

AstroBlast - October, 2015

With the Oil Region Astronomical Society's move to a new location this year, ORAS decided to delay AstroBlast to October so that they could have some of the new observatory infrastructure in place. <http://www.oras.org/astroblast.html>

I had hoped to go up either that Thursday or Friday of the event, but unfortunately last minute work obligations got in the way, so I had to settle for only one day.

Saturday 10/17/2015:

Having preloaded the car and camper earlier in the week, all I needed to do was grab a few small items, such as my laptop, and I was on the road by 10:00am for the trip north. The weather forecast for the day was dismal, calling for a high in the low 40's and possible snow showers. The drive started out cloudy, but along I-79 the sky cleared off to nice sunshine. I started thinking that perhaps the forecasts were going to be way off and I would get some observing in. But once I made the turn to the east along I-80, the Sun disappeared into lowering clouds, and by the time I hit the exit at Emlenton, there were snow showers! Looked like the forecast was going to be accurate after all, meaning no observing later that night.

The new observatory site is quite easy to find, located off of Rt322, about half-way between Franklin and Clarion. Upon arriving around noon, I headed over to the registration tent to sign in with Phil T and Marianne H who were manning the tent.



I was looking forward to seeing the progress on the Maintenance building from when I was last up to the observatory site helping out a few weeks back. The metal roof was now on, along with insulation and most of the siding. Also, the interior concrete floor had been poured, and the outside doors were ready to be installed next week.



Inside, huddling against the cold was ORAS members Tim S, John and Katie O, and Kisi Astronomer Bob K.



Also, Mike A. was there, having placed his tent inside to keep it out of the weather.



After having a cup of hot coffee and visiting with everyone, including a number of additional ORAS members who arrived, Bob K and I walked up toward the unfinished Observatory building. Here are a couple of pictures looking north from the parking area of the Maintenance Building and along the road. You can see along the left side of the road the ditch that was dug for both the electrical conduit and field drainage lined with large granite boulders. Access to the western section of the field is behind the Observatory building. The lone 'campers' up by the Observatory was Steve and Deb in their Tab camper. I decided to camp down by the Maintenance building, but other than turning on the propane heat, I didn't bother to set anything else up or get the telescope out of the car.



The Observatory walls were partly up, along with the roll-off roof wheel tracks.
Here are a few exterior pics:



Inside, the concrete floor was done, along with the conduit for the two telescopes, a 30" Reflector for visual work, and a 14" SCT for imaging. A warm-up room will be in the northern section of the building.



While there, John L from the Kiski club also joined us. Here's John and Bob looking south from inside the observatory. You can see the Maintenance building on the right.



Bob and John both headed home after an hour or so. Several times during the afternoon snow squalls moved thru, and toward evening we had one that left a $\frac{1}{4}$ " of the wet stuff on the cars and my camper:



During the afternoon, while we sat inside the Maintenance building around a couple of heaters, I led one of the 'informal talks' on night-sky mythology. John O then started a discussion about how different amateur astronomy was from the late 60 's and how much the equipment being used had changed over the last 50 years. And Dave J bounced around several other astronomical topics too. Lots of good discussion!!



By then the door prizes were out and the pizza had arrived. At that point there were probably a good 20 some amateurs present, both ORAS members and guests. After the pizza had been devoured, it was time for the prize drawings. The club had a nice selection, with Marianne H, Miranda H, and Katie O running the event. I ended up winning a nice binocular guide from Orion Telescopes.



By the time we finished the drawings, the Sun was down, and it was getting dark under the grey snowy sky. Most of the folks headed home, but a number stayed to hear Phil T lead a discussion on constellation star-lore. Phil covered a number of stories that I had skipped over earlier in the day, along with interesting tidbits regarding star names and constellations that were no longer there. Fun stuff!

By 9:00pm, with just a handful of us left who were staying overnight, I decided to head inside my camper for the evening and warmed up with a little reading. In bed and asleep by 11:00pm.

Sunday 10/18/2015:

Woke to a cloudy cold morning, with the outside temp hovering at the freezing mark.

Glad I didn't unhook the camper or have any outdoor items to pack.

After a quick indoor breakfast, I stowed away a few interior items and headed outside to say my goodbyes and started the drive home under snowflakes.

Despite the cold and snowy weather and only being able to attend one day, it was still a good trip! I enjoyed visiting with my ORAS friends, and the pleasant surprise of several Kiski Astronomers dropping by. The 'informal' talks were a lot of fun!

The new ORAS observatory site is starting to take shape, and I look forward to being able to observe from the location next year and to future AstroBlasts under dark skies.

Larry McHenry

Astronomical Webportal: <http://www.stellar-journeys.org/>