

Black Forest 2008

Hi all,

Had a busy week, so I only just got time late this evening to process the starparty pictures I took and to write up this blurb.

I arrived at Cherry Springs Tuesday afternoon, the 2nd, shortly after Bob Kalan and Denny Hill, and the three of us setup camp together. Here's a few pics of the observing field. By the sunset of that evening, there must have already been over 100 folks there! It was a good thing we got there when we did, cause shortly after I arrived a couple from the Hamilton Astronomy club of Ontario arrived and took up almost all of the free space around us. The two of them must have setup a half-dozen tents by themselves. Over the next several days, more of their club members shows up and occupied the existing tents, and put up a few more.

(they were nice folks - Kerri, Steve, Dan, and John).

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-01.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-02.jpg>

We had a spectacular evening, with the Milky-Way stretching from the southern horizon, all the way thru the zenith, and back down into the northeast!

I spent some time doing the iterative method of polar aligning and achieved probably the best polar alignment I've ever had. My 8" LX200GPS kept putting every object practically dead centered on the video chip of my stellacam. My camper's video gear and computer capture worked like a breeze, and I was nailing a bunch of small globulars in Sagittarius & Ophichus all evening long.

Next to me Bob K and his imaging refractor & DSLR was pulling in some of the best astro photos I've ever seen. And these were the basic raw images.

I can't wait to see what he comes up with after a little post processing!

It was amazing watching him work. He was like an artist!

Denny was also having a good time with his 12" SCT and his astrophoto rig.

The next day was nice and sunny (and very hot), so we did a little solar observing with my PST Ha, PST CaK, and Daystar T-Scanner.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-03.jpg>

There were several nice limb prominences visible, but no sunspots. :(

How can I say it, Wednesday evening was even better than the previous spectacular night. That night the Milky-Way was the best ever!!! We were seeing faint extensions and streaks from Sagittarius extending all the way over to the middle of Scorpius. There was also a faint band extending from Scutum over into Ophichus. One of the campers across from us was sitting there identifying some of the figures visible from the dark clouds obscuring the brighter starlight. (such as the 'running horse'?)

Words fail in trying to describe it!

I heard a few days later that if I had stayed up longer, I could have seen the zodiacal light coming up in the east.

Bob K continued to capture outrageous deep-sky images, and Denny and I had to stop what we were doing, and just watch him capture these incredible images! We kept busy thinking of deep-sky objects for Bob to image, and he kept blowing us away with their pics, but he finally exhausted everything we could think of.

Even our Canadian buddies were impressed with Bob's equipment and skill.

That night, I switched observing gears and spent the evening sketching.

Thursday continued to be unseasonably hot, with the humidity and circus clouds building. I decided to take a day trip about 30 miles down the road to the Pa Grand Canyon / ditch! (it was actually very scenic!)

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-12.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-13.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-14.jpg>

Donna and Gary Shannon arrived early evening, and setup a small tent and their big dob next to my camp.

(they actually stayed down the road at the B&B).

Here we are sitting around and goofing off that afternoon.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-04.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-05.jpg>

Around sunset, Denny, Bob K, and I took a stroll around the observing field and I took a few pictures:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-07.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-08.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-09.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-10.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-11.jpg>

Thursday evening was kind of mediocre, with a lot of high haze obscuring the Milky-Way. Still, it was a better evening than what we would have in Pittsburgh! Having already completed my initial video capture and sketching lists from the previous two glorious nights, I spent Thursday night experimenting with a new flip mirror that I had purchased, along with my old 6.3 focal reducer, to do a little wide-field open starcluster video imaging. (M6 & M7 in Scorpius, and various other Messier open clusters). I'm working on creating a video capture album of all the Messiers to go along with all the sketches that I have of them.

Friday was another hot day, but this time the wind was really kicking up! (tents were flying). By now the observing field had really filled-up, but there were a few folks who packed up and left.

I tried to do solar observing but it was too windy. So instead we spent time sitting around the camp, adding more 'hot air' to the windy conditions, and visiting the various equipment vendors, who had finally shown up in force. That afternoon, Bob Novack and his friend Susie pulled in and setup their little A-liner camper across the road from our main Kiski camp. Bob N brought his small refractor telescope over to our common area and setup there with the rest of us. (unfortunately, I don't think he ever got the chance to use it). Later Maureen and Bill Moutz arrived - they were also staying down the road at the B& B with the Shannons.

Here's a group pic - minus Maureen & Bill - sorry.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2008-06.jpg>

Friday evening began clouding over early, but I managed to fire-up the LX200GPS and entertained the group by hopping from one sucker-hole deep sky object to the next and displaying it on the video monitor. Still, by 10:00 PM, it was all over, so I cover the scope and put away as much as I could,

as the weather radio was calling for rain late. We all went to bed early and got a good nites sleep.

Around dawn, it started raining, and most of the day Saturday was overcast or drizzly. There was talk all day about it clearing off that night, but it never did. In fact it actually started drizzling around dusk, and after dark had several good periods of rain. (but I heard from Denny the next day that around three-am-ish, there was an hour or so of clear skies, in which he got up and walked around to see who else was up observing).

We continued to visit the equipment venders and took in the speaker presentations during the day.

My 'Astro Sketching' talk and demo went very well.

(Donna made sure that the Kiski peanut gallery was well behaved!)

During the day, we all took advantage of a dry spell and finished packing away all of our telescope equipment. Which was a good thing with the weather that night. With the rain, everyone called it an early evening.

The next day dawned cold, foggy, and damp. Bob K left for home with the dawn, and Bob N & Susie a few hours later. Denny and I took our time, and was out of there by noon. By the time we left for home, the Sun had started to come out. The few people who stayed Sunday night probably had a good evening!!

I'm glad a group of us went up to Black Forest on Tuesday. We got in some of the best observing ever! Next year we'll have to go up on Monday!!!

;)

Larry