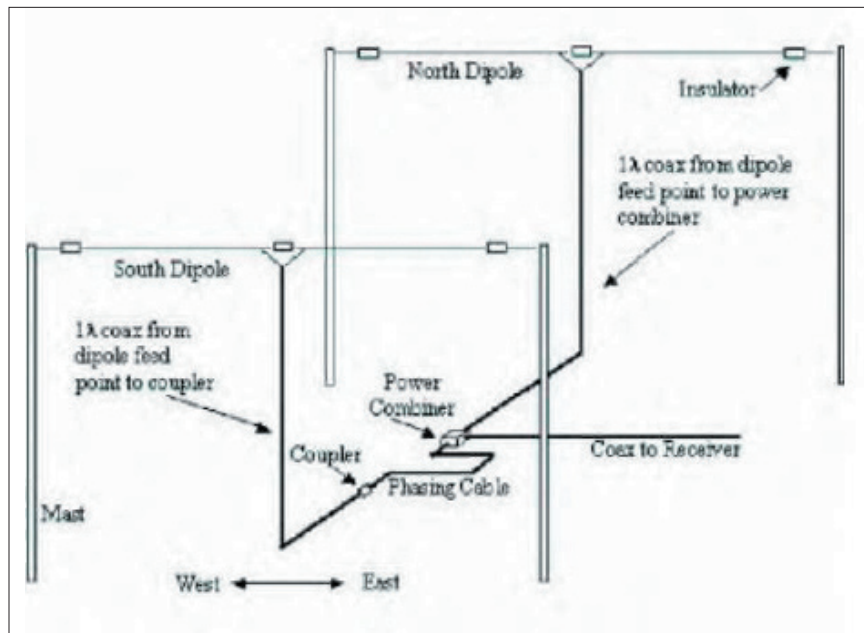
Two Types of Astronomy for Young Guests at Apple Ridge

By Dave Thomas

On Saturday evening July 26th *GE Observatory* volunteers and RVAS members, **Paul Caffrey**, **Roger Pommerenke** and myself set up the Radio Jove dual dipole and RJ1 receiver at the GE Observatory on Apple Ridge Farm to observe a predicted *Io-B radio storm from Jupiter*.

The radio storms from Jupiter are basically caused by electrons spiraling around magnetic lines of force in Jupiter's magnetic field. The free electrons are supplied when ionized Sulfur is deposited in orbit around Jupiter after erupting from volcanoes on Jupiter's moon Io.

This **radio telescope** consists of two dipole antennas at about 20 feet above ground and cut for a frequency 20.1 megahertz in the short wave 15 meter band. The radio signals are fed to the RJ1 receiver through coaxial cable similar to the cable used for cable TV. The radio bursts from Jupiter, because of the effects of the Earth's ionosphere and atmosphere, are strongest between 18 and 40 megahertz, with 20.1 megahertz found to be the best for this system. There are other frequencies that are used for radio astronomy well into the gigahertz range, but the Radio Jove system is a good way to do planetary and solar radio astronomy at the basic level without the high cost of more sophisticated equipment.



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basic level without the high cost of more sophisticated equipment.

Along with the Io-B observing, we were expecting a group of 27 youngsters from the *Carver Disco Science Academy of Richmond, Virginia*. They had come to Apple Ridge for several days to study nature, and for recreation at the science center on the farm.

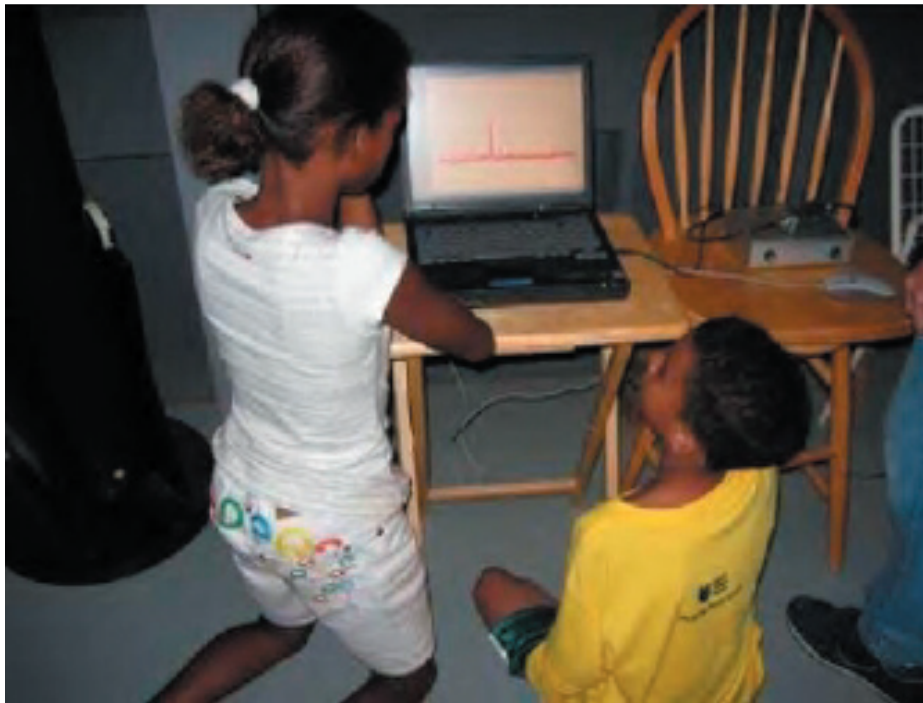
We had planned on having simultaneous viewings of Jupiter in both the visual and RF portions of the spectrum. However, the cloud cover did not want to clear, and we were sure that the optical observing would not be an option. Fortunately, radio astronomy is available even on cloudy nights.

The student group arrived at the observatory at about 9:15 p.m. There was a great deal of interest in the radio telescope. Students asked several questions about it, and about the Radio Jove program.

The night sky had been overcast. After the students arrived holes started opening up in the

cloud cover. Shortly afterwards, the sky was mostly clear, and the optical seeing became the best that it had been in weeks! Jupiter was visible, and the Great Red Spot was close to the Central Meridian. Other detail was also visible in the Jovian cloud belts.

The Io-B was predicted to begin at about 9:48 p.m., but we didn't detect any bursts of activity until 10:40 p.m. The students had to leave at 10:30 p.m., just missing the first of several RF bursts that occurred during the evening.



During the time the young amateur astronomers were there **Paul** and **Roger** gave them a tour of the evening sky through the observatory telescopes, and just using their eyes. They were able to view Jupiter and several constellations and stars that were visible during the evening. This was quite a change from Richmond skies. ★

Pursuing the Perseids

By Donnie Grisso

Each astronomy club member has different likes when it comes to watching the sky. Although I do enjoy deep sky stargazing, my favorite astronomy pastime has always been the few meteor showers we have each year.

On Tuesday morning, August 12th, I headed for the Cahas overlook, and arrived at 12:15 a.m., a full hour before the Moon was to set. When I arrived at Cahas I was alone, and set out my lounge chair beside my car to block the moon's light. The moon finally set around 1:30 a.m.

Over the course of the next few hours three other cars arrived at Cahas, and stayed for a good while; but I have no idea if they were astronomy club members or someone who had just heard the news that the morning of August 12th was the peak for this year's meteor shower. Everyone just kept to themselves.

It was a fairly warm night in the mid fifties, although my sleeping bag was covered in dew by the early morning. The sky was as good as it gets around here.

I climbed into my sleeping bag and began my watch. I watched with a couple of short breaks until 5:00 a.m., but all in all I was disappointed:



King Perseus of
Macedonia

I did count 95 meteors in a little less than 5 hours. I would say that 65 of the 95 were on the faint side. I did see several very nice ones, but none of the long ones or the ones that "knock your socks off." There was never a so called peak or flurry. I seemed to see one about every three

or four minutes and that was it. I know my 62-year-old eyes aren't the best, but I just didn't see that many "wow" meteors. I only saw a few meteors that left "trails" that the Persieds are famous for.

When I left for home at 5:00 a.m. I was telling myself, was I just that unlucky and all the "wow" me-

tears were behind me? A couple of days later I went on the Internet to see what others experienced.

It seems that the actual peak was not the morning of August 12th – but on the 13th. That sure made sense to me, because over the years I have seen a bunch of Perseids on peak night, and they were always better than what I saw on the 12th.

Both *Sky & Telescope* and *Astronomy* magazines, and Channel 7's news, all said this year's peak

would be in the early hours of the 12th, so I'm not sure what happened up there.

Ironically, the next night of August 12/13, when the real peak occurred, was cloudy here in Roanoke – so there wouldn't have been any meteors for us to see anyway.

Oh well, there's the Geminids in December, although I think the Moon is going to be a big factor then. Oh, how I miss those lively Leonids! ★

Get Ready for a Great September Picnic!

By Clark M. Thomas

"Old time" members of the RVAS always look forward to a fun event every year, the annual picnic.

This year we gather on **Saturday, September 20th**. As has become our tradition, the gathering takes place at the **Franklin County Recreational Park, south of Rocky Mount. The park is about 35 minutes south of Roanoke's Tanglewood Mall. Turn left off 220 onto Rt. 619 (Sontag Road) at the light. The county park is on the right a few miles east.**

Officially, we'll get everything underway around 3 p.m. However, facilities are reserved from noon on – so members and their families can arrive as early as they'd like. The park has tennis courts, a fishing pond (sorry, no swimming), and room enough for an enjoyable stroll. There's a dirt court for volleyball or badminton, and a playground area for younger children. Restrooms are adjacent to the huge pavilion we'll be using. The pavilion has a large, permanent charcoal grill, and plenty of picnic table space.

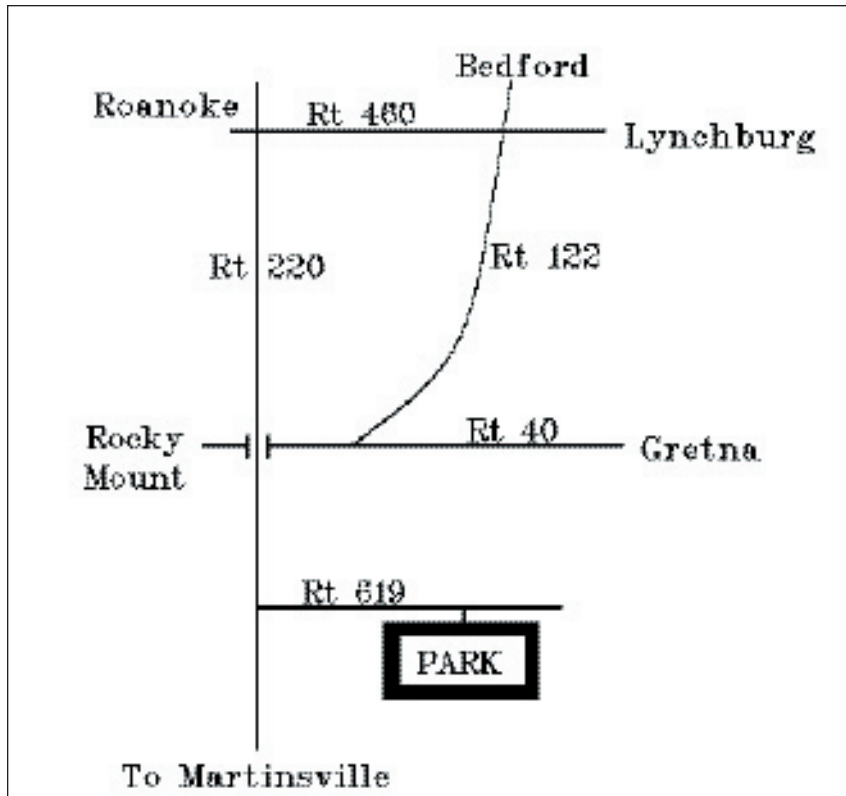
Our picnic dinner should begin around 5:30 p.m.

As in past years, the Society will provide the hamburgers and hot dogs, buns and condiments, soft drinks and tableware. Each member is asked to bring a side dish, salad or desert (and any necessary serving utensils) to share with the group.

After dinner, there will be some announcements, short talks and other activities. There will also be several door prizes given away. These will include astronomy calendars and mugs, but the list is sure to lengthen by picnic day. In the past, giveaways have ranged from books to astronomy software and equipment. We will be giving away astronomy related candy. Needless to say, you have to be present to win!

September is a great month for the star party portion of our activities. It's among the clearer

months of the year; evening temperatures are still favorable; and night falls at an earlier hour. It's dark by 8 p.m. The moon rises after 10:40 p.m., so we can expect dark skies to observe, starting in the early evening.



The night sky view will bridge the seasons. High overhead, the Summer Triangle of Deneb, Vega and Altair will prominently straddle the Milky Way; while the constellations of spring set in the west, and those of

fall rise in the east. Planet lovers will be able to check out mighty Jupiter, and even hunt for Uranus and Neptune. For deep-sky devotees the September skies serve up some of the finest clusters and nebulae visible from our part of the globe.

So, find that favorite recipe that you've been waiting to share with your RVAS family. Dust off your scopes, and get ready to have an afternoon and evening of food, friends and fun! ★

Statement by Mark Hodges, RVAS President

As many of you have learned, the club has been going through some trying times with the recent resignations of the President (**Kristen Gillespie**), Vice President (**Randy Sowden**), Past President (**Mike Overacker**), and Past-Past President (**Katherine Hix**).

Since then **Randy Sowden** has agreed to return and serve as Vice President.

On behalf of myself and the board I want to thank them for their service to the RVAS, and say that they will be missed.

Kristen Gillespie first served as Vice President from Feb. - June 2008, and was elected President and served from July - Aug. 2008. Not only is she only the second woman to be elected President, she

is the youngest person to hold an elected office in the club. I am now fulfilling the balance of her term.

Mike Overacker has been a member of the club off and on since the 70's. He first served as Vice President from July 2004 – June 2006, and as President from July 2006 – June 2008. He helped many people with his knowledge of telescopes, and built quality scopes for several members. He performed many outreach programs over the years.

Katherine Hix first served as Vice President from July 2002 – June 2004, and as President from July 2004 – June 2006. She was the first woman to be elected President of our club. She organized a very successful VAAS convention in 2005. ★