

REFLECTIONS / REFRACTIONS

REFLECTIONS \ REFRACTIONS

University Lowbrow  
Astronomers

November 2011

Volume 35 Issue 11



*Image by Norbert Vance*

Eastern Michigan University: Sherzer Observatory

## CLEAR III

By Don Fohey

The CLEAR (Club Lowbrow's Excellent Atlanta Retreat) was visited the weekend of October 1<sup>st</sup> by the following Lowbrow's: John Causland, Mark Deprest, Don Fohey, Jim Forrester, Brian Ottum, Mike Radwick, Doug Scobel and Dave Snyder. Please refer to the Lowbrow May 2011 newsletter for an article by Mark describing CLEAR.

Fortunately the planning for CLEAR III included a primary date of the weekend of September 24 with the next weekend as an alternate. That Lowbrow flexibility made CLEAR III a success. The September 24<sup>th</sup> weekend was cloudy and Oct 1<sup>st</sup> weather was clear skies and brilliant sunshine.

Mark had arrived on Friday afternoon knowing that clear skies were on the way. Unfortunately that evening the breaks in the clouds were not enough to entice him from his tent. The main Lowbrows contingent arrived on Saturday. Dave and I drove up together and arrived just in time to enjoy the barbecue rib dinner that Brain had prepared. We all gathered in Diane's kitchen and dining room for the wonderful meal.

We were busy setting up tents and telescopes as the sun set and temperatures dropped. Before twilight ended my metal tube scope was covered with dew and before the moon set it was covered in frost. During the evening one could hear the sound of 12Volt blow driers clearing secondary mirrors and the occasional howl of coyotes. The only telescope put out of action by the frost was the one John set up for Dave to use. Dave enjoyed views throughout both evenings in other member's telescopes. I heard voices of several visitors enjoying the views through the larger scopes. Debbie Smith was very inquisitive and challenged many with her questions.

The skies were good! I could see the Milky-Way from horizon to horizon. I counted all seven stars in the little dipper and was enjoying magnitude 12 objects in my 10" that I would never have seen from Peach Mt. or Lake Hudson. Others saw and Mike photographed, the Horsehead nebula! I knew the observing session transitioned to a star party when the Lowbrow Astronomers started singing along to Frank Zappa songs. Observers disappear into the house or tents at different hours of the morning. Mike's laptop screen was coated in ice. It was cold and I crawled into my sleeping bag wearing ski pants and a down jacket.

The morning sun lifted the fog from the valley below and brought out the blazing colors in the trees that bordered the field. The warmth was welcomed as we removed layers of clothing. We spent the morning drying off telescopes and everything else. It was a beautiful day and several of the group convinced me to stay and observe Sunday night.

It was another night of clear dark skies and being ten degrees warmer made for comfortable observing. There was no frost but there was much more dew. The moon didn't set until 11:30pm. Although the moon was younger than first quarter it's glare seemed oppressive. We all sat in chairs with our backs to the moon waiting for it to set. I felt like Gollum, shunning it's light waiting for darkness. As we were basked in the moon shadow of a building some ventured to their telescopes to study the details of Andromeda. After moonset I enjoyed comet Garradd, M101 and it' supernova, planetary nebula, gaseous nebula and faint fuzzy galaxies. In the dead of the night I heard the faint bugle like call of an elk.

We were entertained by a very friendly black and white horse who stood for hours with his head over the fence watching all that we did. Late in the evening I could just seem him as a shadow walking back and forth along the fence line. Cody, an Australian Shepard was also very friendly and was underfoot at all times. No food was safe and he loved to lie next to a telescope.

In conclusion, we all enjoyed CLEAR-III and I am sure that all attendees are looking forward to CLEAR-IV. Unfortunately Diane's has the property for sale and CLEAR-IV will likely be held at another location.







## Okie-Tex 28, Sept. 24 - Oct. 1

Text and Images by George Piner

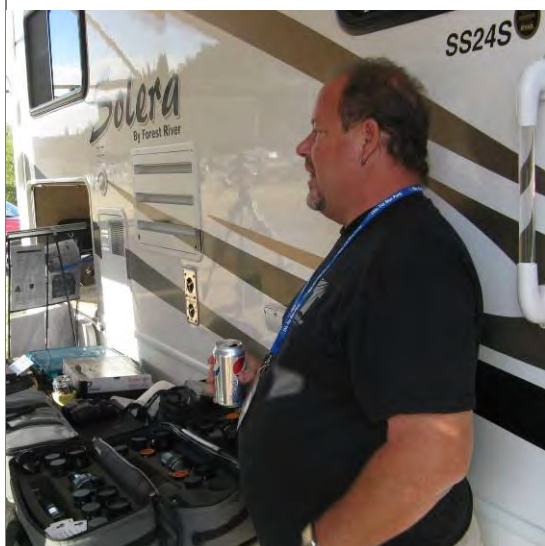
You've got tarantulas instead of squirrels shuffling across a road so empty they make it with time to spare. Packs of coyotes yelp after sunset, upstaged by the frantic squeals of an unlucky cow. Here in the real No Man's Land of high desert mesas carved out by Pliocene Age lava, you're more likely to stumble across allosaurus tracks in an ancient riverbed than anything more mundane.

But it's really about the sky. Don't worry that you're tucked in a low horseshoe canyon where 1/2 mile in any direction lie vistas that stretch from horizon to horizon. The canyon acts as a partial windbreak, although this 28th anniversary party featured mostly calm nights. Setting up tents on Day One however proved a challenge with wind gusts that blew tents 30 yards down the road if they weren't seriously hammered into the dry, compacted soil that rendered all but heavy-duty stakes useless. Past Okie-Tex events had offered storms that blew tents into the next county, followed by downpours that forced the party goers into their vehicles for two days or more, followed by sub-freezing temps. Enough to make you wish you'd bought the DVD instead.



Fortunately not this year. The Oklahoma City Astronomy Club choreographed all the details: food services, shower facilities, vendors, speakers, and even the weather. Every day presented a beautiful blue sky and a low 80s temp, but the main event for the 200+ starpartyers from all over the U.S. & Canada was the night sky, only one of which was totally obscured by clouds. Routinely at midnight on three nights scattered clouds rolled in but dispersed by 3:00 a.m. as indicated by the satellite radar. Some hightailed it to the Cosmic Cafe. A few napped. Others played in the sucker holes waiting for the break.

The vendors were helpful & pleasant. John, the stand-up comedic rep from Televue, brought an array of lenses from Radians through Ethos, any of which could be checked out for a test drive for the night. As a relative newbie, I was impressed. Other vendors included S&S Optika from Denver, Astro Systems, Dave the Meteorite Man, as well as a small number of 2-D and 3-D artists. George Kepple, one of the authors of the Night Sky Observer's Guides, was promoting his updated versions of volumes 1-3, with vastly improved digital photos compared to the 1998 editions, and vol. 3 showing the Southern Constellations. Lastly, members of the Astronomical League including the current president Carroll Iorg brought an interesting assortment of books & manuals. I was surprised as well as they that we're not affiliated.

*John from Televue**George Kepple*

As you would expect, OT featured a number of speakers, most of whom were active attendees, exploring topics from E.E. Barnard's life & photographs, through Visual Double Star Research for Amateurs. (A note to future presenters: if you're scheduled to appear before the "Great Okie-Tex Giveaway," keep your talk brief, no matter how informative. DO NOT run over your allotted time. The 100 new audience members pouring into the last four rows and massing like cattle by the entrance half way through your show aren't there to see you).

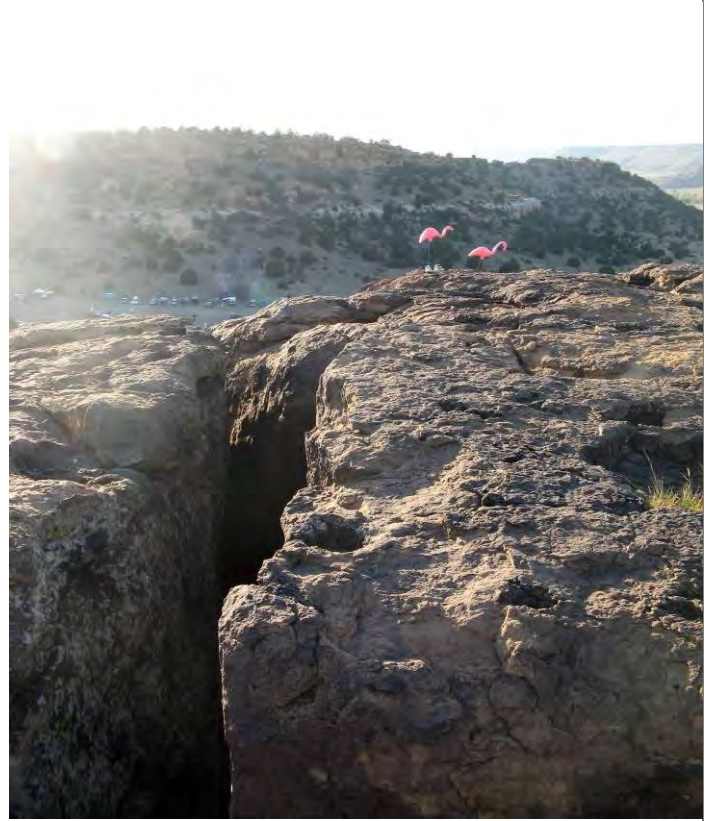
For the first three nights a busload of high school astronomy students from Norman, OK invaded the campground for a class outing. Teachers had provided each with a checklist of deep-sky objects they needed with our help. We were to initial their viewings. Their sneaky instructors included various M & NGC objects that were impossible to find this time of year to keep them honest. Generally the students were a fine group, with several exhibiting genuine excitement, and a couple anonymous knuckleheads showed their skill with lasers.

Which brings us to Kenton, OK, the official location for the Okie-Tex Star Party, which sits just outside to the left of the campground about a 1/2 mile down the road and has fallen on hard times again. Bob Anderson, an affable retired farmer formerly of Guymon, OK, acted as my local tour guide & historian. He mentioned that most of the kids grew up and left, and all that remains now are 20 or so youngsters who will have brighter futures elsewhere.

*F. Jack Eastman w/ H.S. students**Ex-Kenton Mercantile*

If you've been to Kenton, you'll probably remember the Mercantile Store that served as a general store, information center, and a B&B. Under cloudy circumstances, it closed its doors about a year ago, the owner having plunked down \$168,000 to buy this gem with little chance to recoup on a future sale; and the only other restaurant has also bailed. The bank is long gone & is little more than a three-walled ruin. The locals I met were all very friendly with seemingly little to be friendly about.



*John Anderson & Dinosaur Tracks**Flamingo Sentinels**Kenton Museum**Open-air Banking? With a little foliage in the lobby!*

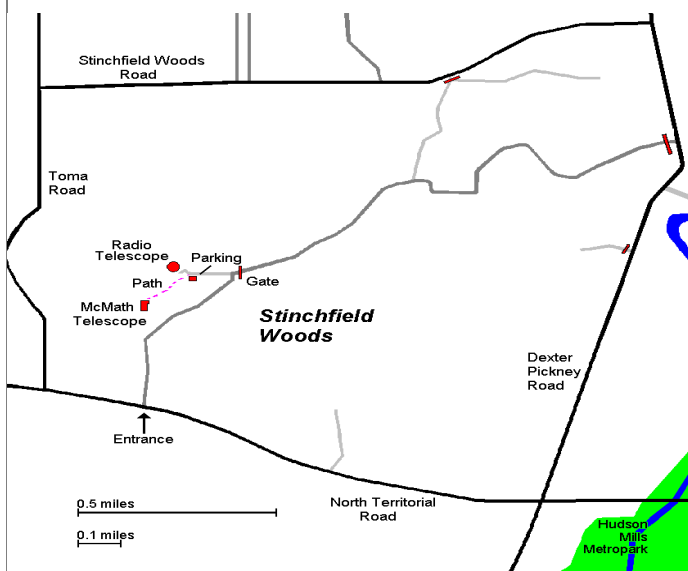
The nearest food source was 30 miles to the east in Boise City, a town founded around 1908 on complete fraud, according to author Timothy Egan in his book about the Dust Bowl, The Worst Hard Time. Its name came from a French word meaning “trees,” which were nowhere to be found in a city that didn’t exist. Brochures at the time boasted aged trees, an artesian water source, and nice houses on paved streets. Well-dressed buyers arrived with their families to see nothing in the middle of nowhere. They decided to stay in spite, and the fraudulent land dealers eventually did jail time. 100 years later they boast of a Boy Scout Camp and a Star Party 15 years running, catered by the Cimarron Heritage Society. They are proud sponsors of a beautiful backdrop with some of the clearest skies in the country.

George Piner

## Places & Times

Dennison Hall, also known as The University of Michigan's Physics & Astronomy building, is the site of the monthly meeting of the University Lowbrow Astronomers. Dennison Hall can be found on Church Street about one block north of South University Avenue in Ann Arbor, MI. The meetings are usually held in room 130, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of each month at 7:30 pm. During the summer months and when weather permits, a club observing session at the Peach Mountain Observatory will follow the meeting.

Peach Mountain Observatory is the home of the University of Michigan's 25 meter radio telescope as well as the University's McMath 24" telescope which is maintained and operated by the Lowbrows. The observatory is located northwest of Dexter, MI; the entrance is on North Territorial Rd. 1.1 miles west of Dexter-Pinckney Rd. A small maize & blue sign on the north side of the road marks the gate. Follow the gravel road to the top of the hill and a parking area near the radio telescopes, then walk along the path between the two fenced in areas (about 300 feet) to reach the McMath telescope building.



## Public Open House / Star Parties

Public Open Houses / Star Parties are generally held on the Saturdays before and after the New Moon at the Peach Mountain observatory, but are usually cancelled if the sky is cloudy at sunset or the temperature is below 10 degrees F. For the most up to date info on the Open House / Star Party status call: (734)332-9132. Many members bring their telescope to share with the public and visitors are welcome to do the same. Peach Mountain is home to millions of hungry mosquitoes, so apply bug repellent, and it can get rather cold at night, please dress accordingly.

## Membership

**Membership dues in the University Lowbrow Astronomers are \$20 per year for individuals or families, \$12 per year for students and seniors (age 55+) and \$5 if you live outside of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.**

**This entitles you to the access to our monthly Newsletters on-line at our website and use of the 24" McMath telescope (after some training).**

**A hard copy of the Newsletter can be obtained with an additional \$12 annual fee to cover printing and postage.**

(See the website

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/theclub/>

**for more information on joining the club).**

Membership in the Lowbrows can also get you a discount on these magazine subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope - \$32.95 / year

Astronomy - \$34.00 / year or \$60.00 for 2 years

For more information contact the club Treasurer. Members renewing their subscriptions are reminded to provide the renewal notice along with your check to the club Treasurer. Please make your check out to: "University Lowbrow Astronomers"

## Newsletter Contributions

Members and (non-members) are encouraged to write about any astronomy related topic of interest.



## Lowbrow's Home Page

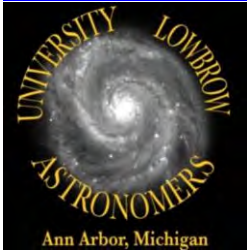
<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/>





## University Lowbrow Astronomers

### Reflections & Refractions



Comet Garradd C2009 P1 by Clayton Kessler from Manchester MI  
Orion 8" F5 Newtonian, Baader MPCC, Canon 10D Modified DSLR, G11 Mount  
Guided using Orion Starshoot AG and WO ZenithStar 66SD, 10 X 180 seconds @ ISO800

C2009 P1 Garradd

### Website

[www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/](http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/)

