

Star light, star bright...

by Suzyn Smith

Organized stargazing has never been a particularly popular pastime for college students. But every time Mathematics Professor Allen Dotson brings his telescope out to a nearby field, there are students willing to come look up into the heavens. On January 13, Senior Rose Jenkins and freshmen Rachel Troutner, Kris Reifenrath, Chad Creasy and myself gathered in Belk to go stargazing with Professor Dotson.

As we stood Belk, Dotson told us that we would be seeing the moon, Saturn, a star cluster and a star nebula. We would see

the "Pleiades" or seven sisters.

As we walked out to the field behind Mecklenburg, the anticipation grew.

"Look, I can see one!" Troutner said, pointing up at the sky.

"I can only see the moon." Reifenrath responded.

"Oh, look, there are some stars." Jenkins said.

We reached the middle of the field. As Dotson set up the telescope, he told us that from earth, Saturn just looked like a star next to the moon. He put his eye to the telescope and adjusted the focus.

"I suppose because of the earth's shadow we won't be able to see the sea of tranquillity" Dotson said regretfully.

Nobody seemed to mind as we crowded around to get a look at the moon. It looked, well, like the moon looks when you see it's picture in magazines. It was neat to see it live, but I was a little disappointed because it didn't really look like anything I hadn't seen before. I think I'm going to cancel my subscription to *Discover*.

Saturn was a big improvement. It took me a minute so actually get a glimpse of it because I was the last one to look through the telescope and Saturn had already moved. Dotson told us that the rings were about 75 miles in diameter.

By the time Dotson was just focusing the telescope on the Pleiades, junior Melissa Moore and Professor Dennis McCracken had joined us. We all got to see the "seven sisters." It wasn't as impressive as Saturn, but as stars go, I was pleased.

"Dude, that is phat!" Moore said, transfixed.

She looked up at the constellation Orion, which was right above us.

"You know, my brother and I call that the Bart Simpson constellation," Moore said.

"Why?" I asked, squinting at the sky.

"See, that's his hair, and he's kind of leaning backwards." Moore said. We all looked up at Orion. It actually sort of did look like Bart Simpson.

"One time, my brother and I were coming out of our house and we looked up and at the same time we were like, 'Bart Simpson!' I was like 'Whoa.' We have never been so bonded." Moore said.

It was getting cold and we were all looking forward to hot chocolate and s'mores in the Orange main lounge, so we called it a night. Two people picked up the telescopes and we walked back across the field as Sirius rose over Mecklenburg.

"Compared to the stars," Moore said. "Dude, I'm teeny."

For one night, Laurinburg suddenly seemed a little smaller than usual.

Professor Dotson's Stargazing tips:

1. If you're looking for a specific star, don't look directly at it. Try looking from an angle. Stars sometimes seem to fade when you look straight at them.
2. The clearest weather comes right after a front passes through.
3. Bring binoculars or a telescope. (It's less romantic, but you'll see more stars.)
4. Stay away from well lit areas. Try the middle of a field.
5. Bring along a field guide so you can identify what you see.

SAU calendar

Feb. 7-Creative Dating

- Explore options in creative dating

8-Mardi Gras

- Albemarle Courtyard. \$3.00.

11-Movie-The Truth about Cats and Dogs

- Belk Main Lounge. Free.

12-Dating Game

- Win a free blind date.

15-Dress to Impress

- Valentine's formal. \$4.00 or Season Ticket. Semi-formal.