

Black Forest 2007

Hi all,

This was the first year that I attended the Black Forest Star Party, and I have to say, it was the best convention that I've been too! (except for LHSC of course!)

I was originally planning on traveling to Black Forest on Thursday, but I had taken Wednesday off to prepare for the trip. I spent Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning hauling out the needed equipment from my backyard observatory. (accessible only by two flights of steps).

After seeing Wednesday evenings great weather forecast for Coudersport, I hurried up and finished loading the car and got a late start for Potter city. After wasting a good bit of time stuck in road construction on Rt28, I arrived at Cherry Springs with about an hour to go before sunset. It was an amazing site. Two days out from the official start of Black Forest, there were more people there than at the May Cherry Springs Star Party! (and they kept coming!)

Here's several pictures of the field: (almost all of the green space filled up).

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-01.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-02.jpg>

a few images of the on-site observatory domes:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-03.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-04.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-05.jpg>

my campsite:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-06.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-07.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-08.jpg>

Bob Kalan's camp:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-09.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/bfsp2007/bfsp07-10.jpg>

I was lucky and was able to find a spot across from Bob Kalan and Denny Hill from the Kiski Astronomers. I rushed setting up the campsite and getting my 8" SCT assembled. Unfortunately, the weather forecast from the morning seemed to be a little off, as we were mostly clouded out! Most of the campers around us only had their telescopes partly together and covered up. But then, around 10:00 PM, the front passed thru and the sky cleared. The views of the Milky-Way was the most spectacular that I have ever seen! The contrast between the bright edges of the Milky-Way with the blackness of the rest of the sky was tremendous! The great rift in Cygnus was very prominent, with the bi-

sected sections brightly visible all the way thru Aquilia and Serpens, merging back into a single glowing mass in Sagittarius! Even the area about Cepheus and Cassiopeia showed structure that I had never seen before. The entire Milky-Way had an almost three dimensional appearance to it. Needless to say, everyone scrambled to uncover and finish setting up their telescopes, occasionally pausing to just stop what they were doing, look up and loudly exclaim how beautiful the sky looked!!! Though out the night, deep-sky objects were just popping out of the eyepiece. (or in my case, the video monitors). We were even treated to dozens of faint meteors that seemed to be originating from under Polaris in Camelopardalis. Eventually, the intense dew and lateness, and cold got to most of the observers, but staying up to 3:00 AM to see Orion striding over the horizon with his belt and sword made a great ending to a great night! Easily the best night observing I ever had.

Later on Thursday, we were joined by Ray Montgomery and Winni & John Labrecque, and Bob Novak and we all shared a common field area between our campsites. I was made a temporary Kiski member for the weekend - so they could hang their club banner on the side of my tent. :) During the day on Thursday, I had my solar observing setup going, hooked up to the monitors showing views thru the PST Ha, PST CaK, and with the Daystar thru the 8" SCT. But, as we are going thru solar minimum, there wasn't much disk detail visible, other than a small area of plage and a few limb prominences.

Thursday evening stayed clear, but the seeing had noticeably decreased from the night before. Still Thursday evening was great, besting the evenings that I remembered from the StarCruise site, and far surpassing anything we might see from the Pittsburgh area at our observatories. Thursday night was another long evening of observing, till Orion put in his appearance again.

A few hours later, with Friday's dawn, came the clouds! The rain held off through the morning and noon hours, with even an occasional glimpse of the Sun to taunt us a bit. Then mid afternoon the rain started! We had several good downpours during the afternoon that sent everyone scurrying between their camps and the vendor tents. Friday evening was a cold and damp bust with occasional showers and lightning. But the good folks from the Central Penn Observers put on several movies at the pavilion to entertain us. They did a great organizational job throughout the weekend! Most everyone went to bed early to try and catch-up on some sleep, but around 12:30 - 1:00 AM, the storm really blew through waking everyone! What started out as a soothing tapping on the van roof soon turned into a roar! It was as if a group of people were standing around the van pounding on the roof with their fists! Eventually, the front passed, and everyone got back to sleep.

Saturday dawned cold and wet. Occasionally, the sky would clear, (which the

predictions were calling for), and I would start thinking about getting out the solar equipment. But then a cloud band would come over and dump some rain. So I ended up just carrying all of the solar stuff over to the pavilion as show-and-tell for my afternoon talk. (the presentation went well with lots of questions afterwards). Most of the BFSP attendees, which kept increasing in spite of the weather, either spent the day listening to the presentations, visiting the equipment vendor tents, or lounging at the food vendor tent. There were a number of families with kids, and a number of college students there, so during the dry periods, people were out riding bikes around the observing field, or playing various ball games. During the day, I ran into several AAAP members - Maureen and Bill Moutz, and Fred Klein. (Earlier in the week, I met John OHara from ORAS).

After the talks concluded with a greatly hilarious presentation by Ed Ting, the door prize drawing was held. They had some great stuff, from software to eyepieces, to elescopes. Even Blueberries from a local farm! (I think the only lucky member from our group who won anything was Bob Kalan).

At sunset Saturday, the skies finally cleared enough to uncover the scopes. But we did get occasional cloud banks go over throughout the evening. (they made for good opportunities to go get something hot from the food vendor). The temperature also dropped. Really dropped! (down into the thirties). I had on every sweatshirt that I had brought with me, including my winter coat, gloves and hat. It kept me warm enough till about 2:00 AM, when I started getting chill. At that point, after an extended wait for a long cloud bank to pass, I decided to quit for the night. Taking a stroll around the observing field with John and Denny, most of the other attendees had also turned in for the night. But, there were still an occasional group of hard-core observers out, getting ready for the next wave of clearing!

Sunday morning dawned cold and clear. By the time I rolled out of my sleeping bag, about 9:30 AM, most folks had already started packing, or had even left. By noon, I was ready to go, and the last to leave from our group. On the way home, I stopped at a little park in Austin, that was a memorial to for the dam that burst in 1911. (more interesting info on the internet) Made it back to Pittsburgh just in time to get stuck in Steeler traffic! Took today off to unload the van, and harvest the grass that I didn't get to cut last week.

Black Forest was a great event! Two and a half nights of awesome observing! I highly recommend going next year. I'll be there!!!

Larry