

At the December LAS meeting, I gave a presentation on "How I Do What I Do". It was a mini presentation about my personal preferences in our hobby of astronomy. I talked very fast and shared a ton of information to the membership in attendance that night. The next morning, I was in the shower, letting the hot water hit my back, when it hit me and I almost hit the floor of the shower (No! I didn't slip on the soap). I could write a series of monthly articles for the newsletter, detailing how I do what I do. I think you will enjoy them.

To sum up what I choose to observe is pretty easy. I like *lists*. Some people have these lists in their heads, those objects that they love to visit each and every time they go out. Others, like myself, like them printed on a piece of paper, where I can check them off once I've seen them.

There are lists all over the internet of objects to look at. But there are a set of lists that I have found and have taken great interest to complete, of which I have completed 15. These are the lists of objects for the various observing clubs of the Astronomical League.

If you visit the web site www.astroleague.org and click the Observing Clubs link, you will be taken to a page of observing clubs that are sponsored by the Astronomical League. And each of these clubs has a list. Hot Dog!!!

There is a club for observing the Messier Objects. At monthly LAS meetings this past year, Bob Spohn showed the 110 objects of this club, what they look like and where they were in the sky. For some of you, it was your first introduction to the observing clubs of the Astronomical League (AL).

Most all of these clubs have an observing guide that you can purchase to aid you in understanding the rules of each club, the objects associated with the club and various interesting facts about the objects. These observing guides are well worth their price, for some of the clubs, like the Herschel II Club, the guide is indispensable in aiding you in finding the objects.

Did I mention that you get a prize for successful completion of an observing club? Its like Cracker Jacks, you get this wonderful bunch of goodies (caramel popcorn and nuts) and you also get a prize. Well, the observing clubs of the AL are exactly the same. You get a wonderful bunch objects to observe (tasty treats for the eye) and you get a nice certificate of completion and an award pin. You also get your name on that observing club's awardees web page.

So, I go to the observing club web site and read about each of the observing clubs. It doesn't take much to get me interested in the club. My taste for faint fuzzies is so varied, that I will look at anything I can find in the sky. And each club has a list!!!

The first observing club I tackled was the Messier Club. I started this club by logging my first object, M57, on July 12, 1986. From that point on, I was hooked on AL observing clubs. Since then, I have looked at double stars (Double Star Club), studied the moon (Lunar Club), performed various observations of our solar system (Planetary Observers Club), studying the moon some more (currently doing the Lunar II Club), looking at a pot-pan of objects (Herschel and Herschel II Clubs), seen globular clusters (Globular Cluster Club), watched meteor showers (Meteor Club), looked at comets (Comet Club), watched man-made satellites pass overhead (Earth Observing Satellite Club) and am about to start two of the newest AL clubs, the Planetary Nebula and Open Cluster Clubs. I have always been interested in looking at these kinds of objects, and having a club, with a list and a prize is just icing on the cake for me. And I love cake.

In the process of doing all these clubs, I have learned much about our hobby. You get those “ah-ha” moments, when you learn something new and it’s like a light going on for you. With the AL Observing Clubs, you get these moments at the most unexpected times. The clubs not only make you look at a certain list of objects, but often provoke thoughts and in the process, you learn a great deal about the topic of the observing club. This is the wonderful affect these clubs can have on you. They teach, you learn.

For those of you who like to take CCD images of the sky, there are observing clubs for you. The Asteroid Club would be a neat one to do using images to show the movement of the asteroid. The Arp Peculiar Galaxy Club would also be a neat club to do with a CCD camera and actually photograph the peculiar aspect of each galaxy in this club.

So, whether you are a beginner or an advanced observer, the AL Observing Clubs offers something to everyone.

But the real prize of doing these clubs is not the certificate. It’s not the award pin. It’s not seeing your name in ones and zeros. It’s seeing some of the most breath taking objects the heavens has to offer. It’s learning how to navigate the nighttime skies. It’s about being outside, being with friends and having a good time.

Our hobby has something to offer to almost anyone. The Astronomical League and their Observing Clubs, makes our hobby more fun.