Cherry Springs Star Party - June, 2024

With the Memorial Day holiday get-togethers complete, it was time to plan my trip to Cherry Springs for the 20th anniversary Cherry Springs Star Party.
This would be my 16th year (since 2007 minus the Covid year) and 41st trip to Cherry Springs! Watching the weather forecast begin to come into focus, the week of the starparty wasn't looking very promising, but the weekend beforehand, particularly Thursday and Friday evenings looked very good. So on Wednesday, 5/29, I finished loading the camper and car with my astro/camping gear and planned to leave the next morning.

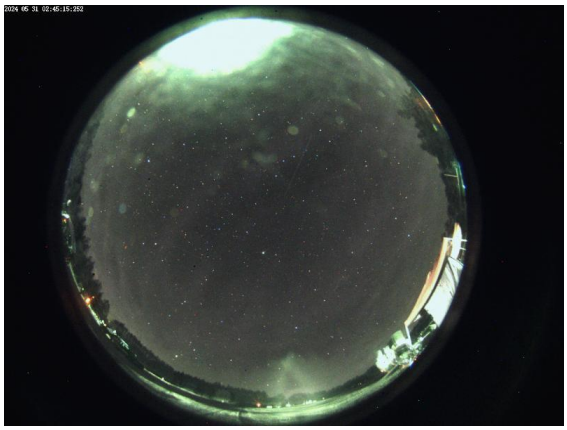
Thursday 05/30/2024:

Late start leaving Pittsburgh, 9:30am. Pleasant drive under clear blue skies. Stopped in St Mary's for lunch, and then took the highway to Emporium / Austin. Eventually came out on Rt6 in Sweden Valley. Had to make a short side-trip to Coudersport and the nearest carwash as my GPS earlier took me down an old dirt road shortcut and the camper was covered in mud! After cleaning off the camper, I headed back eastward on Rt6 and then took Rt44 to the park.
Upon arriving, I found both Dean S and Dean M (his 1st trip to CS), already on the field, and Gary S pulled in while I was registering.

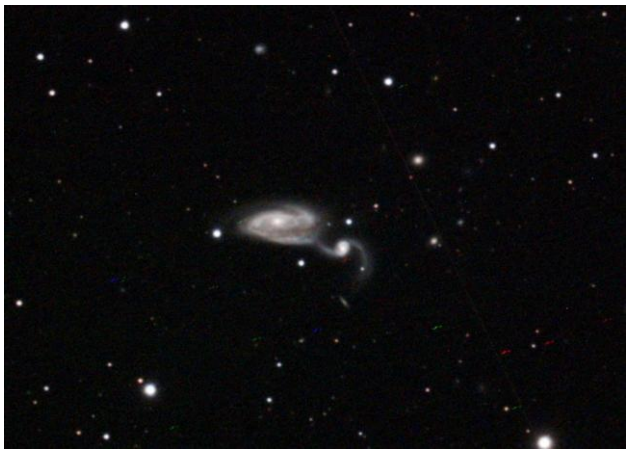
It always feels good to be back at Cherry Springs! The observing field grass had been recently mowed and looked great. I pulled into my usual 'spot' on "Orion Ave", and spent the next hour setting up camp. I then focused on assembling my EAA telescope setup: an 8" Celestron SCT optical tube @ f6.3 with a ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera, ZWO filter wheel & focuser, on an Atlas EQ GEM mount, along with a piggybacked Sky-Watcher EVO 50mm refractor with a ASI294MC camera (uncooled model),and a 60mm Antaries refractor guidescope with an ASI120MC camera. Attached to the bottom rail of the main optical tube was my ASI290MC camera with a small Canon 5.5-50mm CCTV lens as a super-widefield finder. And I also setup the Allsky cam, a ZWO ASI224MC & fisheye lens in a DIY dome.

In addition to my group, there were a number of other amateurs already in the field, growing eventually to about 30 by sunset, including Brian from NJ who arrived late afternoon and setup in his usual spot. Also the neighbors across from me in our section included Michael (imager) and Carl (visual) from Connecticut.

At dust was able to polar align (with a little help from my buddy Dean S), and after spending way too much time fighting technical gremlins, finally got GOTO and guiding to function around 11:30pm. While we were all busy getting our scopes running, we forgot to close the gate and several cars snuck in with their lights on.



Started the evening off with an EAA 'warm-up' observation of globular cluster M3 in Canes Venatici. Then went for a deep dive on NGC5394/5395 'Heron Galaxy' in Coma Berenices.

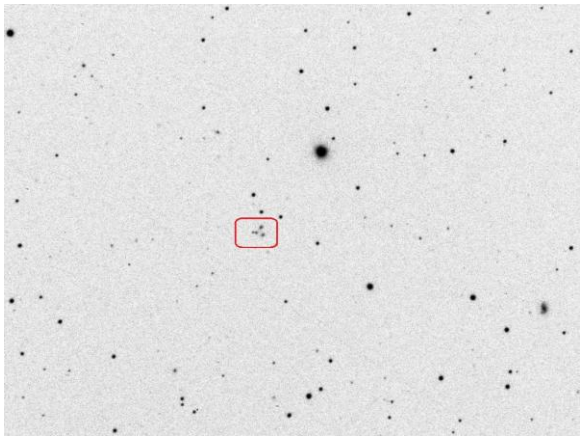


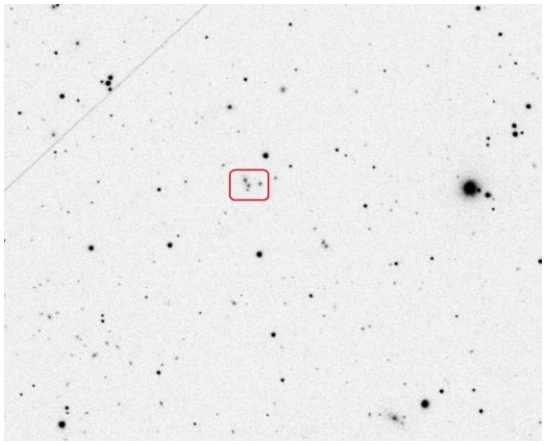
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, for M3 = 15 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 5 minutes, and for the Heron = 5 minute subs livestacked for 1 hour).

Taking a break around 1am, I walked around and visited with the group. Everyone had their imaging kits up and running, including Gary S who was busy narrowband imaging M101.

A number of nice meteors zipped across the sky throughout the night.

Back at camp, I then turned to hunting faint Palomar Galaxy Clusters PGC1212+2235 in Coma Berenices and PGC1525+2956 in Corona Borealis. EAA observing Palomar Clusters are not everyone's "cup of tea". They are very tiny and faint, right at the limit of my 8" SCT. Perhaps the challenge of being able to even see them at all is why I like viewing these.

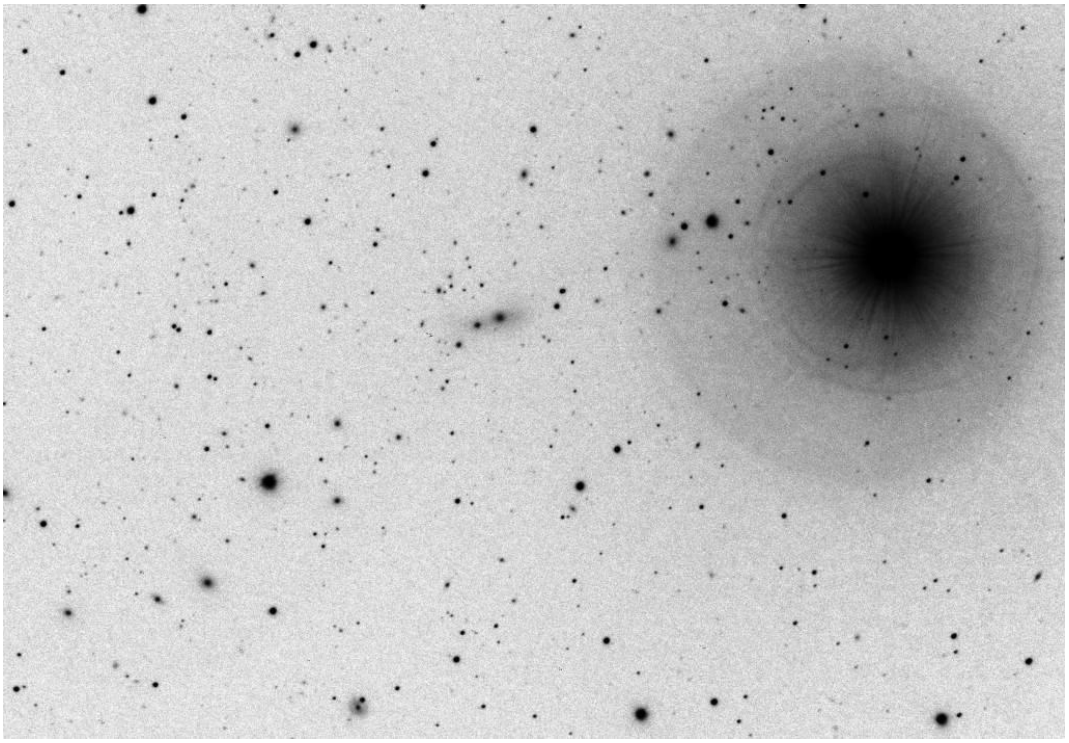




(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 15 minutes)

To show how small and faint these Palomar galaxy clusters are, here's the uncropped full-frame of PGC1212+2235. Can you find the cluster? (hint: look for the bright star)

During the galaxy cluster hunt, Dean M dropped in to visit.
I then went Abell Galaxy Cluster hunting in Corona Borealis, observing Abell2079.
It was nice to chase a little larger object! LOL. This one was a difficult observation due to a nearby bright star.



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes)

I had barely finished Abell2079 when Moonrise cleared the trees at 2:51am.

Amazing how bright the Last-Quarter Moon can be. Decided this was a good time to wrap up a long day, powered off the equipment and headed to bed.

Here's a Time-lapse of moonrise from my AllSky camera:
https://youtu.be/jikx0ndw2OA?si=3tqw8QO42qszmsns

Friday 05/31/2024:

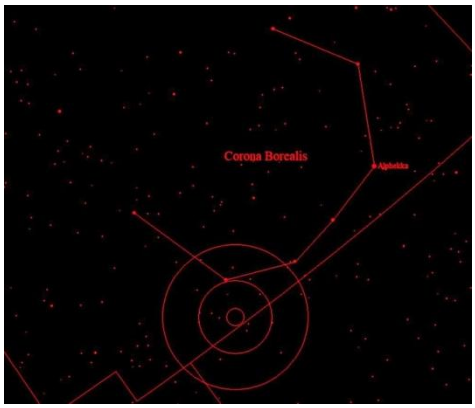
Slept in till 9am. After breakfast, visited with the Dean's, and Gary, and Brian. Helped Dean M balance his scope. Dean was adding a new refractor piggybacked on his 12" Meade and GEM. Around 2:30pm, Ed K arrived and setup his portable observatory in his usual spot on the end of Orion Ave, next to Dean M.

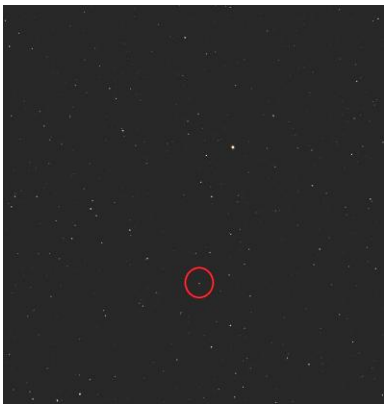
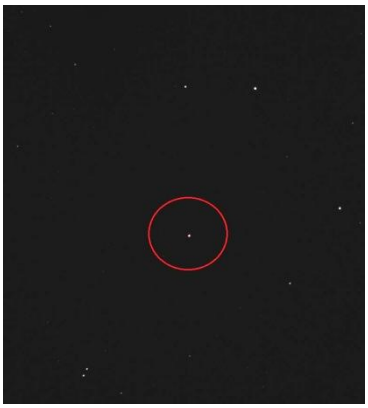
Then Michelle and Gordon M from Toronto Canada arrived and setup their tents next to me.

Headed indoor for a late afternoon nap. Once I was back vertical, prepared dinner and reviewed my observing plan for the night. I then assembled the blackout tent and uncovered the telescope and started up the AllSky camera.
At dusk, I walked across the road and checked out the Park ranger program. There were probably about 75 cars parked in the lot and people spread out on the old airfield and in the open-air planetarium listening to the program. 'Out of the Box' food vendor was setup in the parking lot for the public program. They stayed all week and moved over to the observing field on Thursday.

Back at camp in the lingering twilight, I began my observing run, starting with the stars T Corona Borealis and Wolf359 in Leo. (recent Sky&Tel articles serving as inspiration).

First up was the 10th magnitude eruptive variable star T Coronae Borealis, which is expected to blow anytime between now and September and become as bright as "Northern Crown's" alpha star – 2nd +mag Alphekka. Here's a finder chart showing the location of the variable T Coronae: (from ECU planetarium program), and images using the EVO50mm refractor and the 8" SCT:



(both the EVO50mm & 8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, single 15 second sub, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided)

Unfortunately, my scope's GOTO was askew, so while it had no problem positioning me on T-Corona, the slew to Wolf359 in Leo was slightly off, placing the star just outside the FOV. I didn't realize the error until after several days. Wolf359 will now have to wait till next spring.

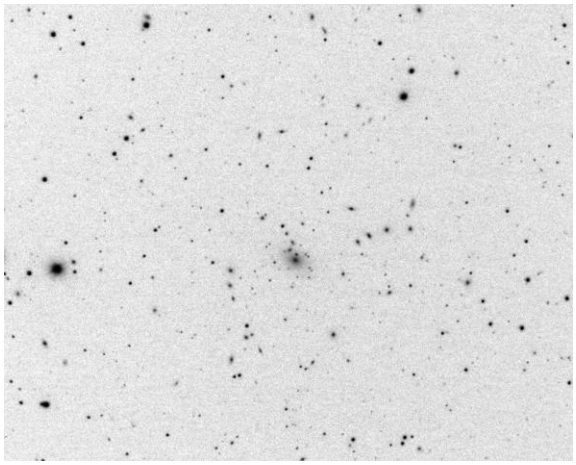
Then at full dark, I slewed the telescope over to the "Antenna Galaxy" – NGC4088/4089 in Corvus. I had planned on doing a deep EAA dive into the interacting pair of galaxies, but due to their low elevation this time of year, I decided to limit the observation. Still, it was interesting to zoom-in and view the bright internal knots in the galaxies cores, while going full-frame and stretching the livestack histogram to view the "antennae" extensions to either side of the pair. Wish I could have spent more time with this object. Being able to make on-the-fly changes in near real-time is the observational power of doing EAA!

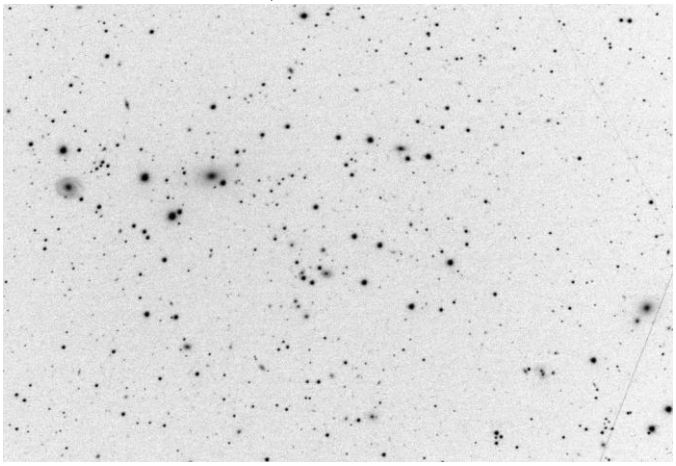

(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 15 minutes)

Went for a walk and visited with the group, handing out KitKat snacks.
Dean S had his DSLR camera out and was making a Milky-Way time-lapse. Gary S was doing narrowband imaging of M27 – "Dumbbell Nebula' in Vulpecula.

Back at camp I turned to my Abell Galaxy Cluster project and observed Abell851 in Ursa Major (accidently followed it into the trees, lol), then Abell2124 & Abell2162 higher up in Corona Borealis, and later Abell2147 in Hercules.

Here are the best two EAA observations: Abell2124 & Abell2162, both in Corona Borealis:





(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes)

At 3am I headed out from under the blackout canopy to join Gordon and Brian in watching the moonrise thru the eastern tree line. We sat out till near 5am before heading indoors.

Saturday 06/01/2024:

Slept in till 10am, woken by the warm camper. It was a sunny, hazy day. Forecast didn't look good for tonight. Dean M was packed and headed for home before I was even out of the bed. Over the next several hours he was joined by most of the other folks who had stayed overnight on the observing field, including Brian who had gotten his fill of Virgo Galaxies over the last two nights. By 1pm, there were maybe a dozen of us left.

During the afternoon a few additional amateurs trickled in, including Tracy N who setup across from Michelle and Gordon. I spent the afternoon reading or visiting with everyone.

At 5pm, we all gathered over at Gary's for snacks. I headed back to my camper at 7pm to make dinner and phone home. Afterwards I became optimistic on the weather and uncovered the telescope and prepped the blackout tent.

With the slowly thickening skies, I was forced to abandon hunting faint galaxies and had to stick with bright Messier objects. I was able to EAA observe bright globular clusters M5 in Serpens and M13 in Hercules, along with the "Ring Nebula" - M57 in Lyra, and shared the EAA views with Michelle and Gordon.





(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, For both M5 & M13: 15 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 5 minutes. M57 was a 30 second sub livestacked for 2.5 minutes)

Seeing the skies were becoming hopeless, I closed up the equipment and headed indoors, early to bed.

Sunday 06/02/2024:

Woke at 9am to a surprisingly partly sunny sky. But as the day progressed it became increasingly cloudy. Several campers across from our section packed and headed home. After breakfast, I went for a hike along the park trail.



Back at camp, I sat outside and read, then made lunch. Headed down to Lyman Run park for the showers. Once back at camp, I visited with Michelle and Gordon, then headed inside my camper for a nap. During the day, about 6 or 10 new campers pulled in and setup down in the southern section of the field.

At 6pm, we all gathered under Gordon's canopy for refreshments and dogs on the Barbie. An enjoyable group dinner! (Michelle, Gordon, Ed, Tracy, Dean and Gary S)

We then sat around in the dusk and swapped stories and listened to the light drizzle falling on the canopy. Gordon led a discussion on the new Pegasus 'SmartEye' eyepiece/camera that's caught his interest. I warned him that once he went EAA, he'd never go back to regular eyepieces,, ☺
At 10pm, with the damp air becoming chilly, several of us headed back to our campers. I got out my laptop and worked on the few images that I had from the other night. Then read for awhile before heading to bed at midnight.

Monday 06/03/2024:
Slept in till around 7:30am, looked out the window down at a dreary morning, then rolled back in bed till 9am, LOL! After breakfast, I led a hike around the park trail with Gordon, Gary and Ed. A nice 1.5 mile walk thru the trees surrounding the park.

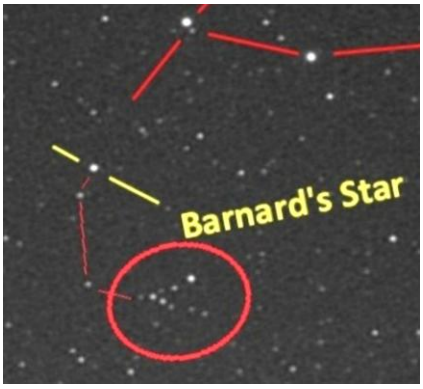
Back at camp I set my wet shoes out to dry in the now partly sunny sky. The forecast for tonight was shaping up to be an all-nighter. I sat outside and read for awhile, then made lunch. Visited with our group for a bit, then headed inside for a long afternoon nap! After dinner, I assembled the blackout tent. At sunset I went for a walk around the field and took a few pics! Ran into several long time attendees: Doug H setting up his big dob, Mike P from Niagara at his camper, and Adam T and his Tab camper and imaging scopes.

At dusk, we had a few stay clouds that hindered observing, but by midnight the sky had cleared off nicely. I had to work thru a few tech gremlins that dropped in to visit, but finally got the equipment cooking. It was a warm evening, outdoor air temp only got down to 57, while inside the blackout tent it stayed 75. Moderate dew on the scope tonight.

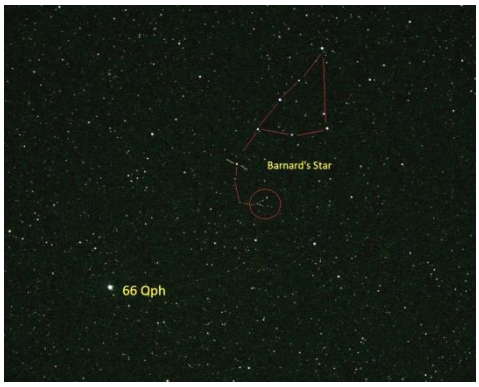
My first observation of the night was M99 in Coma Berenices. Good detail in the face-on galaxies spiral arms, plenty of HII knots and dark lanes were visible.

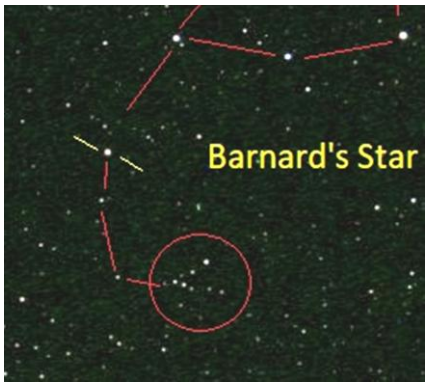
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes)

I then went star hunting in Ophiuchus for "Barnard's Star", which has a high proper motion across the sky. I had last observed this star ten years ago and wanted to make a re-observation in order to see any movement. Here's both the 2014 (using an 80mm f3 refractor & AVA StellaCam-3 analog video-camera) and new observations using the EVO50mm f4.2 Refractor and ZWO camera:



(2014)



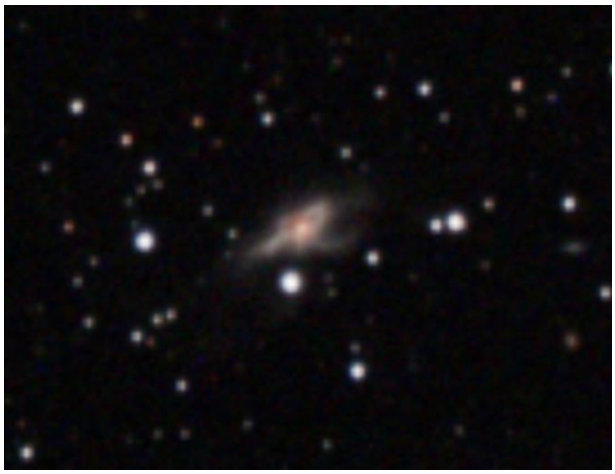


(2024 – wide & cropped)

After orienting the two images as close as I could get, there's a definite displacement showing movement in the star location between the old left-hand image and the new right-hand image. Looking forward to repeating this observation in 2034!

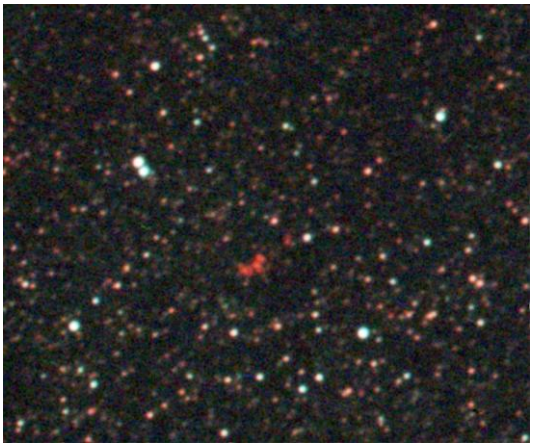
(EVO50mm f4.2 refractor on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC camera with L-Pro filter, a single 8 second sub, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied)

I then moved on to the 'Starfish Galaxy', NGC6240, also in Ophiuchus. This small +12th mag object is a remnant of three galaxies that have merged into a single object that contains two active galactic nuclei, each with supermassive black holes.
An interesting cosmological object!

(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 24 minutes)

With the scope still pointing towards Ophiuchus, I decided to drop-in on Kepler's Supernova Remnant – SN1604. This tiny butterfly-shaped red knot of nebulosity is the last supernova that has occurred within the Milky-Way galaxy, and was naked-eye observed by Kepler 420 years ago in 1604.

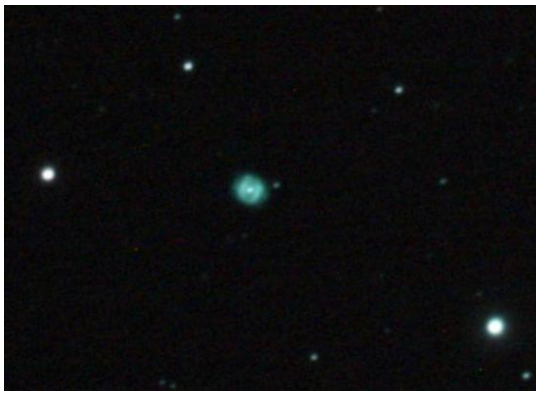



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 300 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 35 minutes)

Took a break and visited with Gary, Dean, and Tracy. Ed had gone to bed but his scope worked on narrowband imaging of M20 – 'Triffid Nebula'. Tracy was imaging M64 – the 'Black Eye Galaxy', and then later the Iris Nebula and M101. Dean S was imaging Comet C/2023 A3 'Tsuchinshan-Atlas in Virgo, along with globular M3 in Canes Venatici, and later he worked on a mosaic of the Veil Nebula in Cygnus.
Gary was gathering data on both M101 and M27.

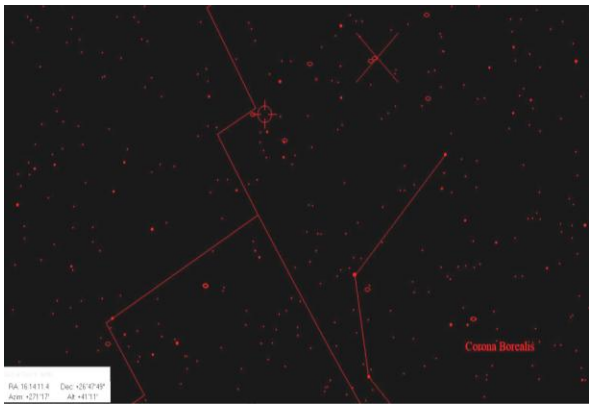
I then dropped-in on the visual folks and looked thru Michelle's 16' dobsonian telescope at galaxy NGC4565 in Coma Berenices. The spindle shaped galaxy with its dark bi-secting lane filled the view, stretching to either side of the eyepiece.

Back at camp, I then worked on my 'Observers Challenge' 2024 object list, EAA observing elliptical galaxy pair of NGC6702 & NGC6703 in Lyra, and then the tiny blue Planetary Nebula NGC6058 in Hercules. Here are the observations:



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, the two NGC galaxies are 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes. The planetary nebula is also 180 second subs, but only livestacked for 18 minutes)

By now the night was very old, and with the start of astronomical twilight, I got in one last observation of asteroid 2 Pallas. The 3rd largest asteroid (and the 2nd ever discovered, in 1802), reached opposition with the Sun on May 19th, shining at +2.8 mag and had recently crossed into Corona Borealis. Using the starchart from the May Sky&Tel, P50, I was able to identify the starfield locate the asteroid. Here's the observation:



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 15 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 105 seconds)

Stayed up till 5am to see the early morning glow of dawn in the northeast.

Here's a Time-lapse of the night: https://youtu.be/rZk2WWSHfEQ?si=oPMttwOJl7fbFsIn

Tuesday 06/04/2024:

Slept in till 10am. Spent the day sitting around camp and visiting with the group. Mike from Niagara stopped by later in the afternoon to say hello. About a dozen new amateur astronomers arrived on the field including Eric L, and Roxanne K.

A tent rental company arrived and assembled the large vendor's tent and smaller tents for registration and food vendor. The day started off clear, but slowly grew overcast with the weather forecast not showing much hope for the evening.

Around 6pm, we held a group dinner at Ed's campsite. (Michelle, Gordon, Dean S, Gary, Ed, Tracy). Smoked Brats on the grill, followed by Snickers & Twix ice cream bars!

We then sat around at dusk discussing all things astronomical (and the differences between what food products you can find at American vs Canadian grocery stores – they don't have Velveeta cheese!) and watched a few stars poke thru the cloudy haze.

There was a bright bolide around 9:30pm to the south east. The sky actually slowly improved enough that some of the other amateurs in the field uncovered their scopes to observe thru the haze, but I didn't bother to setup my blackout tent. Having just pulled an all-nighter, I decided to call it an early night and headed indoors at 11pm to bed.

Wednesday 06/05/2024:

Woke at 8am to a cloudy morning. Rain was on the way for later that afternoon. In talking with several of the other attendees, it partly cleared after midnight giving those still awake several hours of observing.

Gary S and Dean S were up packing to head home. Except for possible clearing on Thursday evening, the rest of the starpary weather forecast looks dismal, so they decided with three good nights of imaging already under their belts that they've had enough camping. Being one of this year's presenter's, I was staying thru Saturday. Ed K also decided to stay thru at least Friday, along with Michelle and Gordon, and Tracy.

Went for a late morning hike along the park trail. Then stopped oby and visited with Eric L and Niagara Mike where they were setup near the far western side of the observing field. I then headed back to camp for lunch. Several vendors were already setup inside the vendor tent, so I stopped in and bought a book.

Mike M from Pgh arrived and setup camp in the section across from me. He was joined later in the week by several other buddies from Pgh.

Later, Chris T from ORAS setup in the section to my south. Getting back from Lyman Run showers, I joined everyone sitting out under Gordon's canopy where we talked about traveling out west to the big Star parties. Gordon and Michelle are planning on going to Okie-Tex in October and invited me to join them, (though talk of the tarantula spider migration occurring during the starparty put me off a bit). But unfortunately, I am already booked for ORAS Astroblast starparty. Maybe next year. Talked with Tracy about getting a solar generator for power, as that would be something I'd need before I could travel out west.

During the afternoon, more amateurs pulled in, including Mike from Ontario and his white Tab Teardrop clamshell camper, and the observing field was beginning to look a little like a starpary. Probably about 125 people on the field. Still, the poor weather must be holding down crowd size as the field should be a lot more full this close to the start of the starpary.

Around 4pm, light showers began going over the field, but fortunately, no heavy showers or winds. Headed indoors to practice my presentation, then fixed dinner. Went back outside and joined Ed, Tracy, Mike M, Michelle and Gordon for snacks under Gordon's canopy. Spent the next several hours there talking and watching the rainy sky slowly getting dark.

At 11pm, everyone called it quits and headed indoors. I stayed up for awhile and worked on my tine-lapse from Monday night.

Thursday 06/06/2024:

The rain continued overnight and into the morning, so I slept in till near 9am.
Got up just in time to watch the latest SpaceX Starship launch, pretty Cool!
After breakfast the rain, cool temps and breeze kept me indoors where I read.

Around 11:30am the sun came out and began drying up the field. Unfortunately that was for naught as around 1pm, a heavy shower went over. Hopefully this will be the last one for the day. Eventually the Sun was back out warming the field.

Headed down to the registration tent to sign in. Then had a quick bite of lunch.
More amateur astronomers arrived onsite. The forecast had begun to improve for the night.

Spent the afternoon visiting with our group, and then went for a late afternoon walk around the field to check out the scopes that were uncovered.

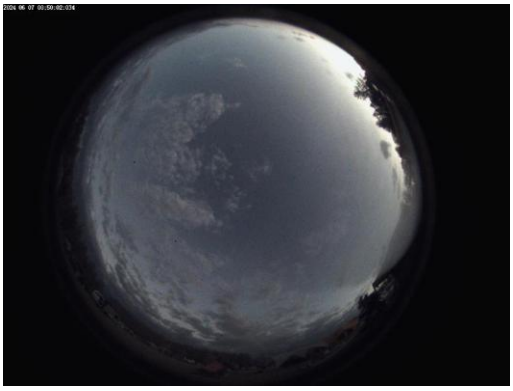
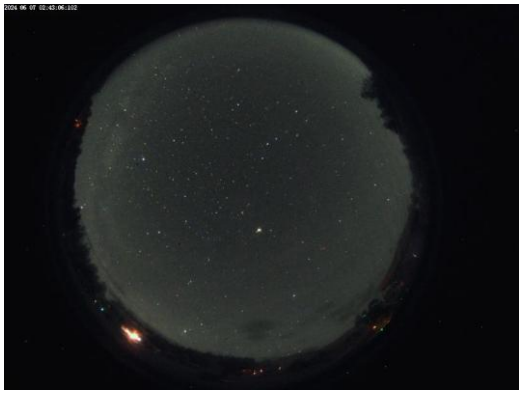






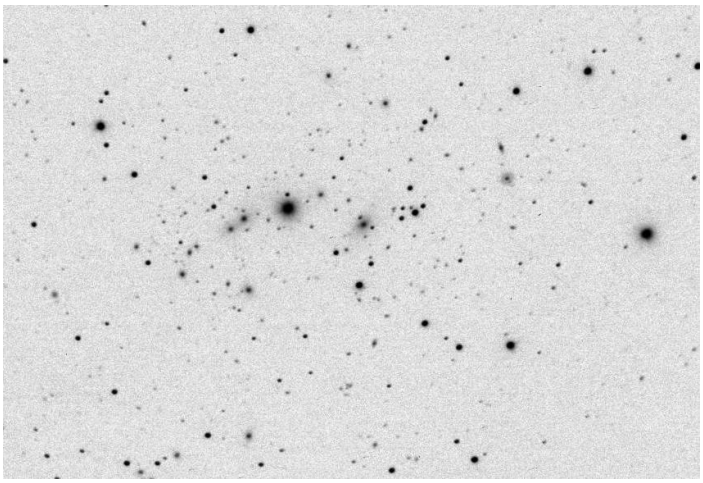


After dinner, I headed indoors for a short nap. While inside, another round of showers when over the field soaking the ground. Once back up, and with the rain finally over, I uncovered the telescope and setup the blackout canopy. Cranked-up the dew heater as we were in store for a damp night.

Multiple Tech issues slowed down my observations. Anything that could go wrong,,, did. Focuser, main camera, guide camera, AllSky camera, laptop,,, No useful observations. Around midnight, visited with Michelle & Gordon for a view of M104 thru Michelle's 16" dob and a view of a small globular cluster and planetary nebula (forget which ones) thru Gordon's 18" dob. Both were very nice visual views. Ed was imaging Comet C/2023 A3 'Tsuchinshan-Atlas in Virgo. Tracy was gathering more data on the Iris.

Was finally able to overcome all the tech issues and was able to begin EAA observing. I started off with Abell1904 - galaxy cluster in Bootes. Here's the observation:



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes)

I then slewed the telescope over to Serpens for Galaxy NGC6118, part of my "Observers Challenge" list. NGC6118 is noted as being one of the hardest Herschel Objects for visual observers, but with EAA it was easy-peazy, displaying nice spiral arms.

(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 12 minutes)

Around 2:30am, clouds began moving in from the SW, and soon closed down the sky.

After consulting the weather satellite, I decided to shut down for the night.
In bed by 3:15am

Friday 06/07/2024:

Slept in till about 10am. It was a cool, partly cloudy morning with an occasional breeze. Weather radar showed storms approaching a couple hours away.
Michelle, Gordon, and Tracy were busily packing to head home, along with a number of others on the field. The forecast for tonight shows possibly of clear sky for a few hours so I decided to leave the telescope setup for another day.

Both Michelle and Gordon pulled out for their drive back to the great north at 10:45am. Tracy was on the road about 20 minutes later. Ed planned to put in a work day at the camper then make a decision late afternoon as to whether to stay or leave.
I'd guesstimate that there were still 150 to 200 attendees staying the day.

About a quarter after 12pm, a heavy downpour hit the park, drenching the observing field. Kept up for a good 15 minutes. Headed over to the park pavilion at 1pm to hear the opening remarks and then the first presentation of the day by Nico Carver on basic astrophotography.

A good talk, but the pavilion was like a freezer. Sat beside Mike M from the Rochester club and compared notes on April's total eclipse. While there, the wind really picked up with strong gusts that sent a few small tents on the observing field flying.

I was up next with my talk on Edwin Hubble - the Surveyor of the Universe. Talk went well, nice little crowd and several good questions and comments.
After a short break, I then sat in on the last speaker of the day, Steven Bellavia of Brookhaven Nation Laboratory on the Vera Rubin Observatory. Another interesting speaker.

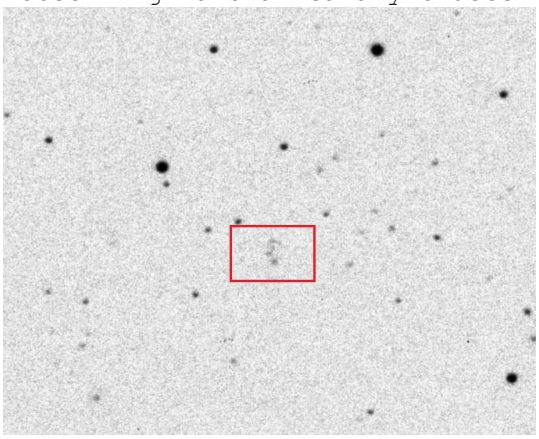
During that presentation, a shower went over and the wind blew a fine mist thru the pavilion. Ugh!

Afterwards, I walked over to find Ed packing up his mobile observatory to head home. Before he left we headed over for dinner from the 'Out of the Box' food vendor and joined several other attendees and staff inside the food tent. We ended up being stuck there for awhile as a strong downpour soaked the field. But finally it stopped raining and Ed was able to finish hooking up his camper and got on the road home.

I headed back to my camper and sat inside for an hour reading and watching an occasional shower go over. Finally, the sun came out and began to dry things off. I headed outdoors at 8pm to begin setting up and discovered that the power was out on the observing field for the past hour. Hopefully it will be back on soon, so I went ahead and setup the blackout tent and prepped the telescope and my notes. By 10pm, the Power was still out! The outdoor temp was down to 55, so I switched the camper over to propane heat.
Got out my jump start battery and planned to use that for the scope and laptop, along with using the AllSky battery to power the scope dew heaters. With a little luck, I should get a few hours of observing out of this. But fortunately, it was all un-needed as the electrical power on the observing field came back on around 10:15pm. Yay!!!

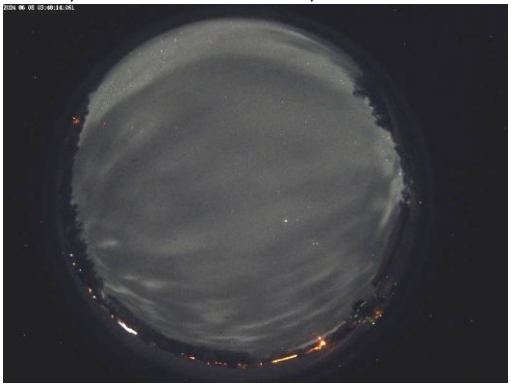
At Dusk, the skies started off looking pretty good, with just an occasional cloud going overhead to dodge.

I started off with observing Palomar Galaxy Cluster PGC1352+1234 in Bootes.



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat calibration frames pre-applied, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes)

But then Cherry Springs started playing with us, with clouds forming right over our heads on the observing field. Spent a few minutes attempting to chase sucker holes, but as it was fruitless, I soon stopped that effort. This continued until finally, around 12:30am, the sky completely clouded over and closed down for good. I stuck it out for another half hour, but at 1:30am, I covered up and headed to bed.

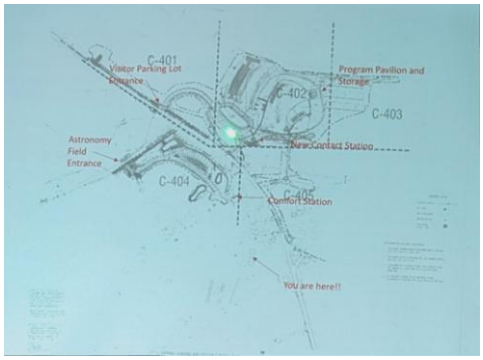


Saturday 06/08/2024:

Woken early (7:30am) by the sound of the porta potties being cleaned. Errrrrr!
It was a partly cloudy morning, temps in the mid 50's, and breezy. The forecast for the evening showed possible clearing, but I decided to go ahead and pack up the two easy up canopies and outdoor chairs.

At 11am, I walked down to the swap meet and bought another book. Then headed down to Lyman for a shower. Once back at camp, I checked the weather forecast again. I made lunch and after checking the weather once more, made the final decision to pack away the telescope and hitch the camper. A lot of attendees packed up and headed out, but I planned to stay the night and if it should clear, get out the binocs.

Around 3pm, I headed over to the pavilion to make my raffle ticket selections and to hear the park report. Park manager Scott Morgan:
Bids done, project has started. Start digging on June 10th. Other than creating a new entrance to the astronomy field, most of the work will be on the public side. Astronomy field campers will have to stop at the new ranger contact station on the public side to register for the astro field. Updates will be posted on the CS web site. Project expected to be done by spring 2025.



Scott was then followed by a report from the CS Dark Sky Fund given by Eric L. Once the park finishes its project work next year, the fund will help with additional electrical power installation. At 5:15pm, it was time for the raffle. Maybe about 150 attendees still present. Unfortunately I did not win anything.

Afterwards I headed over to the food vendor for dinner, while most folks headed for home. Back at camp, I packed a few inside items then had dessert. Visited with Mike from Ontario for awhile then went for a walk to take a few last pics and visit the few folks still there that I knew, including Chris T from the ORAS club, Clyde from Ohio with his Tab Teardrop, Mike from Niagara, and Roxanne K.

Maybe about 50 amateurs left on the field at that point. I then headed back to camp and went indoors to read. After Sunset I stepped back outside at 9pm to check the sky. The expected cloud front was making an early appearance from the northwest and the sky was beginning to cloud over. I was able to get in a quick naked-eye view of the waxing Crescent Moon hovering above the trees in a clear gap before it was covered. My last observation from Cherry Springs.

Sunday 06/09/2024:

Up early to a rainy morning. Woken at 6:30am by a hard rain hitting the camper roof, but rolled over and slept another hour. After a quick breakfast, I pulled my electric cord, and by 8:30am was on the way home to Pgh. After a damp drive along Rt555 to Benezette, the clouds lifted and the Sun began to shine. Arrived home right before 1pm.

So this brings to a close the 2024 Cherry Springs Star Party. Out of ten nights at the park, I was able to observe on six of those. (With three very good nights). Not bad odds. Still, this year seemed to have a different feel about it. It was noticeably less crowded with plenty of unusually open green space in my section. Not sure if it was due to the changing demographics of the attendance as many old timers either can no longer attend or were shut out of getting tickets this year, or whether it was due to the lack of vendors and only a few participants at the swap meet, or due to the weather scaring off attendees. (Maybe all of the above?). Can't put my finger on it, just didn't seem like it use to be. The Park is finally kicking off its long planned changes and that will definitely impact the astronomy field. Times are a changing.

As mentioned before, this is my **16th year** of doing astronomy at Cherry Springs since 2007. (minus the year of staying home due to the Covid Pandemic)
A total of **41 trips** for **248 nights** in the park! (over 8 months).
Almost all of them spent living in the 'Orion Ave' section of the observing field.

I look forward to spending even more future nights at what has been called the ***"Astronomer's Paradise"*** – Cherry Springs State Park!

Larry McHenry
Astronomical Webportal: http://www.stellar-journeys.org/