

Cherry Springs 2008

Hi all,

Spent this past weekend up in Potter Cty at the Cherry Springs Star Party 'CSSP' in Cherry Springs Park, PA's 1st dark sky preserve.

After last Wednesday's beautifully clear evening here in Pittsburgh, I was anxious to leave the next day for CSSP. Even with the weather calling for storms over the weekend, the forecast for Thursday night was very good. Though I waited till the end of rush hour, I still managed to get stuck in traffic along Rt28. But after a period of stop-n-start traffic close to town, I finally made it into clear driving for the next 4.5+ hours.

I arrived at CSP mid-afternoon, and was able to find a spot next to the Kiski Astronomers club members that I usually hang-out with.

(Bob Kalan, Denny Hill, and Jan, and later in the weekend Tony O & Roz).

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-01.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-02.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-03.jpg>

After getting the Wazat teardrop camp in order and setting up my 8" LX200 and connecting it to the teardrop's video/computer, I was ready for the night's observing. It was a good thing that I got there when I did, as the open area around us quickly filled up with other convention goers.

While waiting for sunset, we strolled around the observing field, checking out the various telescopes being prepared for the evening, along with this year's site improvements.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-04.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-05.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-06.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-07.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-08.jpg>

We estimated there was about 250 in attendance. (normally the Harrisburg club that runs CSSP closes registration at 350, but this year did not sell out, and we were told at the front desk on Friday that there were a lot of no shows, mainly due to the weather and the cost of gas).

About this year's site improvements, in addition to adding more electrical box hookups and concrete telescope pads, the park had also completed the new rest-room facility. It is really nice!! Running water, hot air hand dryers, and flushing porcelain seats! It even has red lights for nighttime use. The best part is that the facility is heated!!

(that was a pleasant surprise at 2:00 am! ;)

After what seemed like forever, the sky finally began to darken and the stars came out to play, allowing me to auto-align the LX200, attached the video camera and adjust focus. The evening sky was spectacular!!! Transparency was great, the winds were calm, and there was absolutely no dew. (or bugs).

I observed sketched/videocaptured various spring galaxies in Ursa Major and Canes Venatici, which I can't normally see from my home observatory.

(northern sky is blocked by the observatory shed). My catch of the nite was NGC3079, as described in a recent issue of Sky & Tel. After finishing my observing list around midnight, I went on to view some of the usual suspects - M3, M13, M57, M104, various galaxies in Virgo, and later after the Earth had rotated a bit, the summer southern sky objects such as M22,

& M17. Around 3:00 AM, I covered the telescope and sat down for a little Milky-Way viewing as it was brightly rising high in the east. The rifts around Cygnus down thru Scutum was outstanding. With moonrise beginning to interfere with the darksky and the cold getting through, (temp dropped to 37), I finally called it an evening and went to bed at about a quarter to four. Thursday night was a great evening. That one night alone made the whole trip worthwhile!!!

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-sketch-m81.gif>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-m81.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-sketch-m82.gif>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-m82.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-sketch-ngc3079.gif>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-ngc3079.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-sketch-m64.gif>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-m64.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-sketch-m104.gif>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-m104.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-sketch-m13.gif>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-m13.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-sketch-m57.gif>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-m57.jpg>

Friday started out sunny, but by noon, the clouds and severe weather forecasts began rolling in. Before long, numerous convention attendee's began packing camp and leaving. (but a few brave groups of observers actually arrived and setup camp). Still, a lot of the observing field was now empty, and there probably wasn't more than a 150 attendees left by the end of the day. That was a shame, as they missed several good presentations that afternoon, including "Recent CSP Improvements" and "Dark Sky Fund Update" by park rangers Chip & Maxine Harrison that detailed what had been done with state funds and our donations over the past year, and "Into the Mystic" about how humankind has followed the stars thru the ages, by a member of the Hamilton Amateur Astronomers from the great white north. (Canada eh?). To review the full schedule, go to <http://www.cherrysprings.org/> After an afternoon shower, with the wind picking up and more ominous looking clouds, our observing group also put away the telescopes. We decided to ride out the storms and stay the entire weekend, so we just secured loose items around the campsite and tightened down the tent canopies.

After a few strong gusts of wind, the storm threat died down, and later that evening, was actually partly clear. While the transparency was bad,

and there was an obvious overcast of scattered haze and light clouds, the sky was still no worse than what we would have on an average night from the Pittsburgh area!

An occasional brighter deep-sky object was visible and Saturn was putting on a nice show with it's nearly edge-on rings and it's moons in the few telescopes that were in operation. But, as midnight approached, the clouds thickened and covered the entire sky.

In the wee hours, the wind picked back up and the rain came in.

Saturday dawned cold and wet.

The weather forecast continued to go downhill, resulting in more folks giving up and leaving. They missed an interesting presentation by the keynote speaker - Al Nagler of TeleVue fame. Al's talk was "Choosing Eyepieces", in which he stated (to Tony's dismay), that you only really needed two or maybe three eyepieces in their collection!

That was certainly an eye-opener for some of those in attendance.

Of course it really didn't concern me, being a videoastronomy guy who doesn't need eyepieces! ;)

Al also went thru his controversial 'majesty' principle that he recently came up with in conjunction with his new Ethos eyepiece line.

His principle concerns using the highest power with the widest field of view that gives the most majestic view of the particular object being observed, taking into account the darkness of the observer's sky.

(that's a very simplified version of it - you should go to his website for the full description).

After several squall lines blew past, a calmer airmass went over, and we had a few hours of clear partly sunny skies.

Bob and I took advantage of that and brought out the solar scopes, and shared the view with Denny & Jan, and some nearby campers who were still there. While there was absolutely 'nothing' visible in white-light and not much more in the CaK, the views in H-alpha was much more interesting. There were two large groups of prominences we were able to observe, a nice hedgerow formation on the north polar limb, and a bright fan shaped prom on the western limb. Using the Daystar filter on my 8" and slowly following the limb around the Sun brought into view a number of smaller fans, flames, and detached fragments, and when the seeing momentarily steadied, individual spicules could be observed along the rim! Good Stuff!

I managed to get one image with the CaK before another squall line began to approach that interrupted the solar fun.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/cssp2008-cak.jpg>

Late that afternoon, rumors about a clearing Saturday night began making the rounds. Sure enough, during the early evening raffle prize drawing the sun began poking thru the clouds and with sunset came partly clear skies! Speaking of the doorprize raffle, several Kiski members continued our club streak by winning!! Denny and Jan both won items, and Bob walked away with the main doorprize - a DenkMire Bino viewer! Way to go Bob!!!

After the last drawing, we all hurried back to our camps to uncover our scopes. I quickly got the LX200 up and running, but I rushed through the alignment process and didn't really have accurate GOTO for the evening. (generally put the object in or very near the finder field of view, but not right on the chip everytime like on Thursday night). The public is invited in on Saturday evenings, and as I had volunteered to be part of the public program, had several people lined up waiting to look at something

while I was trying to align. Was able to give everyone a look at Saturn and M13, and they left happy.

Not long after it had finally gotten dark, cloud bands began rolling thru, making it difficult to observe. The dew also came on very heavy! While my dew heaters kept the 8" SCT's corrector plate and the 50mm finder scope objective mostly dry, the red dot finder quickly succumbed and it was a fight to keep the eyepieces dry. (while correcting my alignment problems, for awhile I turned off the dew heaters as they were possibly interfering with the alignment sensors, and I soon had to borrow Denny's hair dryer for the corrector plate and 50mm finder - the dew was that heavy!)

Between the dew, clouds, and alignment problems, I finally said to heck with it around 11:30 pm, put away the telescope, and stayed up after midnight with Denny enjoying views of the Milky-Way with his binoculars or naked-eye. By then the last of the cloud banks had gone over, leaving a clear sky overhead. While not as good as Thursday night, the night sky was still very impressive!

Sunday morning dawned bright and sunny, and the remanding attendees quickly began packing up and leaving.

I pulled out and headed for home around 10:30 am, a little tired but a very happy camper!

Larry