

# Astronomy at Pinehurst

BY BION H. BUTLER

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You never know how one thing is going to follow another. With the likelihood of the local airport becoming an important station in the air travel of this country the folks who navigate the air ask where our station is. Not long ago Major Yost received an inquiry as to the latitude and longitude of the airport, which he referred to Rassic Wicker, and Rassic said he would let him know in a few days when he had time to make a few figures.

Now this thing was determined thirty-one years ago by a group of scientific men, who at that time would have said such a thing as an airport in the vicinity of Pinehurst was an impossible dream of the Darius Greens and other fanciful characters who interest and amuse us, but in other respects get nowhere. On the Ritter road in Pinehurst, a couple of hundred feet from its intersection with the Chinquapin road, near the Carolina, stands an odd monument about two feet high and two feet square, with a flat brownstone slab on top. A small hole is punchmarked in the center of the slab, with some other marks around the margin. That small punchmark is the basis for all computations of location and distance and measurements in this section. And it is also a part of a gigantic scheme of world mapping that covers the entire earth. It is the bench mark that determines the latitude and longitude of that particular little punchmark in the sandstone slab. In the Naval observatory at Washington the records show that the punchmark is in north latitude 35 degrees, 11 minutes and 38.23 seconds, and in west longitude 79 degrees, 28 minutes and 12 seconds. From that bench mark 1,500 feet on the true north meridian at a point in the Cad-dell road, opposite to the entrance of the Shaw road is another stone monument on the side of which is a perpendicular line cutting the face of the stone, the line marking the position of the north line. These marks were established in 1900 by a corps of astronomers and engineers who came to Pinehurst to study the eclipse of that year. As near as I can gather some of the most eminent astronomers of the world, and some of the most skillful engineers were there, including men from the Naval observatory, which has no superiors. They determined these positions and established the north line to facilitate these observations. Their marks remain engraved in stone. Any engineer who wants to test his compass needle at any time can go there and prove it up, or he can secure the location of the monuments and apply it to the position of any other place here or anywhere else on the globe.

So when Major Yost asked Mr. Wicker for the latitude and longitude of the flying field Mr. Wicker, who has accurate maps of everything in this neighborhood as the result of his long years of surveying and mapping of the lands, simply drew forth a copy of a map that includes Pinehurst and the airport, and measured on the map the distance to the airport and the accurate direction from the Pinehurst monument. A little careful computation gave the desired location, and the exact location of the airport is determined. This information will be recorded at all places interested in a knowledge of points on the globe, and a man in New York, Miami, Hong Kong or anywhere else

can see at a glance where the local flying field is and how his course will be laid if he wants to reach it.

This call for the exact location of the flying field, and its measurement from the monument established by the party observing the eclipse of 1900 recalls that event, and emphasizes the reason for picking Pinehurst as the spot from which to study the phenomena. Astronomers in determining the point of observation of an eclipse are governed by several things, the first of which must be the path which the shadow that is made when the moon obscures the sun makes during the progress of the obscuration. That is a narrow strip across the globe, and does not fall in the same place year after year. Hence the location must be made on that path. But to secure the best results in the study of an eclipse the proper conditions of light must be considered, and absence of fogs, of clouds, of intervening hills or anything else must be kept in mind. High elevations are chosen often as they indicate a range of vision, and also a clear sky and an open atmosphere. Pinehurst could not offer a high altitude, but the dry soil gives an atmospheric condition that is remarkable, and the high proportion of sunshiny days gives hope of luck in observing the sun. So the Pinehurst location was selected, and the astronomers came here and set up their outfit. To be chosen as the place from which to observe a solar eclipse is about the same as the award of the first prize at the fair, for it confers a distinction of certain natural advantages that every place on earth is glad to win. Possibly nothing is a higher testimonial to the atmospheric conditions of North Carolina than that sandstone slab on top of the small monument near the Carolina which leaves a permanent evidence that leading scientific men there set up their instruments to study the secrets of the sun and moon in their conjunction at that particular date. No inscriptions are on the monument, but every astronomical observatory in the world has the records. At Adelaide, Australia, Bloemfontaine, South Africa, Dun Echt, Scotland, Greencastle, Indiana, Kayto, Japan, Madras, India, Santiago, Chile, Zo-Se, China; and over two hundred observatories elsewhere, they have the records of this eclipse and Pinehurst's wonderful climate. At private observatories, in scientific libraries, in every group of educated men on the face of the earth, the eclipse of 1900 is known in its detail, and the fitness of the dry atmosphere, dry sandy soil and open sunshiny sky of these sandy knobs is appreciated as a scientific fact. No place can have a higher rating by a more capable body of men thoroughly familiar with their subject and more exact in their conclusions.

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