

NOVAC

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHERN VIRGINIA ASTRONOMY CLUB

NO. 108 • VOL. 23 • JULY/AUGUST 2003

Cloud observing

by Steve "If You Can't Beat 'Em, Join 'Em" Johnson

Someone addressed our group as "fellow cloud watchers." I was relieved to learn that there are some other enthusiasts out there. I have been wanting to contribute one of my observations, but was unsure how much interest there might be.

I went out to my favorite cloud observing site last night. I like to watch from my driveway. I used to drive to Camp Highroad but I have found that the sky coverage there is just overwhelming. There, I can't concentrate on any one object. From my tree- and house-lined driveway, I find that I can aim my 8" Newtonian straight up and really focus on just one cloud at a time.

As usual, I found it completely impossible to see more than a tiny fraction of the object in my 32-mm Erfle, which has only about a 1.0-degree field of view. Also as usual, I found no evidence of any "leak-through" of deep sky objects. This was a really solid, dense cloud—a fine example of a "local nebula," as I like to think of them.

The cloud moved slowly, but other clouds seemed intent on preventing any starlight from filtering through. Thus I was assured of no distractions—I could really concentrate on just cloud observations.

It is amazing to consider how much we understand of the universe despite being enveloped in these dense H₂O formations. How the professional astronomers pieced together the distances to the stars, the structure of galaxies—things that seem forever hidden behind the local nebulae—is nothing short of inspiring.

continued on page 2



Steve Johnson and other local observers reported seeing naked-eye "nebulae" like this one.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thanks for your hard work

We have two veteran volunteers stepping down this month for a little rest and some time to look at the stars, Joe Pierson,

Master

Membership

Maven (M3)

and Mike Mills,

Award Winning

Editor (AWE),

are retiring

from their posi-

tions and three new volunteers have

stepped up as their replacements. Many

thanks from all of the members for your

service. However, you did too good a job

to get away free and you will be called on

again in the future. —Ed. ★



NOVAC President Ed Karch

