

AstroBlast (ORAS) Star Party - August, 2013

After having to decline an invitation in 2012 to speak at AstroBlast, (prior commitment), when contacted again in 2013 by ORAS to come and give a presentation, I was able to gladly accept.

Friday 08/09/2013:

The drive up to Franklin Pa started off on the wet side. Torrential downpours blanketed the South Hills, and it wasn't until I was well north of Pittsburgh that I was finally able to drive out from under them. I arrived at the ORAS observatory ~ 3:00pm to clearing skies and got my camp and telescope setup just to the north of the observatory. (close enough to plug into the electricity).

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-01.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-02.jpg>

A little later, Dan H rolled in and setup his little Aliner next to me.

Besides Dan, the usual ORAS folks were there including Tim S, Pete J, and John & Kelly O.

There were about 45 attendees on the field.

Once the camp was in order, I assembled the C-Gem mount with the 6" RC.

The convention officially opened with Tim S welcoming everyone to the 20th and possibly last AstroBlast! Tim informed us that the observatory would be moving. The county had finally bought them out, and ORAS was in the process of buying about 25 acres of property at a much darker sky location. Once the land deal is complete ORAS will begin the task of building a new observatory on their own land. After Tim finished with the update, I filled in for a speaker cancellation and started the evening out with my 'Stargazing and Mythology' talk. It was well attended, with lots of questions.

The sky had nearly cleared by sunset, so I attached my video-cameras, (SC-II on the 50mm, and the SC-3 on the 6" RC), and brought them to focus on the distant tree-line.

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-03.jpg>

Once dark enough, I aligned the C-Gem mount and spent the next several hours demonstrating video-astronomy to Dan H and other attendees who stopped in. The air temp dropped steadily thru the evening into the low 50's, and dew hit early! But my new 19ah battery and heaters were up to the task. More of a problem was the high-level bands of clouds and haze that kept passing overhead throughout the night, and occasionally obscuring the Milky-Way.

I did spend some useful time sweeping up several faint star clusters, planetary nebula, and galaxies that I had missed previously in the constellations of Delphinus, Sagitta, and Vulpecula.

Finally, around 1:30am, I called it a night and went to bed.

Saturday 08/10/2013:

Woke to a clear morning with a slight chill to the air. After a breakfast of scrambled eggs and pancakes supplied by the ORAS 'kitchen', I grabbed a quick shower at the lake campground.

Made it back to the convention just in time to take in Tim S's presentation on Antarctic Astronomy.

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-04.jpg>

Spent the afternoon socializing with the ORAS folks and attended several other presentations. Then gave my new 'Venus Transit Historical Retrospective' talk, which generated good follow-up questions and conversations. After dinner the door prize drawing was held, but I didn't have any luck. At that point, there were probably around 70 in attendance, but a fair number left as soon as the drawing was over.

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-05.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-06.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-07.jpg>

Afterwards, I walked around and took a few pictures:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-08.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-09.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-10.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-11.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-12.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-13.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/conventions/AB2013-14.jpg>

The skies were sunny all afternoon, but late in the day clouds began rolling in, and there was a general overcast by sunset. With the weather radio and clearskyclock promising clear weather coming, I uncovered the telescope, powered up, and waited. For the next 4 hours it was nothing but an occasional small hazy sucker hole. I managed to grab an image or two of the globular cluster M2 and edge-on galaxy NGC891, but that was about it. Spent most of the evening visiting with the other disgruntled attendees. Finally gave up at 2:00am and went to bed.

Sunday 08/11/2013:

Woke to the noise of everyone packing up.

The skies were still overcast,,, so much for the clear weather predictions!

After another great ORAS breakfast and a few hours of breaking down the telescope and campsite, I headed back to Pittsburgh and arrived home in the early afternoon.

AstroBlast 2013 was somewhat of an observing bust, but still it was fun!

Friday evening I was able to video-capture about a dozen new deep-sky objects and I got to use my new C-Gem mount, and had a good time visiting with the ORAS members.

Next trip will be for the Black Forest Star Party in September!

Larry McHenry

Astronomical Webportal: <http://home.comcast.net/~ismch/>