

# SPECTRUM

Northern Cross Science Foundation Newsletter

November 2006

## LOOKING UP

November 2 Thursday

General Meeting

6:30 p.m. Astronomy 101

7:30 p.m. Business Meeting

November 8 Wednesday

Transit of Mercury

1:12 p.m.—Sunset

Harrington Beach State Park

November 16 Thursday

Board Meeting

7:30 p.m.

Home of Jeff Setzer

December 7 Thursday

Annual Meeting/Holiday

Party/Election of Board

6:30 p.m. Astronomy 101

7:30 p.m. Business Meeting

Holiday party follows—bring a goodie to share

December 21 Thursday

Board Meeting

Election of Officers

7:30 p.m.

Home of Jeff Setzer

## The Night The Sky Danced

By Joyce Jentges

I look forward to all observing nights, but the night of November 8, 1991 was a special night. This night would be the last public viewing night of the season before the long cold winter nights of Wisconsin set in.

On the way out to the observatory, I had glanced up in the sky, and to my delight, saw the telltale traces of the Aurora Borealis. Wavy curtains of color gracefully danced in the northern section of the sky. I thought to myself that we might not be doing much deep sky observing, but we'd have plenty to watch anyway.

Once at the observatory, a quick glance at the sky showed the increasing intensity of the northern lights. We joined as a group on the lawn, and first stood facing the north. Soon, discovering that the aurora was more intense than most, and seeing curtains in the east and west, we then looked over head and to the south as well. As we watched the evening sky, all we could see was evidence of the aurora. There was so much to see, we couldn't turn around quickly enough to keep up with nature's show. If any person, unaware of what we were doing would drive by, they would probably have thought we were doing a rain dance. But all we cared about was seeing as much of the show as our eyes could see.

Oh, and what color! Greens, whites, magentas and purples, in all shades. I had seen aurora before, and had seen the greens and some white, but never such beautiful hues of red and purple. We continued watching, as excited as children turned loose in a candy store. Eventually, the curtains slowed down and vanished slowly, much to our dismay. Standing there talking, we decided to go in the observatory and fill out the logbook. Our thoughts and memories were

written in such a way that it would help us remember this night. Someone stepped outside and told us that the aurora had returned. Excitedly, we all met on the lawn again.

They were indeed back, and seemed to be even more intense than the last burst. Curtains and waves of color now extended far into the south. How I wished for eyes on the back of my head! This burst seemed to last a long time before dying down again.

Once again, we went back to the logbook and recorded our memories as best we could. We sat in our lawn chairs rubbing our sore necks and tried to rest a little. Could this night get any more exciting? We kept our eyes on the sky, and over a half hour had passed. I was thinking our show was finished when we watched some ghostly white arcs start creeping from the north across the sky.

These shot across the sky and disappeared as quickly as they came. There was no hint of color except for white. The sky was changing faster now than what our eyes could see. It looked like the majority of the activity was happening straight overhead, so I kept my head looking mostly overhead. For just a brief second, I saw the image of a dove overhead, framed with rays. Just as quickly, it disappeared and was replaced by more flickers of white.

This display was shorter than the other two, but equally as exciting. I stopped to check the time, and could not believe it was after 1 a.m. Suddenly, I realized that I was tired, but if I left now, I wasn't sure what else I would miss. We waited for quite some time, but there were no more aurora to light up the sky. I felt so happy—almost drunk. I was just thrilled to be an observer in tonight's show. A tired group of astronomers finally packed up and left around 2 a.m. It was after 2:30 a.m. and I was still in the country driving home that I saw them again. Smiling tiredly, I continued my drive home.

## October Meeting Minutes

By Kevin Bert

The October business meeting of the Northern Cross Science Foundation was held at the Unitarian Church North in Mequon. President Jeff Setzer opened the meeting at 8:35 p.m. and thanked the 30 members and guests for attending. Jeff asked for standard reports.

Treasurer Rob Powell reports a balance of \$1,765 in the club's checking account and \$6,828 in the observatory account. The last observatory purchase was a giant 4-inch, 90mm FL. wide field eyepiece and 4-inch diagonal to achieve low power, (85X), in the Cassegrain mode.

Secretary Kevin Bert had nothing to report from the Astronomical League. He did continue on with an update on the 20-inch Panarusky Telescope. The telescope was almost collimated and imaged well on two occasions. Dew was a problem with the primary mirror on one night of testing and would require some type of shroud around the truss tube poles. Kevin's wife Kathy volunteered to tackle the job. A final balancing would be held off until after the shroud would be completed and one focuser modified. Tracking of the clock drive was adequate, but in need of a slight tuning of the correct meshing of the main worm gear. Polar alignment was very close but still in need of a final correction. The digital readout, (Sky Commander), was right on target.

Under a personal note, Jeff Setzer said that it felt like old times out at the 16 foot domed observatory last month when he stayed out late to look through the Panarusky with Kevin. It really hit home that the telescope was no longer a project still waiting to be completed, but a reality under the stars that will ultimately provide good viewing for the membership and outreach to the public. Continuing on with the Jim & Gwen Plunkett Observatory topic it was heard that the park may have no money left this year for putting in power or a walkway to the observatory. Jeff said the board would decide on whether to pay for the electrical hookup this year at their next meeting. Grand opening for the facility would now shift gears to National Astronomy Day in the spring of 07.

Paul Kamikawa brought up that it would be a shame for the telescope to be unused throughout the winter and asked if training would be available some time this year. Kevin said that he would try to get something together and if all else fails have some group sessions scheduled.

Under old business Jeff Setzer gave a follow-up on Astrofest. Vendors and the flea markets were at an all time low. Taking into account the poor weather and viewing conditions, he

described it as a shell of what it use to be and was afraid that it would never be the same with all the other competing star parties. Next years new 20/20 event in northeast Indiana would be a particularly large draw.

Under new business, Kevin Bert explained the process of the tool list that had been started in the last newsletter. Members that felt they wanted to contribute tools from the list could sign up after a specific tool and bring it to a future meeting. Members could also call Kevin to see what tools remained unspoken for.

Joyce Jentges elaborated on the newsletter note that she would like to hear from the membership on how you got started in astronomy. Future issues of Spectrum would present them if members would forward brief articles to her by e-mail or snail mail.

Jeff Setzer said that two positions would be open for nominations for the board of directors. Be prepared next month to defend yourself!

With no further new business, Jeff closed the business meeting at 9:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin Bert, secretary

## Transit of Mercury

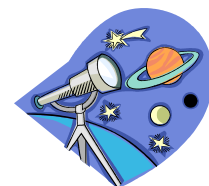
By Joyce Jentges

On November 8, a pretty rare event is happening during the day. A transit of Mercury will take place. According to Night Sky Magazine, the transit starts at 1:12 p.m. and goes until sunset. The Northern Cross will be at Harrington Beach State Park in the afternoon. The public is invited, so plan to come out and view this transit.

You will need a solar filter for your telescope, or some solar protection, if you are naked eye viewing, as we will be viewing the sun. Mercury is viewed as a small black dot moving across the sun.

If you got to witness the last transit of Venus, you know how exciting this can be! Plan to join us out at Harrington

Beach for this special event! It will be 10 years before we can see another transit of Mercury.



**November Meeting**

By Joyce Jentges

Kevin Bert will not be at the meeting, so at this point the Astronomy 101 class has not been decided. If no one volunteers to do an Astronomy 101 program, we will go right to the business meeting. If we can get a vhs/dvd player and

T.V. or a portable dvd player, we have an assortment of videos to show. Please consider bringing videos/dvd's or equipment to show them on to the meeting.

**Nominations for Board of Directors**

By Joyce Jentges

During the months of November and December, the Northern Cross looks for people who are interested in being on the board of directors. This year there are two terms that are up. The terms of both Kevin Bert and Don Miles are both up for grabs. They are both able to be re-elected, or we could have 2 new members, depending on your vote.

Now that the observatory is in operation, the board will be shaping the rules for use, and making other important

decisions about the observatory. If you would like some say in this, please consider running for election to the board of directors. It is always nice to have more candidates than spots available!

The election will take place at the December general meeting. Plan to attend both meeting to defend yourself, in case you are nominated!!!

If you are email/web savvy, consider getting your newsletter online! All you need to do is send me a email telling me that you want to get your email online, and I will add you to the list. You will get an email when the newsletter is online and available for you to see. Help maximize your club dues, by letting us save money on postage and printing.

At the December meeting we will vote for 2 members to take terms on the board of directors. This is also our annual holiday party, so please bring a snack or goodie to share.

If you like the article on page 1, please consider writing up an exciting experience you've had observing. Send it in a Word document to me via my email address which is on the back page.

**Please note: the deadline for submission of items for the newsletter is the 20th of the month. Please get your items to me no later than November 20th.**

**From The Editor**

By Joyce Jentges

As I sit at my computer this morning typing this, I'm reflecting on the past 2 nights at Harrington Beach. The evening of the 27th, brought out 7 club members and 2 guests. Skies were clear, but it was pretty cold. We looked at a bunch of objects, including Comet Swan, the Andromeda Galaxy, NGC 457, M2, Kimble's Cascade, the Garnet star in Cepheus, and of course all of the other popular M objects in the summer sky. Comet Swan is very well placed right now below Hercules. If you haven't seen it yet, I encourage you to get out and look at it.

On the 28th, the park had the annual Haunted Hike. We usually have a built in audience for this one, as the lower parking lot fills quickly, and people have to park in the lot at Puckett's Pond. I don't have a clue how many people

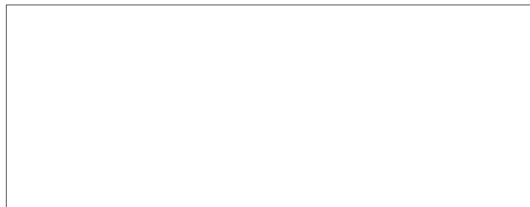
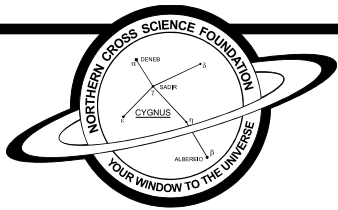
stopped to look through our scopes, but it would have been nice to have more astronomers there to help with the crowds. Sometimes, the lines were 10 people deep to look through our scopes. We had 6 astronomers there with telescopes, and could have used at least 3 more. Clouds came in as the evening progressed, so we packed up around 10 p.m.

As we get into next season, and have the observatory open house, it will be crucial to have as many people out there as we can get to help show people what we do. There will be a lot of publicity surrounding the Open House. Education is one of the reasons our club exists, and next Spring we will have the opportunity to show off our new telescope and observatory, and educate those who come

out to see the telescope. We need your help to do that. One way you can do that is to attend a training session on how to use the telescope and observatory. Kevin Bert will be announcing training sessions soon, so stay tuned for more information.

Despite sending out a group email, I have not gotten a great response to my request for people to send me information on how you got started in astronomy. I think this is an interesting topic, and would love to hear how you got into this "hobby". I will probably put this into an article for the December or January newsletter, so please get me your information by November 20th.

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**Monthly Meeting Location**  
Unitarian Church North  
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## YMCA Viewing

By Rob Powell

On Friday, October 27, I led a public viewing at the Edwards YMCA camp. For days, it looked as though it would be clouded out. Armed with hour-by-hour images from the clear sky clock for Milwaukee, I put my faith in the free sky forecasting service from Canada. Kevin Guerritz, our Y-Tribes contact, was a bit amazed to see me pull into the parking lot, with dense cloud cover overhead. I explained that the skies would be clear by 9PM.

They were!

12 dads and many children, aged 8 to 14, enjoyed a leisurely "unit power" tour of the autumn skies. A bright meteor graced our view, too. The cold weather shortened the kids' viewing to a couple of objects. Among them were the clearest views of M31, with M32 and M110 that I've ever seen. The Pleiades were up and shining brightly, which made another nice, low power target. All in all, it was a great time for all, and the Milwaukee Clear Sky Clock was the biggest hero of the night!

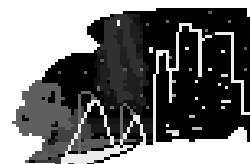


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