



BACK BAY observer

The Official Newsletter of the Back Bay Amateur Astronomers
P.O. Box 9877, Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9877

EPHEMERALS july 2012

07/13

Skywatch

Northwest River Park

07/14, 11:00 am

BBAA Family Picnic

Northwest River Park

Large Picnic Shelter

07/20, 7:00 pm

Night Hike

Northwest River Park

07/21

Nightwatch

Chippokes State Park

Surry, VA

07/27, 9:00 pm

Garden Stars

Norfolk Botanical Gardens

07/31, 7:00 pm

Boardwalk Astronomy

Near 24th St Stage

VA Beach Oceanfront



Looking Up!

Greetings once again skywatchers! The annual Astronomical League Conference (ALCon) is this month in Chicago, and I will be attending. We, as a club, are a part of the Astronomical League and are entitled to all the benefits included. For those of you who don't know, the Astronomical League is made up of many of the astronomy clubs across the nation. They sponsor many observing programs, such as the Messier Program, the Binocular Program, the Planetary Nebula Program (which BBAA helped begin) and awards such as the National Young Astronomer Award, the Horkheimer/Smith Award, and many, many more. They also publish a quarterly newsletter called *The Reflector* that every member receives.

Back to ALCon, it's like any other conference except there's a bunch of astronomer nerds hanging out and talking about astronomer stuff. There are speakers, events and day trips. For example, this year there are trips to Yerkes Observatory, Fermilab, and the Adler Planetarium. There will also be nightly star parties, a "Star-B-Que" and an awards banquet. It's going to be bunches of fun and I'm sure I will have many stories to tell when I come back. !

See you in a few weeks at the picnic!

Courtney Flonta, President

Welcome New Members!!

Joseph Quinn, Jr

CONTENTS

Ephemerals	1
Looking Up	1
Meeting Minutes	2
July Picnic Info	3
Kent's Transit Trek	4
Venus Transit Outreach	7
Calendar	8

Note: NASA's Space Place will return next month

BBAA Meeting Minutes

June 7, 2012

The Meeting at Plaza Middle School was called to order by President Courtney Flonta at 7:38PM .

Those in attendance were: Bob Beuerlein , Courtney Flonta, Robyn Korn, Dino Giangregorio, Mary Giangregorio, Nyssa Giangregorio, Jeff Goldstein, Curt Lambert, Bill McLean, Joey Quinn III, Bernie Strohmeyer, Kevin Swann and 'Bird' Taylor.

Visitors & Guests: Nyssa Giangregorio, daughter of Dino & Mary Giangregorio

Treasurer's report: \$2637.23 General Fund, \$2719.92 Scholarship Fund, \$5357.15 Total.

\$400 is due for the web server site's domain name. this will be good for another 3 yrs.

\$30 is due for the International Dark Sky Association (IDSA) membership.

Secretary's Report: The reading of May's meeting minutes was waived, as they are posted on the BBAA web site, but they were referenced for Old Business.

Outreaches:

- The Transit of Venus event at Mount Trashmore on Tuesday, June 5 had approximately 80 visitors for 1.5 hrs of viewing. There were 8 scopes & 2 or more binoculars.
- Huntington Park (adjacent James River Bridge) had 20 scopes. The restaurant parking lot is shared with the city park so you can stay & observe after dark.

Calendar:

- June 8 Friday, Skywatch @ Northwest River State Park, Equestrian area, 7PM
- June 16 Saturday, Nightwatch @ Chippokes
- June 20-23 Green Bank star party @ Green Bank, WV
- June 22 Friday, Night Hike @ Northwest River State Park, 7PM
- June 28 Thursday, Cub Scout Day Camp @ Norfolk Elk Lodge, 6-10PM
- June 29 Friday, Garden Stars @ Norfolk Botanical Gardens
- June 30 Saturday, Chippokes presentation – tentative alternate
- July 3 Tuesday, Boardwalk Astronomy @ VA Beach boardwalk
- July 13 Friday, Skywatch @ Northwest River State Park, Equestrian area, 7PM
- July 14 Saturday, BBAA family picnic @ Northwest River State Park, large picnic shelter, 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM.
- July 14 Saturday, Sky Viewing for Lincoln Military Housing Group @ VA Air & Space Center -

Hampton, 8-10:30 PM

- July 20 Friday, Night Hike @ Northwest River State Park, 7PM
- July 21 Saturday, Nightwatch @ Chippokes
- July 27 Friday, Garden Stars @ Norfolk Botanical Gardens
- July 31 Tuesday, Boardwalk Astronomy @ VA Beach boardwalk
- August 2, Thursday, Monthly Meeting @ Plaza Middle School, 7PM
- August 10 Friday, Skywatch @ Northwest River State Park, Equestrian area, 7PM
- August 18 Saturday, Nightwatch @ Chippokes
- August 24 Friday, Night Hike @ Northwest River State Park, 7PM
- August 24 Friday, Garden Stars @ Norfolk Botanical Gardens
- August 25 Saturday, Science Saturday, Blackwater Regional Library, Carrollton, VA, 10-11AM
- August 27 Monday, Moon Watch, Princess Anne library (Nimmo pkwy), 6:30-7:30PM
- August 28 Tuesday, Boardwalk Astronomy @ VA Beach boardwalk
- September 6 Thursday, monthly meeting @ TCC
- September 7 Friday, Skywatch @ Northwest River State Park, Equestrian area, 7PM
- September 15 Saturday, Nightwatch @ Chippokes
- September 21 Friday, Night Hike @ Northwest River State Park, 7PM
- September 21 Friday, Garden Stars @ Norfolk Botanical Gardens
- September 25 Tuesday, Boardwalk Astronomy @ VA Beach boardwalk

New Member: Joey Quinn III

Old Business:

- Courtney will ask Vice President about contacting Jennica Walter regarding 6/30 Chippokes presentation .
- Picnic - it is \$110 for a resident of Chesapeake to reserve for the day. Check or cash only & need to be 21 to reserve. A check will be given to Jim Tallman, our NWRP POC, at the Skywatch event. Club pays for meat & drinks. The extras are brought by individuals.
- Jim Tallman is also the Night Hike POC.

New Business:

- A Direct TV dish can be used for radio astronomy. You can pick up signals from the sun, Jupiter, etc. Google how to get the amplifier/receiver (21.1 MHZ) without auto gain control.

Continued on page 3

The Back Bay Amateur Astronomer's Observer

The BBAA Observer is published monthly; the monochrome version is mailed to members who do not have internet access. Members who do have Internet access can acquire the full color version on the Internet at <http://www.backbayastro.org/newslettersnewsletter.shtml>

Please submit articles and items of interest no later than the 15th of the month for the next month's edition. Please submit all items to: bbaa.newsletter@gmail.com or BBAA Observer, P.O. Box 9877, Virginia Beach, VA 23450-9877

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BBAA Picnic on July 14!

The BBAA meet the first Thursday of every month except for July. In July we meet instead at our annual Family Picnic held in the large shelter at Northwest River Park. The picnic will be on **July 14, 2012 from 11am—4pm**. There is no cost and guests are encouraged. All meat, buns and condiments are provided, but attendees should bring a side dish. Please fill out the Picnic Sign-up database on the club Yahoo Page (URL below) to indicate how many are coming and what side dish you'll be bringing.

BBAA Internet Links

BBAA Website
www.backbayastro.org

Yahoo! Groups
tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/backbayastro

BBAA Observer Newsletter
www.backbayastro.org/observer/newsletter.shtml

Meeting Minutes, continued from page 2

- VPAS (Virginia Peninsula Astronomy Stargazers) is very active though it has no formal organization, dues or meetings. They have a yahoo web site that anyone can post to & can be emailed at vpas@yahoo.com. They meet 1st & 3rd Friday of every month on Grundland Dr (the only road to the missile base).
- Through email, Jim Tallman got a member list from the Treasurer but asked in that email, "Do we need a membership coordinator?" It was discussed that the Treasurer already has the up-to-date member list (by definition) so therefore another position is not needed.
- It was also discussed that the officers should get together to discuss meeting agenda sometime prior to the meeting.

Observers Report:

For the Venus transit, one viewer used a Herschel solar wedge refractor. It provided 125X magnification and believes to have seen its cloud layer. Another used Baader solar film as their sun filter. Hydrogen-alpha filter can be used to show prominences & flares (which you cannot see if a calcium-potassium filter is used).

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

TRANSIT TREK

Kent Blackwell's cross-country odyssey
to view the Venus Transit



On June 8, 2004 I was fortunate enough to have witnessed a transit of the planet Venus. Since the transit was nearly over at sunrise Robert Hitt and I had planned a trip to Europe so that we could see the entire event. When those plans didn't work out we watched it from the Virginia Beach boardwalk.

June 5, 2012 marked the last transit until December 10, 2117. Since Venus didn't begin transiting until 2 hours before sunset as visible from the East Coast, Robert and I decided to travel out west. What better place to view it than San Francisco? And what better way to get to San Francisco than by rail? So, we reserved an Amtrak sleeping car for the round trip visit. The views out the window along the way were simply gorgeous.

Some of the scenic highlights after leaving Washington DC include **Harpers Ferry, West Virginia**. Thomas Jefferson thought it was one of the most stupendous scenes in nature. Once the train plunges into a long tunnel it emerges on the Maryland side of the riverbank.

The most beautiful portion of the train ride is between Denver, CO and Salt Lake City, UT when the train crosses the Rocky Mountains.

South Border Canyon is home to the Roosevelt National Forest. Soon after, the train enters the famous 6.2 mile long **Moffat Tunnel**, a tunnel that cuts the distance between Denver and the Pacific coast by 176 miles. Then, the rails follow along Gore Canyon, with steep walls ascending some 1,000 feet on each side of the Colorado River, which descends some 7,300 feet below.

After Salt Lake City the terrains flattens a bit, but the train soon enters the **Sierra Nevada** range of mountains for equally breathtaking scenery. Along the way is the famous **Donner Lake** where the Donner Party, traveling west from Illinois, was stranded during the winter of 1846-47. Some of the party of 87 resorted to cannibalism. I couldn't resist making lunch reservations in the dining car for a tasty hamburger as we traversed over the lake.

Hours later *The California Zephyr* entered the city of **Sacramento, CA**. This is a rest stop where passengers are allowed off the train to stretch their legs. The humidity was low but the temperature exceeded 100-degrees. So much for the saying, "But it's a dry heat." It was H-O-T!

Transit Trek, continued from page 4

As we arrived at our final destination of San Francisco we couldn't believe the temperature difference. The warmest day in that fair city was 58-degrees, and that in the month of June. Short pants and short sleeve shirts were not the order of the day.



Kent Blackwell relaxes in his sleeper car on the *California Zephyr*, his home for 2 days and 3 nights during his trek from Chicago to San Francisco.

We would spend the next six days in San Francisco. The first chore was to buy warm jackets for the chilly Frisco temperatures. The fog, so typical of San Francisco rolled in the next morning, giving us great concern about the transit that would occur two days later. Soon, the fog burned off and the next day we decided to walk the 1.7-mile trek across the **Golden Gate Bridge**. The view was simply wonderful. As I stood at the foot of the bridge looking down I couldn't help but think about that famous scene in Hitchcock's 1958 film, *Vertigo* when Kim Novak plunges into the chilly San Francisco Bay. As we walked across the bridge Robert Hitt counted 10,000 footsteps required crossing the bridge and back.

The day before the transit the weather was cloudy and chilly, but the forecast called for clearing skies that evening and sunny skies June 5. Amen to that! We decided to survey the site we had in mind to view the transit. A local bus took us to **Land's End**, part of *The Golden Gate Park* at the very



Between the Venus transit and breathtaking scenery like this view of the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range, Kent's trip was replete with visual splendor.

western edge of the city, where the steep California cliffs touch the rocky beaches of the Pacific Ocean. After walking 5 miles of nature trails and spectacular scenery we headed back to the hotel, assured that our Venus transit site would be more than adequate.

June 5 arrived, and it was time to pack up our gear and head to Land's End. I had an 80mm f/8 apochromat refractor, a Coronado 40mm SunScope and all the necessary camera gear in a backpack, which weighed more than me. Robert carried the tripod, video equipment and food we would need during the 5 hour 20 minute transit. Upon arriving we were surprised at the high winds blowing off the Pacific Ocean but we found a sheltered spot to set up all our gear. Our chosen spot was not far from the famous **Land's End Cliff House**. The French chateau, made entirely of wood, opened in 1896. It survived the 1906 earthquake, only to burn to the ground the following year. The present all-concrete Cliff House was built in 1909. The structure sits on a spectacular parcel of land overlooking the California cliffs and Pacific Ocean.

The sky was devoid of any clouds as Venus slowly emerged across the face of the sun. I was enamored to share the view with many Californians who wandered by our telescopes. Everyone was amazed at what they saw.



Traveling by train enabled Kent to bring his 80mm f/8 apochromat refractor, a Coronado 40mm SunScope, and enough camera gear to capture some fabulous images.

Venus appeared as a rather large, and very sharp black dot silhouetted across the sun's surface. I watched for the "Black Drop" but was not able to see it, nor photograph it. Perhaps that's because I was so busy sharing views with others. Talking to the multitudes of people enjoying the transit in my Coronado SunScope was equally as thrilling as viewing it myself. Our "Venus Transit t-shirts" were also a big success. If we had fifty of them with us on the trip we would have sold every single one! Two young ladies were so mesmerized by the views in our telescope they both stayed with us the entire time. In fact, when we got back to our hotel they had sent us a bottle of fine California wine with a thank you note.

As the sun began to set we could still see Venus. By now the solar filters could be removed as the sun's intensity diminished behind a layer of clouds along the horizon. Slowly, the sun and Venus disappeared behind the distant mountain ranges of Point Reyes, CA heralding a successful Venus transit day.

As night began to fall, so did the temperature. Even with a jacket I was shivering as we waited for the local bus to take us back to the city, and back to our hotel in downtown San Francisco. I couldn't stop talking about what we had just seen to

everyone on the bus. I think I heard a round of applause as we exited.

Continuing our sightseeing the next day we wanted to visit the telescope store, *Scope City* located near the Fisherman's Wharf section of the city. Proprietor Steve White gave us a tour of the store and exchanged his stories of watching the Venus transit.

The train trip home was a bit different. Union Pacific had begun track work between Salt Lake City and Denver so instead of traversing the Rocky Mountains we traveled the old track lines through Wyoming. I have never seen such remote territories in all my days. In 400-plus miles we never saw one human being. We did, however see herds of buffalo. Ah, it was time for Kent to make lunch reservations in the dining car again. This time a tasty Buffalo burger was on my lunch menu.



Second contact as imaged by Kent and enjoyed by countless Californians lucky enough to be near Land's End Cliff House on Transit Day 2012.

We encountered a bit of a hiccup on the *California Zephyr's* return to Chicago. We missed our train connection by sixteen minutes but Amtrak put us up for the night in a nice hotel in the Windy City. The Capitol Limited to Washington DC didn't leave the station until 6:00 pm the next day so that gave us ample time to see Chicago. The first place to visit was the Adler Planetarium, which has the distinction of being the oldest planetarium in America.

Observing the Venus Transit with BBAA

BBAA member Mark Ost summed up what June 5, 2012 was like in Hampton Roads perfectly, "What a cliff hanger! Terrible weather until three and then dodgy at best for an hour but then – wonderful weather all the way to the horizon until sunset. Perfect."

In Newport News at Huntington Beach it was still raining when Jim Tallman and Chuck Jagow arrived at 4:30 pm. Skies cleared somewhat in the next hour. During the Transit there were some spotty clouds that caused brief breaks in the action, but after a cloudy, rainy day of worrying, no one was going to complain. In fact, most of the seasoned amateurs were treated to views of first and second contact, and the multitude of visitors, estimated to be up to 200 in number, were treated to stunning views of this once-in-a-lifetime event.



Bill and Annette McLean's enthusiasm was contagious at Huntington Beach Park in New port News on Transit Day. "The best part," said Bill, "was sharing it with so many folks. With clouds and reporters mixed in the excitement level was quite high." You can read a Daily Press article describing the event with quotes from Bill, Annette & others at <http://tinyurl.com/nnttransit>

There were at least 20 scopes at Huntington Beach. Of particular interest were views through Jim Tallman's PST, Chuck Jagow and grandson Cameron's "Solar Funnel" and Bird Taylor's Herschel Wedge, which provided a view with such clarity that many observers were certain they could see evidence of the Venusian Atmosphere.

Breathtaking views were also achieved with conventional white light filters like the one Paul Tartabini completed only the night before. With daughter Elizabeth he enjoyed sharing views through his 8" Dob, which was just the right height for some of the younger visitors.

There was also a southern contingent of BBAA members including Dale Carey and Georgie June, who were set up at Mt. Trashmore. Additional coverage and pictures of that event can be seen at <http://tinyurl.com/vbtransit>.



Chuck Jagow was at Huntington Beach and you'll be thankful he was after viewing his spectacular images. This one clearly shows the famed "Black Drop Effect." For more images and Chuck's account of the exciting day see http://www.jagowds.com/_jap/vt.shtml

Transit Trek, continued from page 6

After a quick visit to the Adler we rented bicycles and rode 10 miles along Lake Shore Drive that hugs Lake Michigan. Once again, the weather was glorious and the views of Chicago along that ride were beautiful.

7

Boarding the Capitol Limited train from Chicago to Washington DC the next day marked nearly the end of our journey. We could have flown out west but having

sleeping car accommodations on a train is so much more relaxing, and includes all meals as well. Robert Hitt and I both highly recommend it. Not only did we see spectacular scenery along the way but we also witnessed an astronomical event no one living on our planet will ever see again.

Kent Blackwell



July 2012

BBAA Events	Special Outreach	Astronomical Events
13 Skywatch at NWRP		3 Full Moon
14 Family Picnic at NWRP		
	20 Night Hike at NWRP	10 Last Quarter
21 Nightwatch @ Chippokes State Park		15 Moon, Jupiter, Venus & Aldeberan form diamond in Pre-dawn Sky
27 Garden Stars at Norfolk Botanical Gardens		19 New Moon
	31 Boardwalk Astronomy	26 First Quarter

Sneak Peek into August

Thu 08/02/2012 BBAA Monthly Meeting, Plaza Middle School, 7:30 pm

Fri 08/10/2012 Skywatch at Northwest River Park

Sat 08/18/2012 Nightwatch at Chippokes State Park, Surry VA.

Fri 08/24/2012 Garden Stars at Norfolk Botanical Gardens, 8:30 pm

Fri 08/24/2012 Night Hike at Northwest River Park, 7:00 pm

Tue 08/28/2012 Boardwalk Astronomy, Virginia Beach Boardwalk near 24th street stage, 7:00

