

## Star Quest – 2009

### 06-26-2009 (Day-1) Friday.

For the past several years, I've wanted to attend the Star Quest convention, held down at Green Bank WV, home of the National Radio Observatory. But it either conflicted with CSSP or my work schedule. This year the stars aligned, and I was able to go.

After a nice drive down I-79 to the Elkins exit, I arrived at Green Bank around 12:45 pm. Right before you get to valley that Green Bank is located in, there's a pretty decent hill/ridge that you have to go over. Also, it's located in a 'radio quiet' zone, which means that your cell phone will not work. Green Bank is a great place! The new visitor's center, where the Star Quest registration is located, is very nice. It has a deli, restrooms, gift store, classrooms, auditorium, and an exhibit hall. There's also a computer lab with free internet access that's in a shielded room, (like a giant faraday cage), that you have to access thru a set of double 'blast doors'. The SQ staff was very friendly and well organized in getting me registered and pointing out all the convention details.

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-01.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-02.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-03.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-04.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-05.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-06.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-07.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-08.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-09.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-10.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-11.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-12.jpg>

Most of the SQ activities, took place up at the visitors center, and that was where the vendors, such as CCTS, were also located.

The camping observing field is spacious but primitive. There were a number of porta-johns available, along with a battery charging station in a nearby barn. A number of gravel roads broke up the field into sections, and the individual camping spots were lined off with orange paint and little boundary flags. The field was accessed by driving a good distance past the visitors center and around a lab building all the way to the little airport access road. Fortunately, there's a gravel path that shortcuts between the observing field and visitors center, and made for a short 5 minute walk to the visitors center and bunk/shower house. One of the 'perks' of the observing field was its nearby neighbors.

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-14.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-15.jpg>  
<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-16.jpg>

Every time I turned to look at one of the radio dishes, it had moved and was observing something different up in the sky!

After settling in at my campsite and meeting my camping neighbors, I took in a few of the presentations, (Mike Rosolina – 'Astronomical Sketching Workshop', and Dr Ducan Lorimer – 'Radio Astronomy & Einstein'), shopped at the vendors and gift store, and socialized with the SQ staff that I knew from my LHSC days.  
(also met Fred Klein from the AAAP)

All day the skies were mostly sunny, with scattered clouds. But, as evening approached it became hazier. Around 10:00 pm, a front moved thru with thick clouds and lightening off in the distance. I had time to complete a basic polar alignment and observed a few globulars – M3 and M13, before covering it for the night. A little later the threatening storms moved off with partial sucker hole clearings developing.

I got out the binocs and a chair and toured the sections of sky that opened and closed. Occasionally, it would completely clear for a short interval, but with lightening flashes still off in the distance, I didn't uncover my telescope. Overall, the skies are fairly dark, but not Cherry Springs quality. There are a number of light domes from the nearby small towns, and to the northeast, just across the road from the main entrance; there is a bank with a bright spotlight that was generating an interesting optical effect. Somehow it was projecting the shadow of a nearby tree up into the sky that gave the appearance of a 'dark' spotlight beam. A little after midnight, I called it quits and went to bed.

I was briefly woken up at 4:00 am by a brief rain shower.

### **06-27-2009 (Day-2) Saturday.**

I awoke to sunny skies and warm temperatures. The front that had gone thru the night before was long gone, and the ground already dry. After breakfast, went up to the bunk house and hit the shower. There's a separate Men's and Women's sections, along with a laundry room, and a little AV entertainment game room.

The showers are very nice, better than Cherry Springs. (also free)

At 10:00 am, we all gathered for the group photo. Probably a good 150 of us there.

Later, I tried to do a little solar observing, but it had become breezy, making it difficult. So I packed away the solar filters and went up to the visitor's center. Stopped in at the NASA Exhibit and got to touch a Moon rock!

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-17.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-18.jpg>

Spent some time attending more presentations, (Mark Kochte – 'Messenger Mercury Project'), and went on a bus tour of the radio telescopes. Got to see the GBT up close while it was moving to a new target. That is one big dish!!

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-13.jpg>

Coming back from the tour I met up with Al Paslow, (AAAP) with his wife Adele and daughter Stormy. The big event of the day was the keynote presentation by Apollo Astronaut Alan Bean, the 4<sup>th</sup> man to walk on the Moon. Captain Bean gave a very interesting and inspiring talk. Quite excellent! He talked about a number of little known things that happened on the mission. One of the things he touched on was when lightening struck the rocket ship just after it had launched. They had trained for all kinds of problems, but no one had ever thought about getting hit by lightening. Fortunately their training kicked in, and Alan was able to do the right thing to get them thru the crisis. (he joked about how mission control was concerned that the re-entry chutes had been fried by the strike, but decided not to abort the mission. If the chutes were damaged, they were going to probably die on re-entry anyway, so might as well let them go to the Moon and have a little fun first!) He also talked about all the problems they had with getting the flag to stand on the lunar surface and the dust in the zippers on their moon suits.

(Al Paslow got to ask a great follow-up question about the dust). It was standing room only in the auditorium, and the Green Bank staff even did a remote video feed into a separate classroom for the overflow crowd. I'm glad I made it into the auditorium!! (Thanks for saving me a seat Al!!!)

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-19.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/sq2009/SQ2009-20.jpg>

Captain Bean's talk went well over, and after that the Star Quest staff held the big raffle drawing, while a huge crowd went off to get autographs from the astronaut. (neither Al, Fred, nor I were lucky in winning).

It was already dark, so I hurried back to camp and prepared my telescope for the evening. The skies, which had been great looking all day, had turned to thick haze. Even the slim Crescent Moon was struggling to shine thru them. (we did get several good Moon Dogs). I resigned myself to another disappointing lost observing night, and decided to finish my polar alignment from the previous night and concentrate on working out a few bugs in my videoastronomy system. A lot of folks opted for bed!!

I'm glad I stuck it out, as around 11:30 pm, the skies cleared off to a beautiful summer Milky-Way! Having my 8" LX200 and imaging system now working smoothly, I stayed up till near 4:00 am capturing the northern messier-objects not visible from my backyard observatory, and showing off the brighter globulars and nebula to the occasionally passer-by. Everyone particularly enjoyed the views of M17, the 'Swan' with the StellaCam II at f6.3 prime focus on the 8" telescope, along with the wide field views with the StellaCam EX on the piggybacked 80mm refractor.

I wrapped up the evening by doing a little 'arm-chair' naked eye observing of the bright star clouds in Cygnus and Sagittarius.

Occasionally, I would glance over in the direction of the GBT, and wondered at what it might also be possible observing in the radio spectrum.

By then the air temp had dropped down to 48 degrees! Chilly!!!

Finally, a great night of observing!

### **06-28-2009 (Day-3) Sunday.**

After only a few hours of sleep, I was awoken around 7:30 am by the sounds of the other attendees packing for home. (should have used the earplugs I had).

By then, with a sunny sky, the outside temp had recovered into the low sixties.

After a leisurely breakfast, I broke camp, and packed up the telescope. I was sorry to take it down, after getting such a great polar alignment the night before.

The iterative alignment method, while a little time consuming, is very effective!

Driving off the field, I stopped by and said goodbye to Steve Ahrens, chairman of the convention, to let him know that I had a great time at the event, and how well organized they were, and that I appreciated all the hard work that went into making it successful.

Next year's Star Quest is July 7<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup>, 2010.

I plan on being there!!!

Larry McHenry