ORAS – AstroBlast: October, 2026

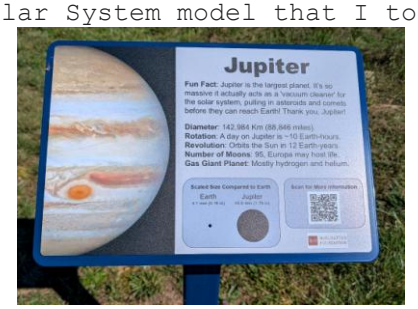
The first weekend of October 2026 brought beautiful, sunny days and clear skies at night! It was time to pack for my 8th astro-camping trip of the year, one where I hoped to ditch the 'cloudy-sky' curse that has been dogging me all year. I was heading northwards in Western Pennsylvania to join my home club members, the Oil Region Astronomical Society (ORAS), and other regional amateur astronomers for the 2026 AstroBlast convention! This year, ORAS will also be hosting the 2026 IAU International Pro-Am Workshop at the observatory and nearby Camp Coffman during the first half of AstroBlast, bringing in professional and amateur astronomers from around the world, some of whom would be participating in the starparty. Should be a very interesting event!

Saturday 10/03/2026:

Left my home in the South Hills of Pittsburgh at 10:35am. It was a crisp, clear morning, with bright sunlight and just a few scattered clouds. A touch of Fall was in the air and the trees had begun to change color. After getting thru a little construction in downtown Pittsburgh, the drive northwards was smooth sailing, except for the 'Orange Cone' flowers I encountered near the I79 & I80 intersection, slowing traffic to a stop.

I arrived at the ORAS Observatory at 1:20pm. Members Tim S and Dean S were there working on the Solar System model. Susan P was at the Jones building organizing items.
Here are a few photos of the Solar System model that I took later.







Denny H was up in the east observing field deciding where to setup. After greeting everyone, I headed up to the field by Denny and setup camp beside him.









Dean S had his camper in the west field and nearby was Dean M, who was away for the afternoon. Later Susan setup a tent to the south of Dean S.
(our astro-camping buddy Ed K was away at the Okie-Tex starparty, along with Chris P).

Spent the next several hours getting my camp in order and assembling my astro-equipment: 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 EVO50mm refractor with a ASI294MC camera, and a 60mm Antaries refractor guidescope with an ASI120MC camera. Also my AllSky cam, a ZWO ASI224MC camera & fisheye lens in a DIY dome attached to a tripod. And my SeeStar S30-Pro smart telescope on an equatorial wedge & field tripod.



In-between setting up the scopes, I took a mid-afternoon break and visited with Denny. Finally got everything ready, just in time for snacks at 5:30pm over at Dean S's camp, joined by Denny and Susan. Once the Sun went behind the western tree line, there was a chill in the air, so Denny and I headed back to our camps to fix dinner and change into heavier clothes, while Susan, who wasn’t staying, headed home.



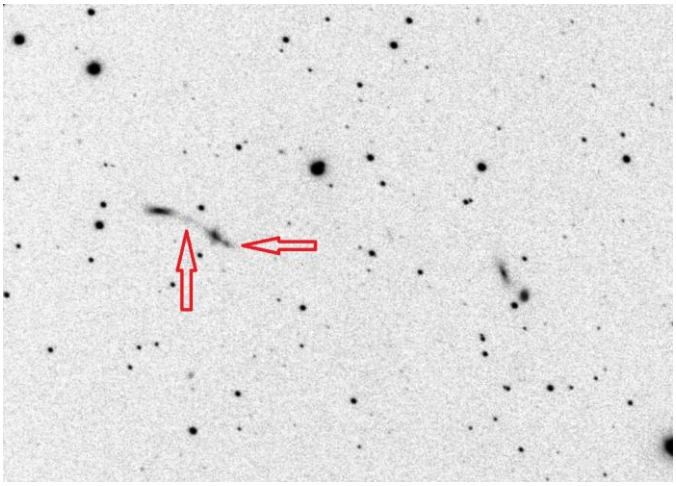


After cleaning up from the meal, I prepped the telescopes and assembled the blackout hatch tent. Dean M arrived back on field late, so I didn’t really get a chance to visit with him. A little before 8pm, Polaris began to shine on the north, while the stars of the Summer Triangle were crossing the meridian overhead. I quickly polar aligned and focused the telescopes. By 8:30pm, the Milky-Way began to glow overhead. Outdoor temps were quickly falling thru the mid 50’s.



My first target of the night was a little peculiar galaxy pair – collectively named UGC8454, and also known as Arp204, located in Camelopardalis in the region between Polaris and the Big Dipper. The tiny pair of interacting +16 mag spiral galaxies exhibits a faint bridge of material between the two, (MCG+14-6-25 left object & MCG+14-6-24 right object), along with an elongated extrusion extending out and to the right of MCG+14-6-24. Located on the right side of the FOV are a couple of small spiral galaxies – MCG+14-6-20 and MCG+14-6-21, one inclined and the other face-on.
Here's the EAA observation with the 8" SCT, both light and negative, heavily cropped:





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

With the sky transparency looking very good, I decided that it would be a good night to work Barnard Dark Nebula, so I put away my "Arp Atlas of Peculiar Galaxies" reference book and got out my "Cambridge Photographic Star Atlas" and my "Photographic Atlas of Selected Regions of the Milky Way" (2011 Dobek revision) books. Both of these are very useful tools in hunting Barnard Dark Nebula. Another good resource that I also use is the "Night Sky Observers Guide – Glories of the Milky Way" by George Kepple.

I started off with B201 on plate-1 of 'Selected Regions', located close to the Double-Cluster in Perseus. The EVO50mm refractor gave the best FOV:

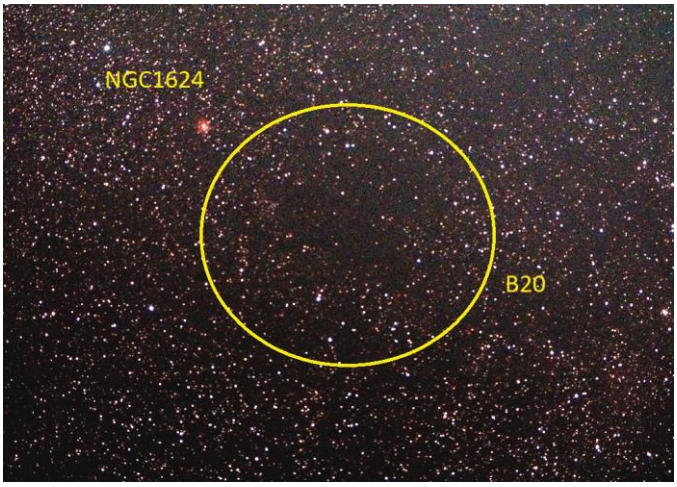




(EVO50mm @ f4.2 ZWO ASI294MC camera with L-Pro filter, piggybacked on the 8" SCT, 60 sec subs, for 30 min).

Next was B20, located close by the bright emission nebula NGC1624, still in the constellation of Perseus. This is one of a handful of Barnard objects that he didn't actually include in his atlas, so I used my Cambridge Atlas, (map-5) to identify the location of the dark nebula. Once again, the EVO50mm provided the best view of the large Barnard dark nebula and the small circular reddish Ha glow of NGC1624:

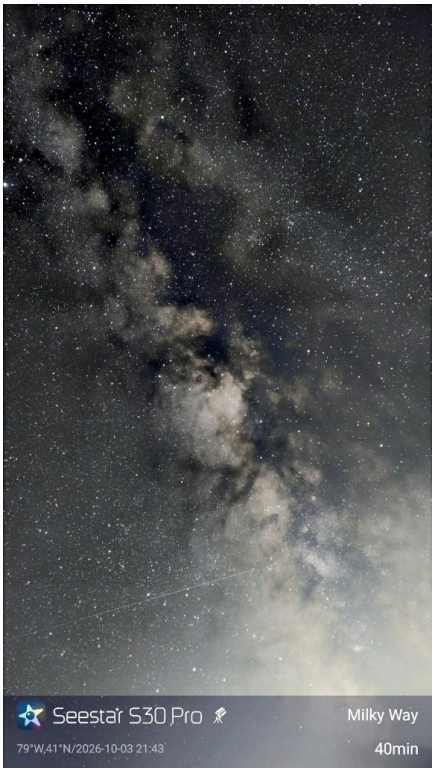


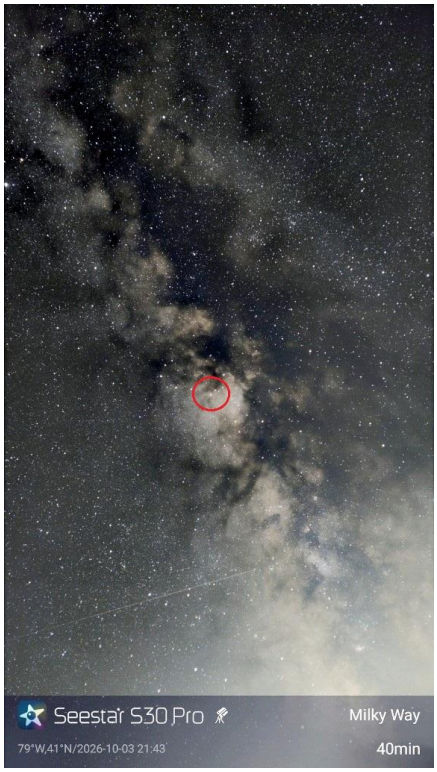


(EVO50mm @ f4.2 ZWO ASI294MC camera with L-Pro filter, piggybacked on the 8” SCT, 60 sec subs, for 40 min).

While the main scopes were collecting starlight, the little S30-Pro was working on the open star cluster Messier 11 – “Wild Duck Cluster” in Scutum. Here’s the observation, both of the cluster using the 30mm lens and the contextual view using the 3mm lens:

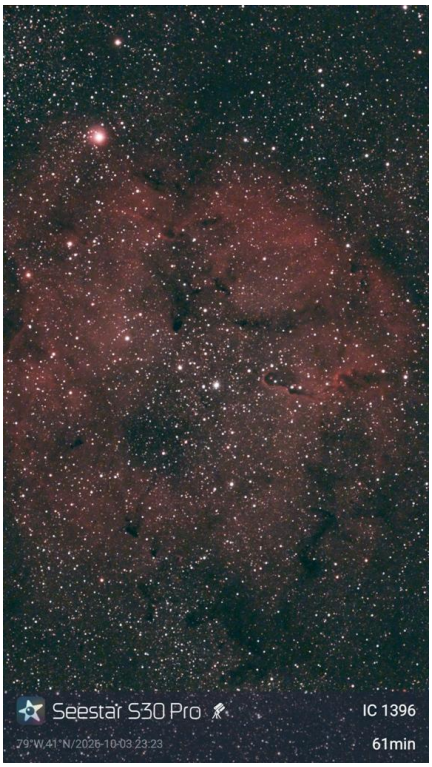




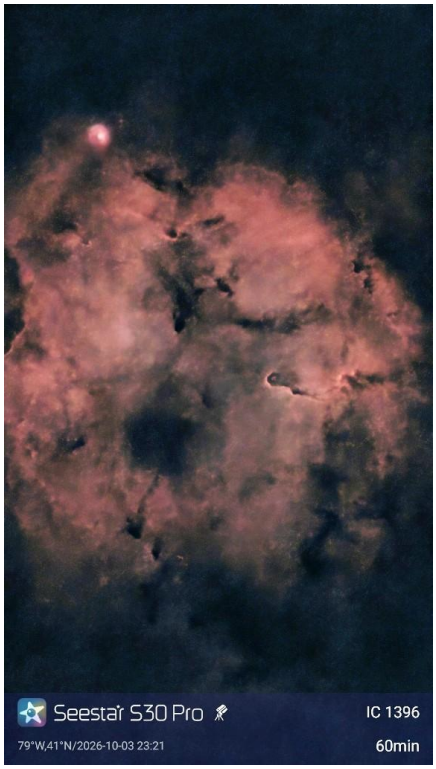


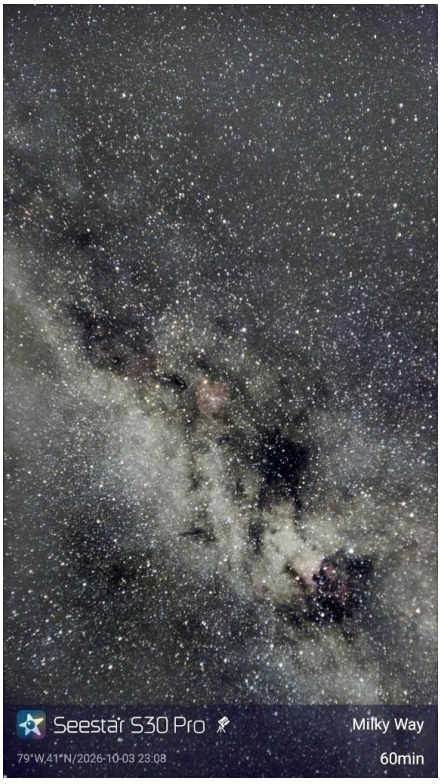
(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 30 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 40 minutes, IR filter)

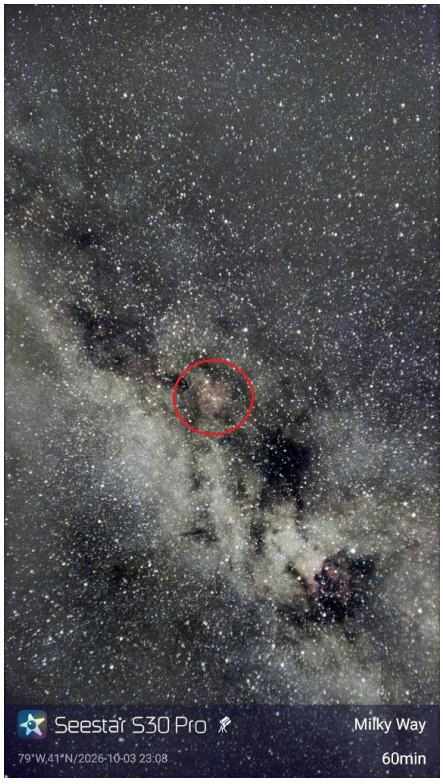
I then executed a deep-dive on IC1396 – the “Elephant Trunk nebula” in Cepheus, I put to use the SeeStar App’s ‘AI Enhancement” tool to reduce and remove field stars. A pretty fun tool to play with in real-time! Here are all three images, normal view where I just tweaked brightness/contrast, the enhanced view where I removed about 40% of the stars and tweaked the brightness/contrast/color saturation and noise, and the third view where I removed all of the stars which really highlights just the bright and dark nebulosity! Also the contextual view made simultaneously using the 3mm ‘Milky-Way’ lens that shows the large-scale location of the object being imaged using the main 30mm lens.
I love the new star-removal feature and being able to run both 30mm/3mm lens/cameras together at the same time, flipping between the two views!
(Images located below, including a phone screenshot of the 3mm view with constellations)









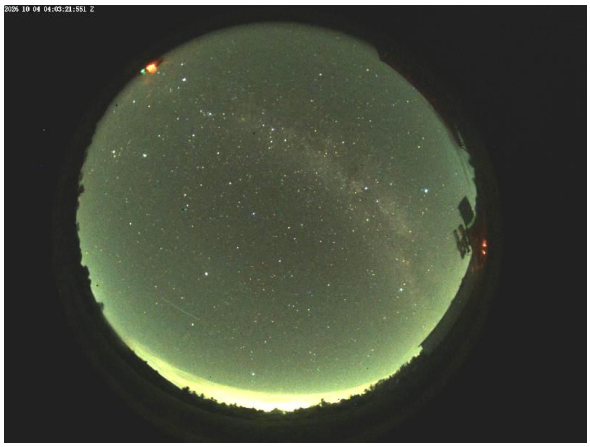




Dean S dropped in to visit around 9:30pm, and received a KitKat. He was busy imaging the 'Pacman Nebula' – NGC281 in Cassiopeia. Dean S had to drive to PGH airport on Sunday to pickup and chauffer several IAU Workshop attendees, so he made it an early night around 12am. The dew formed early and was heavy, and while the 8" SCT and S30-Pro handled it fine, the AllSky cam dew heaters struggled to keep the dome clear. Throughout the night I needed to step outside of the blackout tent to wipe-off the AllSky dome.

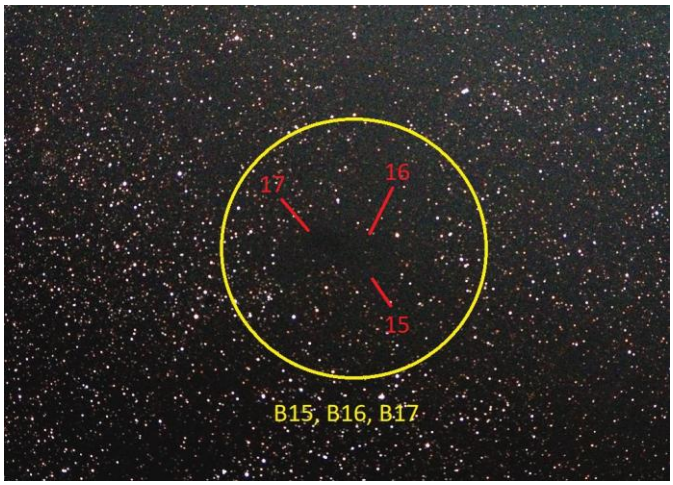
Around midnight, I dropped off several KitKats at Denny's camper and visited with him inside his camper at his workstation for a bit. Denny was imaging SH2 nebula with his main scope and his S30-PRO. Showed him how to do the dual contextual mode in the app.

Once back over at my camp, and having giving the AllSky dome a wipe as I walked past, I noticed a thin band of clouds moving along the southern horizon and a little lite haze overhead, but northwards, where I was working, it stayed relatively clear.



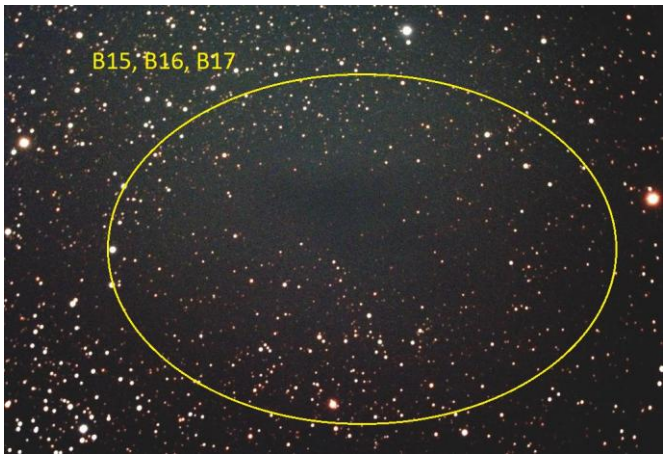
I continued working Barnard Dark nebula using the main EAA scopes. Next on my observing list was a region in Perseus containing multiple Barnard objects – B15, B16, and B17, still using the Cambridge Atlas to identify the dark nebula.
Here's the observation using the EVO50mm Refractor:





Also imaged this area at the same time with the 8" SCT:



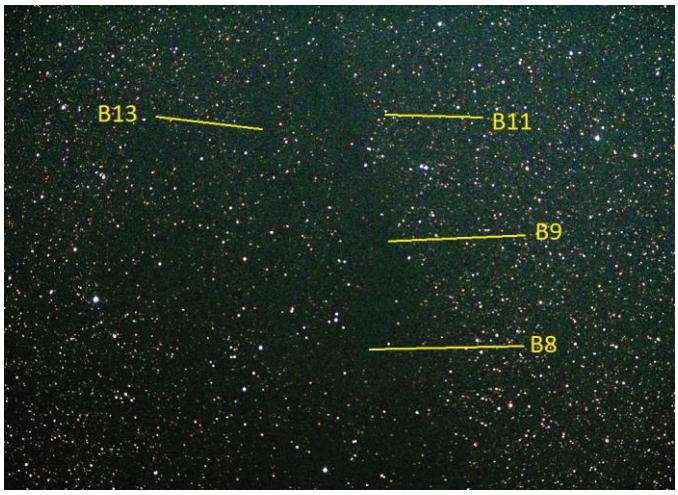


(EVO50mm @ f4.2 ZWO ASI294MC camera with L-Pro filter, piggybacked on the 8" SCT, 60 sec subs, for 30 min).

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

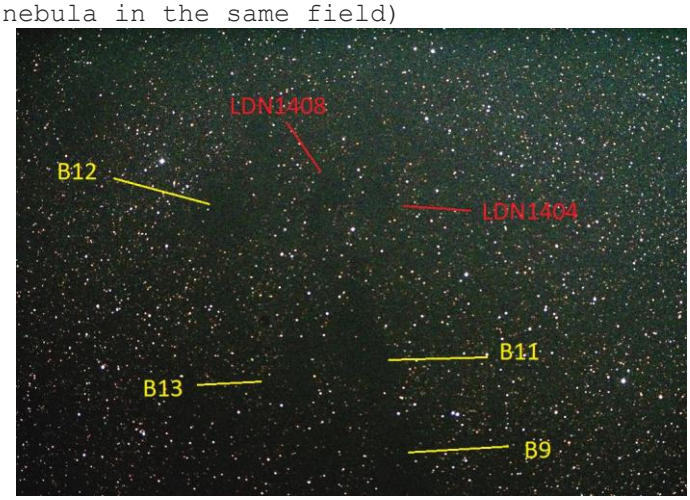
I then moved into Camelopardalis for another group of Barnards – B8, B9, B11, and B13 using the Night Sky Observers book to ID.





Then a slight slew northwards to pick up B12 and B13, just above the tip of B11. (as a bonus, there's also several LDN dark nebula in the same field)



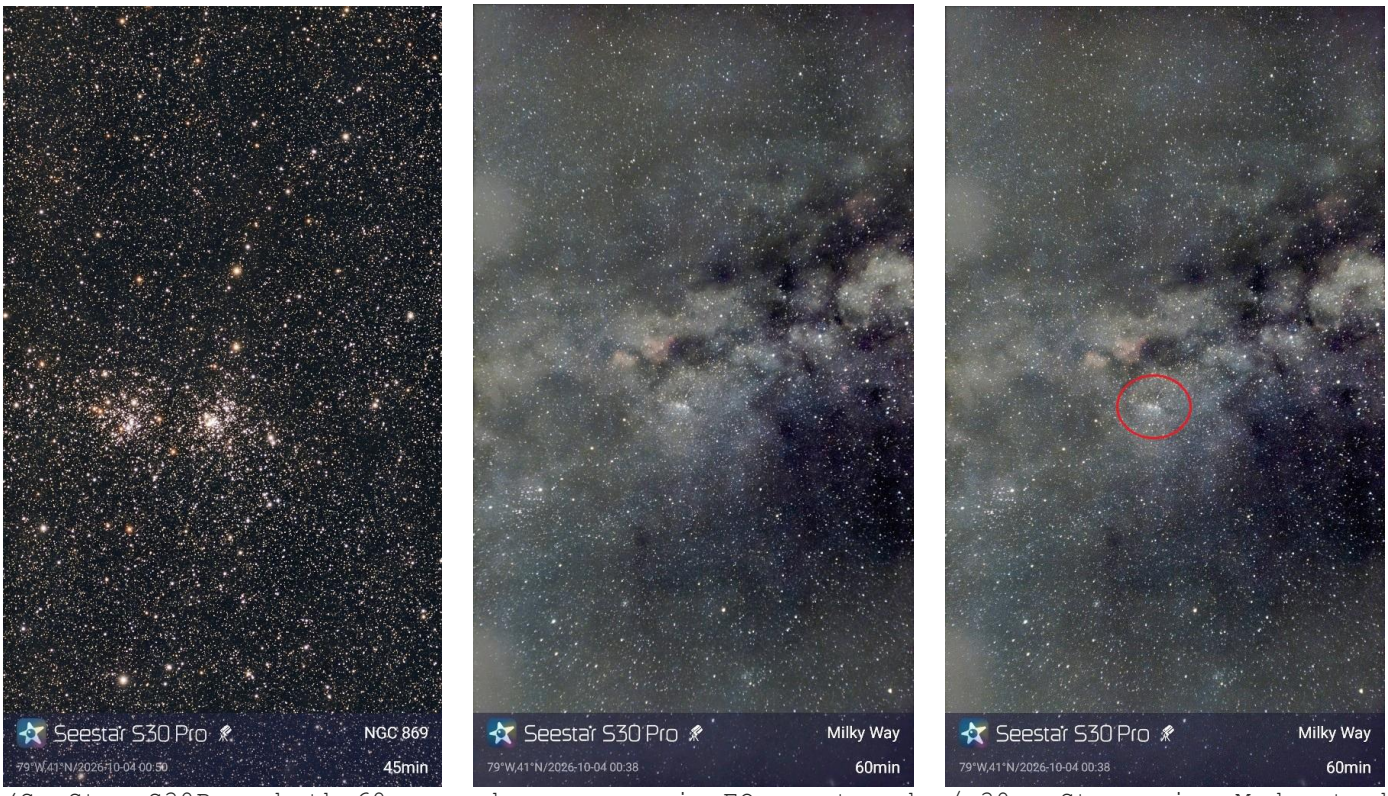


(EVO50mm @ f4.2 ZWO ASI294MC camera with L-Pro filter, piggybacked on the 8" SCT, 60 sec subs, stacked for 40 minutes for B8, B9, B11, and B13, and 16 minutes for B12 and B13).

Working these dark nebulas tonight I noticed that they were not displaying as prominent as I had seen them the previous month while at Cherry Springs. I at first thought perhaps it was due to the skies at the ORAS Observatory not being as dark as those at the park. Then I realized it was more likely due to tonight's dark objects being located in the dimmer Fall Milky Way of Perseus and Camelopardalis, and not silhouetted in front of the bright starclouds of Summer in Sagittarius, Scutum, Aquila, and Cygnus.

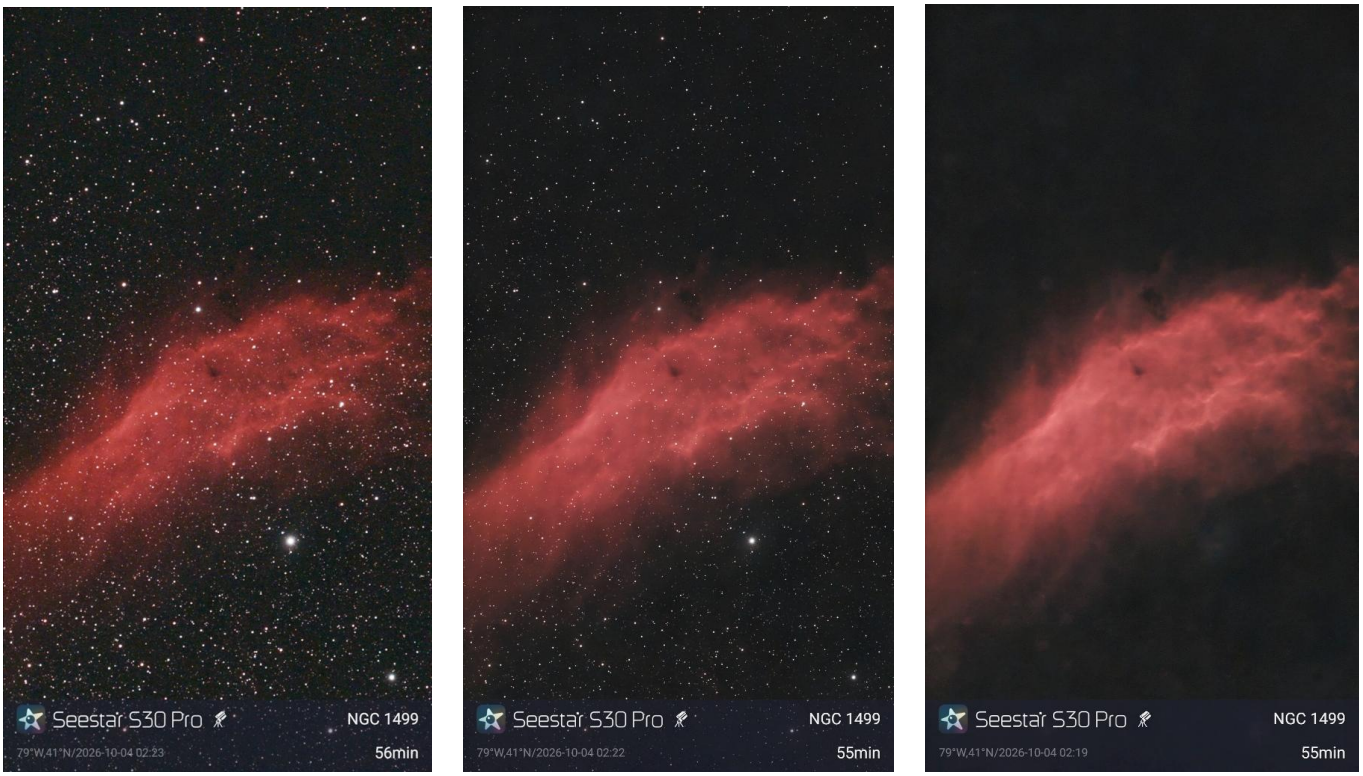
While contemplating the nature of dark nebula, I also had the S30-pro smart scope humming away imaging a widefield view of the bright star-filled region of the Double-Cluster (NGC869 & NGC884 star clusters) located in Perseus, a little ways below the "W" of Cassiopeia. A pretty view! Having a little smart scope going while working with a larger telescope, either an imaging kit setup or even a visual instrument, is a great way to expand your productivity on those rare clear nights!

In addition to the 30mm lens, I also had the 3mm Milky Way lens/cameras going too for that dual contextual live observation. Both views are located below on the next page.



(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 45 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 1 hour, IR filter)

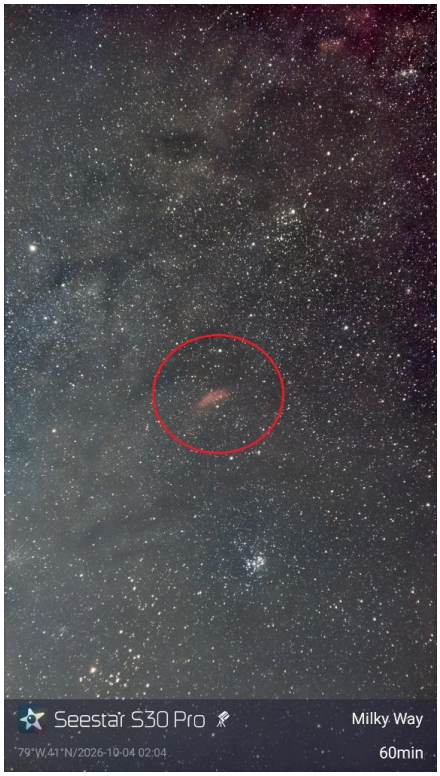
My final S30-Pro observation for the night was a deep dive exposure on NGC1499 – "California Nebula" in Perseus. Once again, I had fun using the SeeStar App's 'AI Enhancement" tool to reduce and remove field stars. Here are all three images, normal view where I just tweaked brightness/contrast, the enhanced view where I removed about 40% of the stars and tweaked the brightness/contrast/color saturation and noise, and the third view where I removed all of the stars highlighting just the nebulosity!

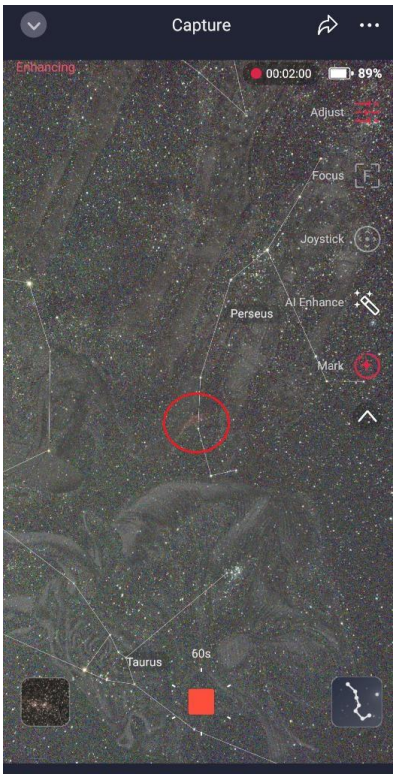


(SeeStar S30Pro, 60 second exposure in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 55 minutes, NB filter, mosaic)

Also the contextual view made simultaneously using the 3mm ‘Milky-Way’ lens that shows the large-scale location of the California Nebula within the constellation of Perseus, along with other nearby objects such as the Double-Cluster, Melotte-20 OB Association, Pleiades, and Hyades star clusters.



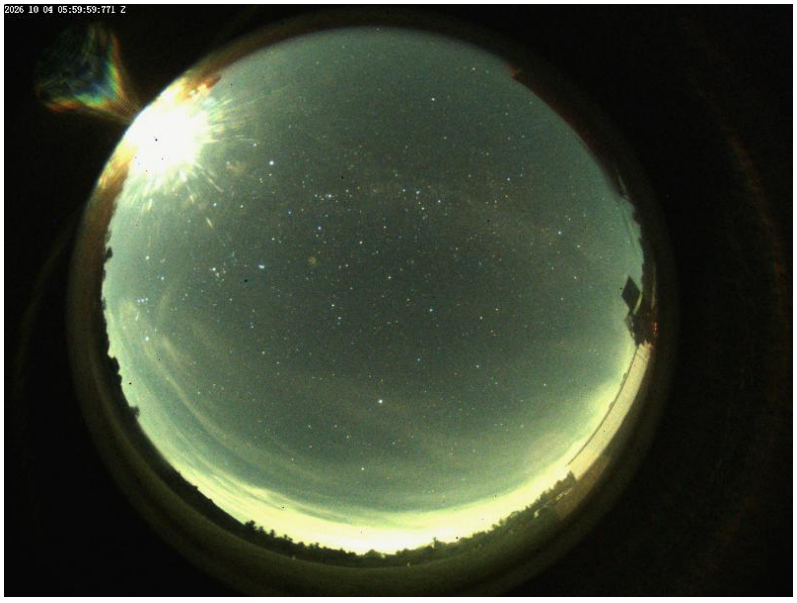




(SeeStar S30Pro, 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 60 minutes, IR filter, also a phone screenshot showing constellations)

While the NGC1499 observation was wrapping up, the 3rd Quarter Moon popped over the eastern horizon above the trees around 1:20am.

The Outdoor temp was down to a chilly 45 degrees, and with the Moon soon lighting up the hazy clouds, I called it a night at 2:30am. A most productive start to this trip!



Sunday 10/04/2026:

Slept in till nearly 9:30am. Woke to a partly sunny morning with temps in the mid 50's. Visited with Dean M and Denny, and met one of the IAU Workshop attendees - Albert F from the island of Mauritania. While I was finishing a late breakfast, Dean M, Albert, and Denny worked on installing the new fire ring down by the Jones Building. By the time I got down there to help, they had the old concrete block pit disassembled and the new ring in its place. So I went for a 45 minute walk along the old forest access roads. Our short overgrown trail soon connected to a more defined dirt road that eventually looped northward, skirting the ORAS facility to its east. Along the way were several oil wells and a large collection of storage tanks.





Once north of the observing filed, the road headed eastwards and I soon came to a cutoff to the old shale quarry, where on a high bank above the quarry someone had constructed a very nice deer spotting tower.




With that, I decided to retrace my steps back to the Jones Building, finishing a nice little hike in the woods.

Back up on the observing field, Susan P was back on site setting up a screen-gazebo tent next to her camping tent she and Dean M assembled yesterday for some of the IAU Workshop guests to stay in afterwards during Astroblast. I uncovered my astro equipment to let the dew dry off from the night before and added another dew heater strap on the outside of the AllSky camera in an effort to suppress dew forming on the dome.

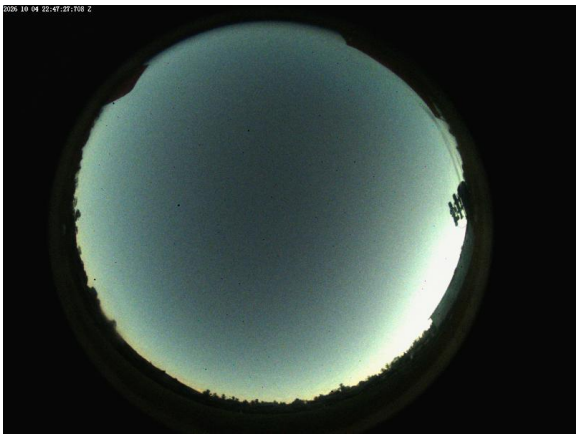
A little later that afternoon, Denny and I worked on a leaky shower in one of the restrooms, and took down the field map across from the observatory in preparation of painting the support bracket.

Around 3pm, Dean S arrived back at the observatory chauffeuring three IAU Workshop attendees from the PGH airport. (Elizabeth from Chicago, Olayinka F from Nigeria, and Damya S from France,). Susan P and I gave them the nickel tour of the observatory. Shortly after, Gary S arrived and setup camp next to his brother Dean S.



Around 6:30pm, Tim S arrived with pizza for the group! Yum!
Having prepped my scopes and observing notes earlier, I was ready to go at sunset. I just needed to later finish assembling the blackout hatch tent to keep the heat inside it.
The daytime puffy clouds had all dissipated and the sky was looking very good!





At dusk, I delivered Snickerdoodles cookies to those on the observing field. The dew was already on uncovered surfaces, though not as bad. Unfortunately, the AllSky continued to have issues with the dome collecting dew. I have to keep stepping out and wiping it off.

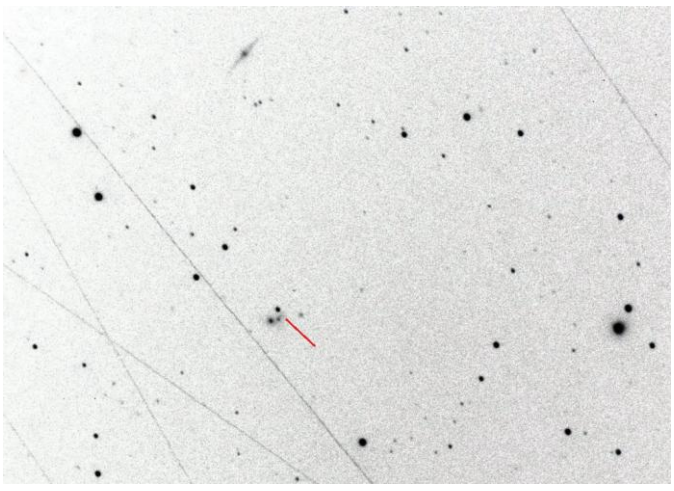
With darkness falling quickly this time of year, it wasn't long before the Milky-Way was glowing along the southern meridian.



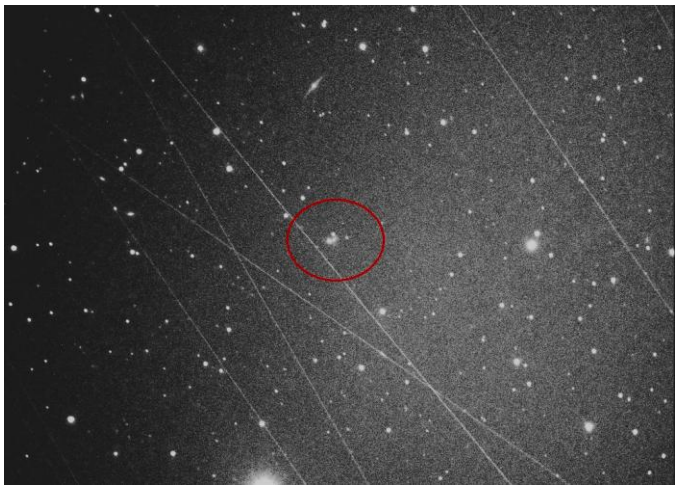


Once the last glimmer of light in the southwest had faded, I started the night off going back to hunting Arp Peculiar Galaxies using my reference book – "Arp Atlas of Peculiar Galaxies" by Jeff Kanipe & Dennis Webb. I had several galaxies over in the western sky in the Bootes / Serpens Caput area that would be setting quickly, so I needed to move quickly. First target was Arp177 in Bootes, consisting of two tiny +17mag & +18mag interacting galaxies – MCG+4-36-16 and MCG+4-36-17, displaying a small plume of material. There's also a nice +16mag edge-on spiral in the upper FOV – PGC53376.





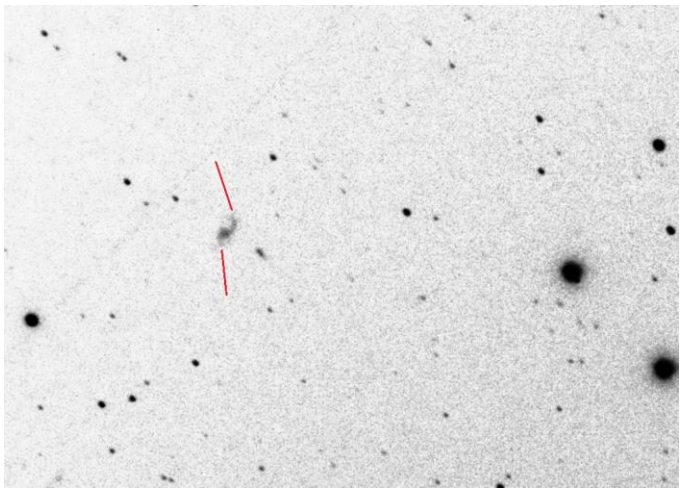
Using Sharpcap's satellite trail reduction tool, I minimized and cropped most of the offending streaks. Here's the full widefield FOV showing how bad it was, lol.
This particular Arp was almost not worth the effort spent, but at least the PGC galaxy in the FOV saved the day.



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

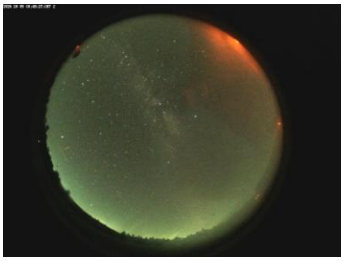
Next was Arp218, consisting of spiral MCG+3-40-57 with its interacting small companion called VV311b which is impacting the larger galaxies spiral arms. The MCG galaxy is +15.4mag and the companion is +18mag.



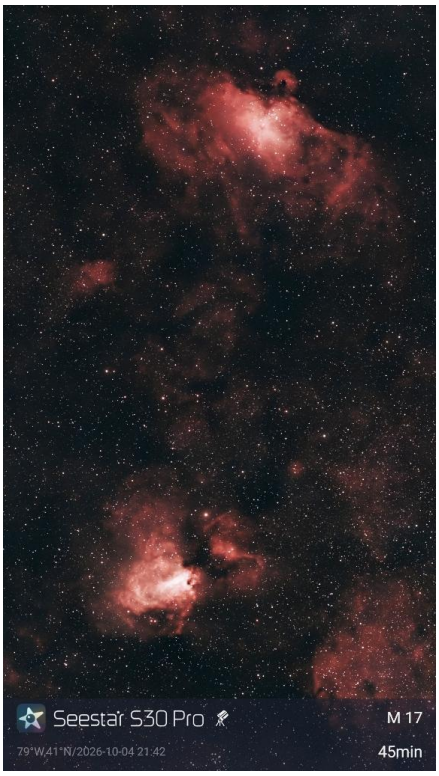


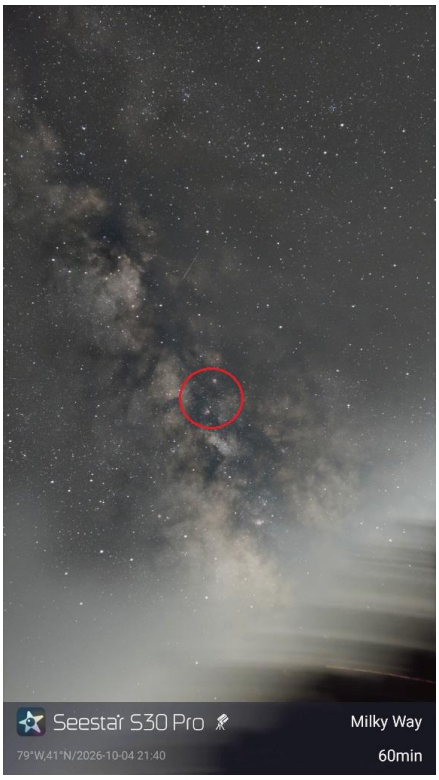
Denny stopped by to visit and we discussed using the S30-Pro-s 'AI Enhancement' tool in the SeeStar App. The extra dew strap I installed earlier in the day failed to keep the AllSky dome clear, and it became a chore to keep wiping it dry. Denny suggested putting the strap underneath the aluminum outer shell around the dome housing and adding a rubber strip to help insulate it. We'll work on that later in the week.

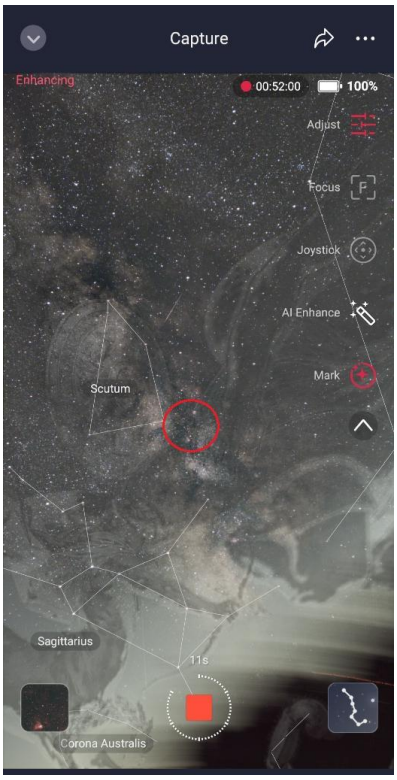
Denny was continuing hunting SH2 nebula with his scopes, Dean S continued working the "Pacman Nebula" – NGC281 throughout the week, and also the "Wizard Nebula" – NGC7380, and the "Pelican Nebula" – IC5070. Gary was doing the "Lion Nebula" – SH2-132, and Dean M was on the "North American & Pelican Nebula" – NGC7000 & IC5070 and LBN301 complex near Sadr for the week.



While the 8” SCt was Arp hunting, the little S30-Pro was viewing nebula. First a final farewell to the “Eagle” and “Swan” nebulas over in Sagittarius & Scutum before they sat. Here’s the dual observation using both of the scope’s cameras:





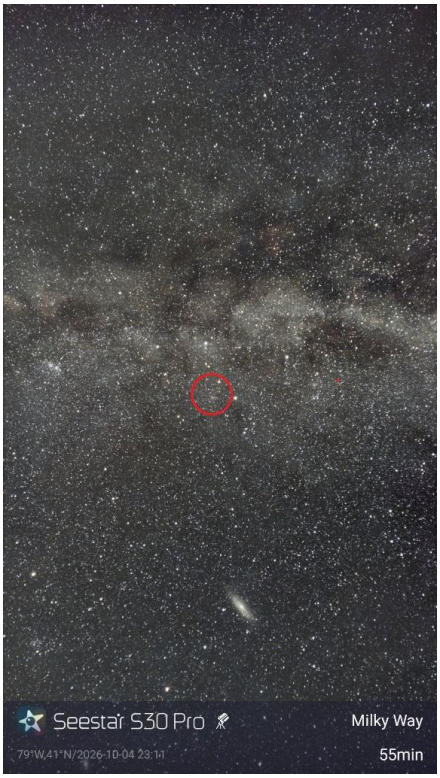


(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 45 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 60 minutes, NB & IR filters)

Then I pointed the S30-Pro northwards to Cassiopeia for NGC281 – “Pacman Nebula”. Here’s the normal view where I just tweaked brightness/contrast, enhanced view where I removed about 40% of the stars and tweaked the other settings, and the contextual view:

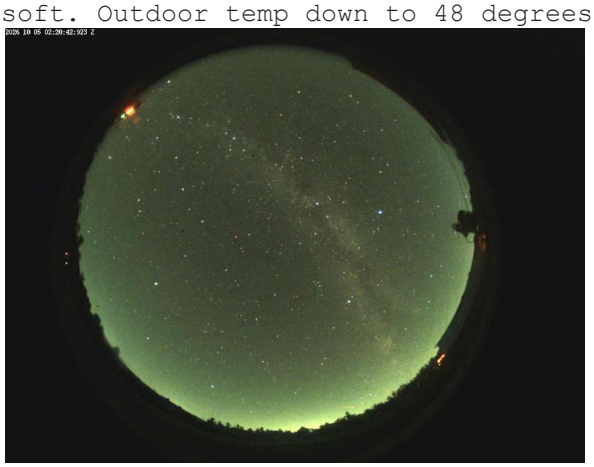






(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 55 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 55 minutes, NB & IR filters)

At midnight I delivered KitKats to Denny. Then he and I walked over to the west field but everyone had gone to bed, so I left the little treats on their doorsteps. We both thought the sky transparency had gone soft. Outdoor temp down to 48 degrees.



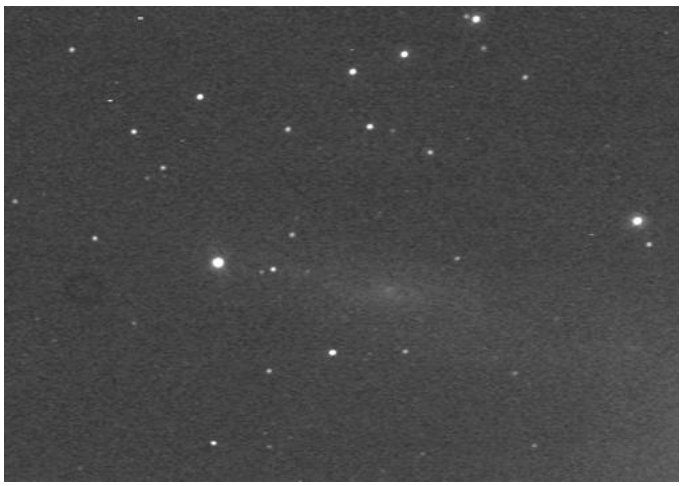
Back at camp with the observing conditions deteriorating, I decided to slew the 8” SCT over to Cetus, now well placed towards the meridian, and hunt a few galaxies on my ‘re-do’ list. (these are objects that I observed 10 – 15 years ago with my B&W StellaCam-3 analog camera that showed promising detail that needed re-observed using a modern camera)

Here’s the old and new EAA observations of spiral galaxies NGC210:





And then NGC247:

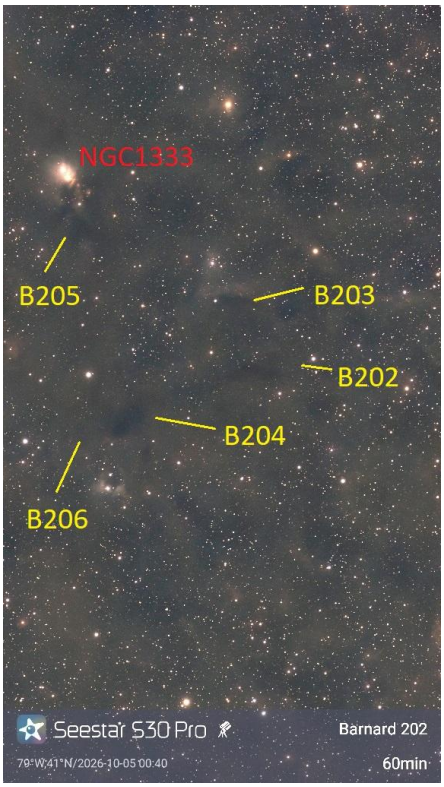




NGC210 (galaxy) - 11/23/2011 - 8" SCT f6.3, StellaCam-3 @ 25 second single exposure.
NGC247 (galaxy) - 09/12/2012 - 6" RC f5, StellaCam-3 30 second single exposure.
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

The S30-Pro continued with its imaging, first the Barnard Dark Nebula complex in the B202 region in Aries, near emission nebula NGC1333.

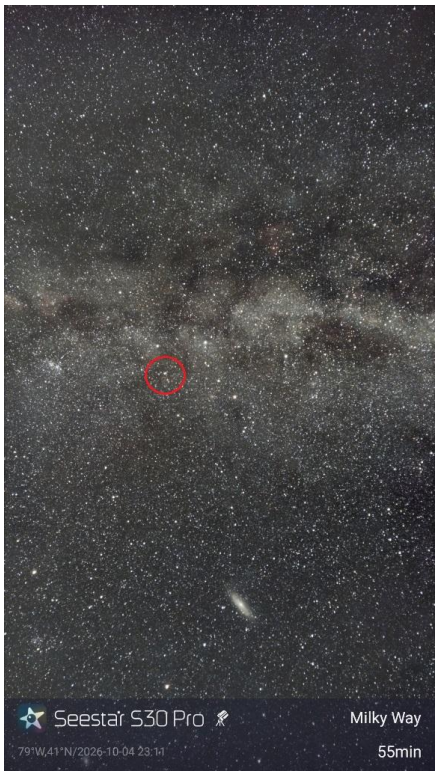


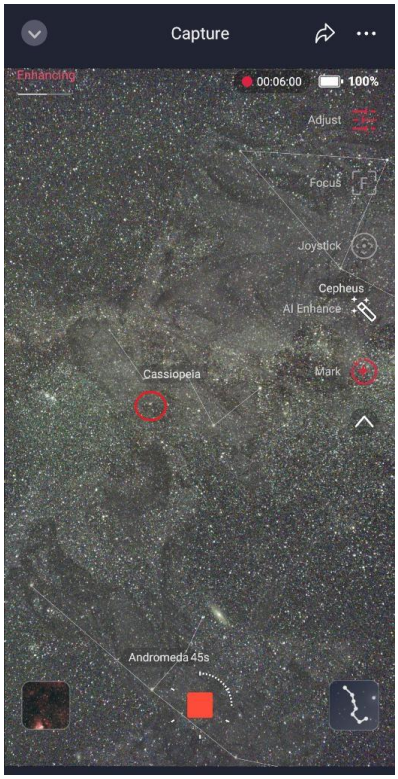


(SeeStar S30Pro, 60 second exposure in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 60 minutes, NB filter, mosaic)

Around 1:15am, scattered clouds began going over, so I squeezed in one last SeeStar observation – open cluster NGC457 "Owl Cluster" in Cassiopeia.



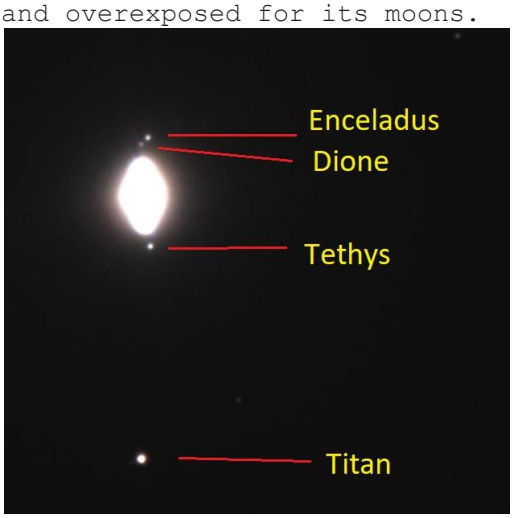




(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 26 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 55 minutes, IR filter)

With the haze making a fine planetary filter, using the 8” SCT I dropped in on the ringed planet – Saturn. Here’s both the planet & rings and overexposed for its moons.





(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 260 milli-second single exposure for planet & rings, a 10 second single exposure for moons).

So after a few more minutes I called it a night, shutdown the scopes, broke down the blackout tent, and closed up the clamshell hatch. In bed by 2:30am.

Monday 10/05/2026:

Slept in till 9am. After breakfast, I uncovered the scopes to dry in the warm sunshine and re-did the dew heater strap around the outside of the AllSky cam. Hopefully that will fix the dew issue. Visited with Denny, Gary, and the Dean's. Spent the rest of the morning lounging around camp, enjoying the warming outdoor temps. Several folks began to arrive onsite including ORAS member Dave R.

Around noon, the wind picked-up, with several 25 to 30 mph gusts. I added extra tie-downs to my canopy. Denny and I had to go rescue Susan P's screen-gazebo as strong wind gust uprooted and blew it across the drainage ditch onto the gravel road.
While retrieving Susan's tent, Roxanne K, (Cherry Springs friend), arrived with her conversion camper around 2pm, for the IAU workshop, and setup in-between Denny and I.



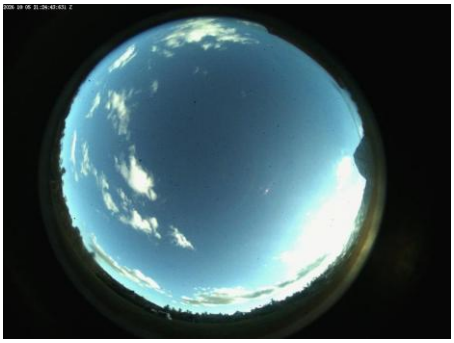
After she had her trailer squared away, I gave her the nickel tour of the observatory and outdoor classroom. The starparty infrastructure began to take shape as the tent rental company arrived and setup our large tent, along with the porta-potty and dumpster folks.







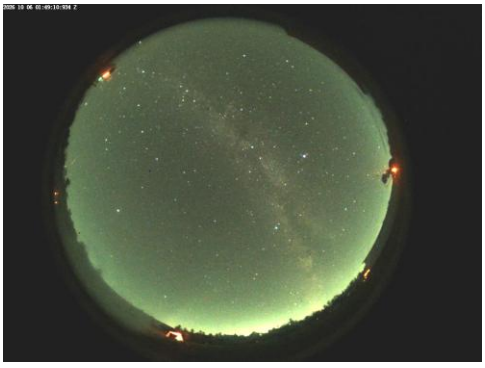
Spent late afternoon shooting new flat frames for the 8" SCT and EVO50mm refractor. Around 5:30pm, Steve and Deb B arrived and setup camp on the east field.
Made dinner at 6pm and phoned home, then walked my trash down to the new dumpster at the Jones Building. The few daytime heating clouds soon evaporated with sunset. With the forecasted temperature low going into the 30's overnight, and possible gusty winds, I decided to forego setting up the blackout tent and instead moved my laptop and observing notes/references inside the camper where I'd be more comfortable.


At dusk, with the bright Summer stars beginning to shine, I changed into warmer clothes and walked over to visit with Dean and Gary S, then stopped by Dean M's trailer, delivering Snickerdoodle cookies. On the way back to my camp I ran into a group of IAU Workshop attendees coming up to see the observatory. After giving them a quick look inside at the telescopes and sharing Snickerdoodles, I took a small group that included Roxanne, Elizabeth, Ed Ting, and several others over to see my EAA setup. As I didn't have the blackout tent setup, I explained how that worked and showed everyone my back hatch workstation. They'll have to come back another time to see the blackout tent assembled and in action. Ed T and the others were impressed with my setup, including my AllSky camera which I had running. One of the folks asked where Saturn was on my AllSky screen so I got out my green-laser and pointed it out in the sky for them.

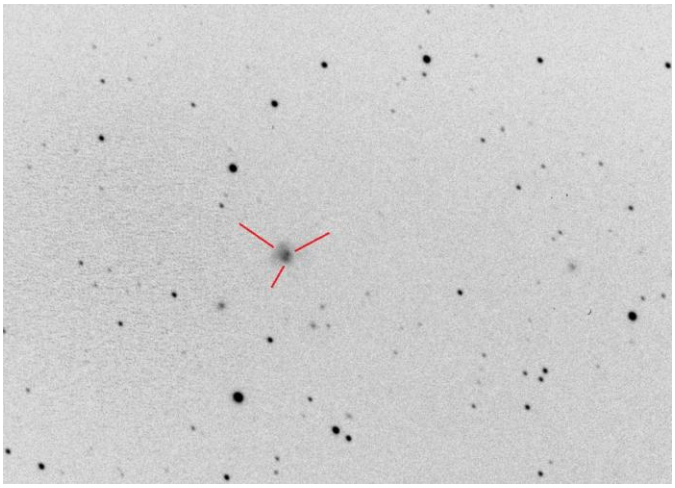


While the outdoor temps were rapidly falling thru the 50's, the dew wasn't nearly as bad as the previous two nights. Denny stopped over and I helped him get his S30-PRO in Milky-Way mosaic mode. By now it was good and dark, with the Milky-Way glowing across the horizon from the NE to the SW. It was time to get to work!



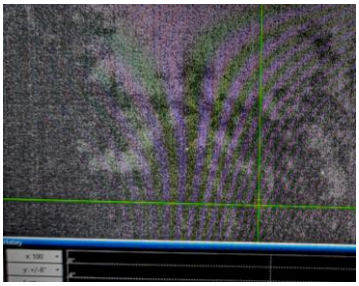
Last few nights I had been chasing little Arp Peculiar Galaxies around over along the western horizon in Bootes, Corona Borealis, and Serpens. Having got a late start this evening, most of the objects I wanted had set. But there was one Arp still high enough to attempt. So I slewed the 8" SCT over to Arp220, (IC4553) in Serpens. IC4553 is an odd shaped +13.1 mag spiral galaxy displaying what looks like two separate nucleus's along with a distorted spiral disk. Here's the EAA observation:





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

I had to cut the observation short as towards the end I was having guiding issues. Here's a screenshot of PHD, maybe I needed to aim higher? LOL!



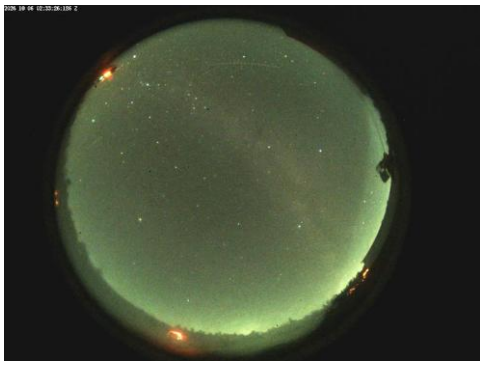
I then switched over to my galaxy re-do list and slewed the 8" SCT over to the SE to Aquarius. There I re-observed a couple of small galaxies – NGC7165 and NGC7183. NGC7165 was a nice little +13.5 mag nearly face-on spiral with a bright star-like core, while at +12th mag, NGC7183 is an edge-on spiral with a prominent dusk-band that nearly obscures the central core of the galaxy.





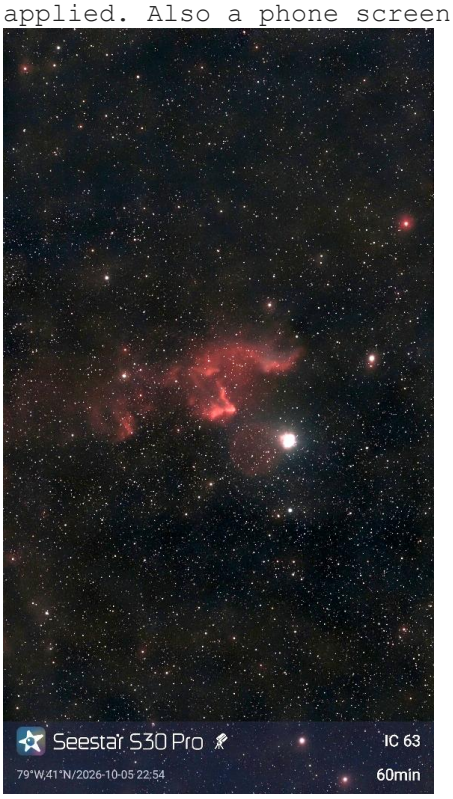
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 Second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, NGC7165 livestacked using Sharpcap for 36 minutes, and NGC7183 livestacked for 45 minutes).

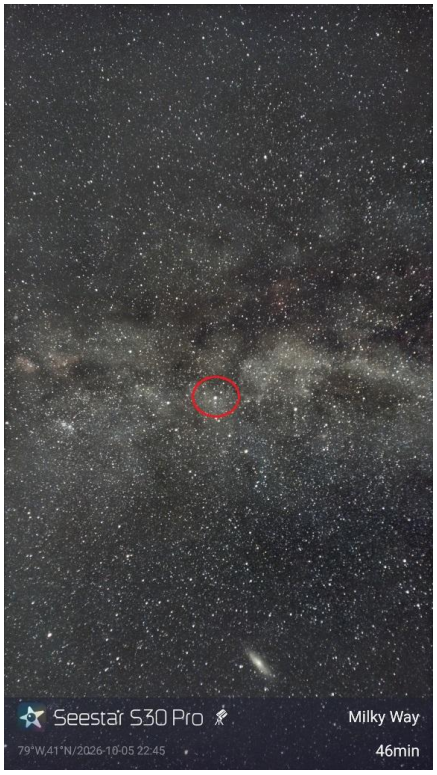
My outdoor thermometer at 11:25pm says it's 41 deg outside! Birrr!! But I was nice and toasty inside the camper, enjoying a cup of tea. Seemed like every one of my images tonight had a couple of satellites zinging through it! Most annoying! Plus, my Allsky cam began to collect more dew than starlight.

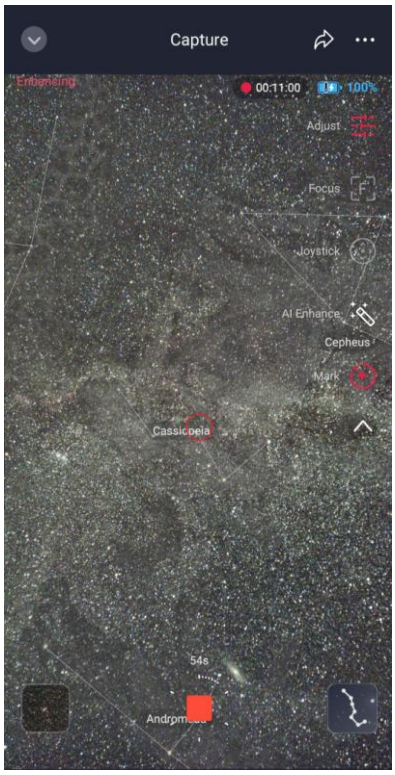


During the galaxy chase, the S30-Pro was busy doing a deep livestack of a spooky object: IC63 – the "Ghost Nebula" in Cassiopeia. An appropriate deep-sky object for the season. The "Ghost" is a combination of emission and reflection nebula, (also includes IC58), located near bright +2.5 mag star Gamma Cas, (the central star of the "W"), whose intense radiation is sculpting the shapes of both nebulas'.

Here's the dual (30mm & 3mm contextual) observation, with a little star-reduction applied. Also a phone screenshot with constellation lines:







(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 60 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 46 minutes, NG & IR filters)

At midnight it was KitKat o'clock! Most everyone was already asleep, so I left goodies on their doorsteps, except for Denny who was still awake inside his camper at his workstation, and I visited with for awhile to see what he was imaging.

It was a chilly damp walk around the field with the outdoor temp now down to 38 degrees. There was also a touch of ground fog on the observing field.

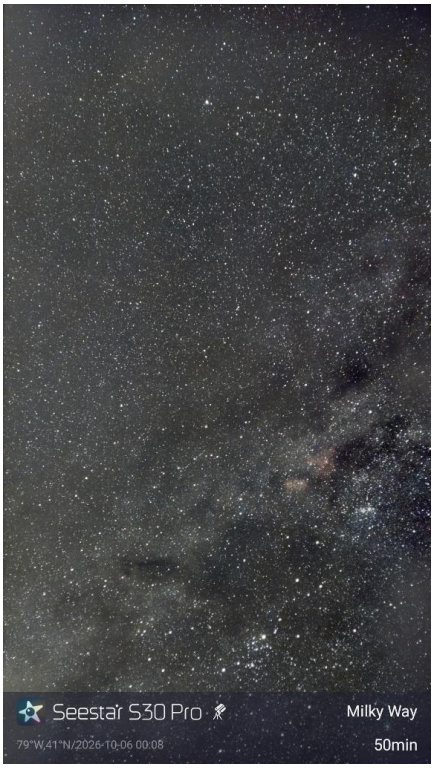
I then pointed the little SeeStar over to Camelopardalis the “Giraffe” to galaxy hunt for IC342, nicknamed the “Hidden Galaxy” due to heavy Milky-Way obscuration making it a hard object to visually observe. Using EAA techniques, it was a piece of cake,, LOL!
The face-on galaxy comes in at +9.1 mag, and is about 10.7 MLY distant. IC342 is one of the closet non-Local Group galaxies to us and is it wasn’t for the dusty region it was in, would probably be an easy visual binocular or small telescope object!

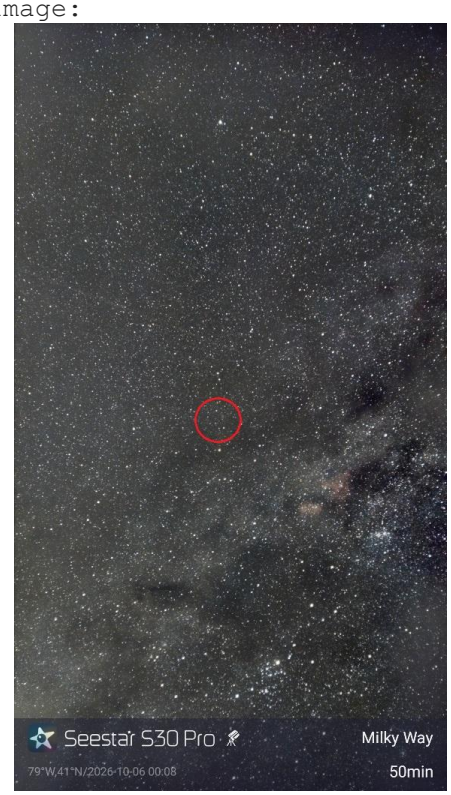
Here’s the EAA observation, (both regular view showing the heavy obscuration & star removal showing the galaxies spiral arms):

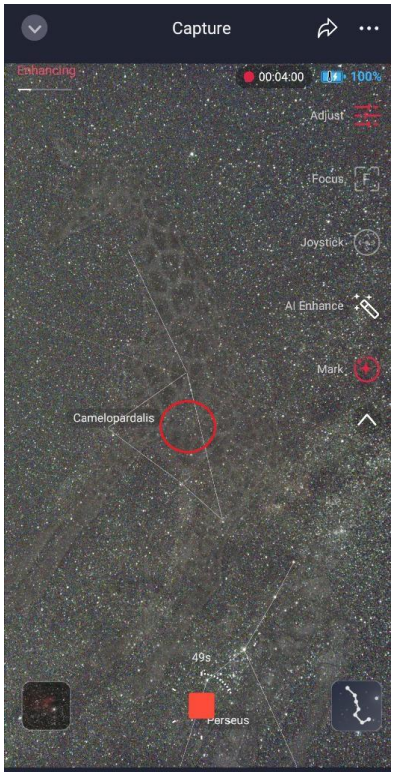




And dual contextual widefield image:







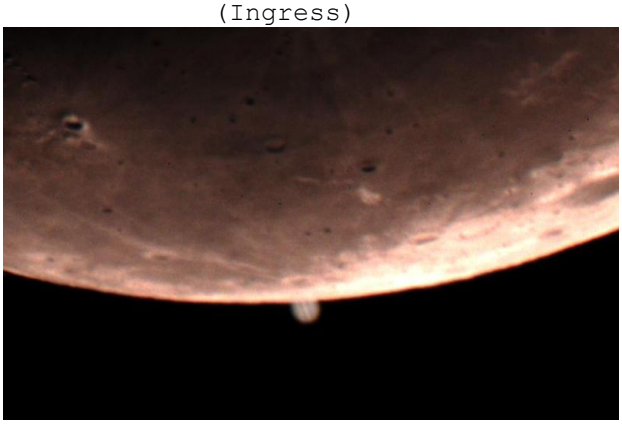
(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 105 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 50 minutes, IR filter)

At 1:30, I parked the 8" SCT and powered down the S30-PRO and covered both. Then I got in a long nap and woke in time to capture the Jupiter-Moon occultation, ingress at 4:23am, and egress at 5:23am. Pretty cool! And quick! Here's a short video made with the S30-Pro at the end of the occultation: https://youtube.com/shorts/JtbnC00xuVo

8" SCT:



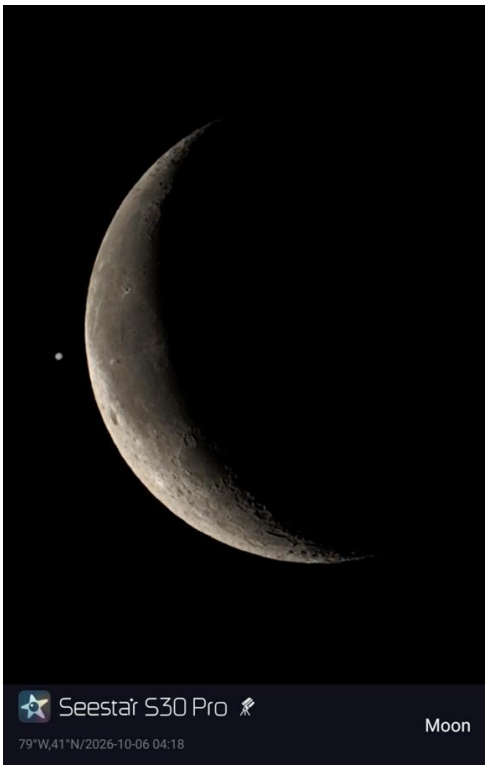
(Ingress)



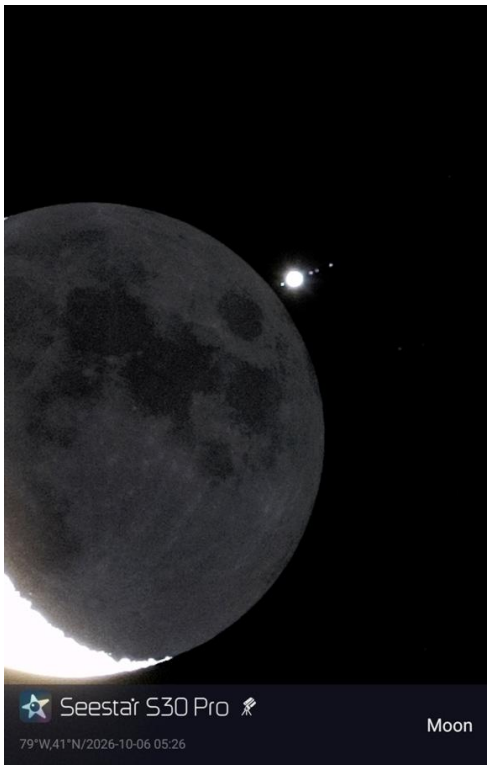


(Egress)

S30-Pro:

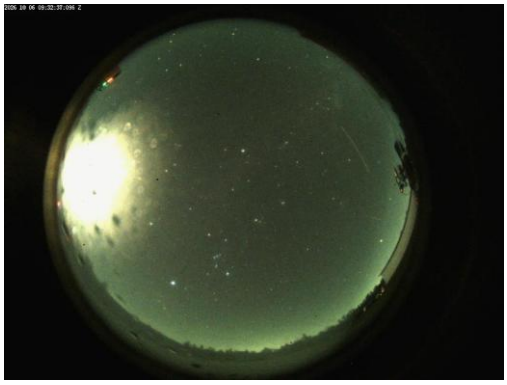


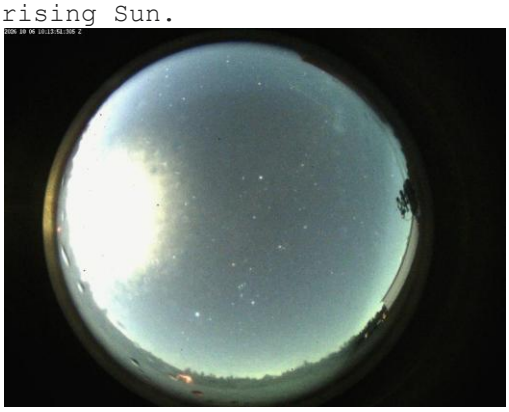
(Ingress)



(Egress)

Afterwards, I shut down the scopes and headed to bed at 6am with dawn beginning to break. Outdoors it was a cold 34 degrees, and everything was coated in frost, so I left the scopes uncovered to dry in the soon to be rising Sun.



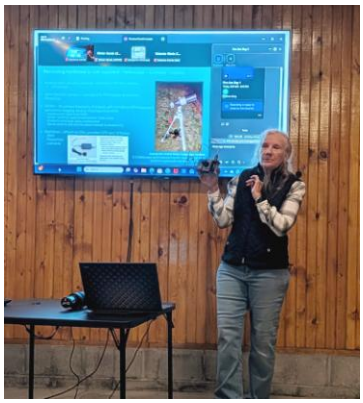


Tuesday 10/06/2026:

Slept in till a little before 10am. Once up, I compared occultation observing notes with Denny and Dean M. Also later visited with Steve, Gary, and Dean S.

Our group buddy Karrie K was onsite setting up her tent just to my South. There were now probably 12 to 15 campsites now on the field. Around 11am, Ed Ting stopped by and did a video interview of my EAA camper setup for a YouTube video he was making for the event.

Running a little late, I walked down to the Jones Building to catch the last half of Roxanne K's 11:30am Pro-Am Workshop presentation on occultation timing! Interesting stuff that amateurs can do to contribute to science.



(AstroBlast attendees were able to sit-in on the IAU Workshop events at the observatory)

I then sat in on a quick registration POS sales training by the club's webmaster Paul R with both Marianne and Mark. Back at camp, I gave Karrie the nickel tour of the observatory. At 3pm, I walked down to registration to help setup, ended heading back uphill to enlist Denny and his truck and Karrie to help move tables down the hill to the tent. Dean S, Steve B, Karrie, and I then setup several picnic tables for food vendor use later in the week. Setup the contest handouts. Helped work registration. Here's Marianne and Karrie registering Dave R.







Over the next several hours, Astroblast attendees pulled in with their campers or tents to setup on the field including Dave A and his friend Jim G (Who I later had a nice discussion with on Barnard Dark Nebula) from the Ohio Toledo astronomical society, And Mike M from the PGH club. Also Paul and Jan B from Pleasant Hills who I met them and Paul's brother with his new Tab CS-360 camper at Green Bank in July.

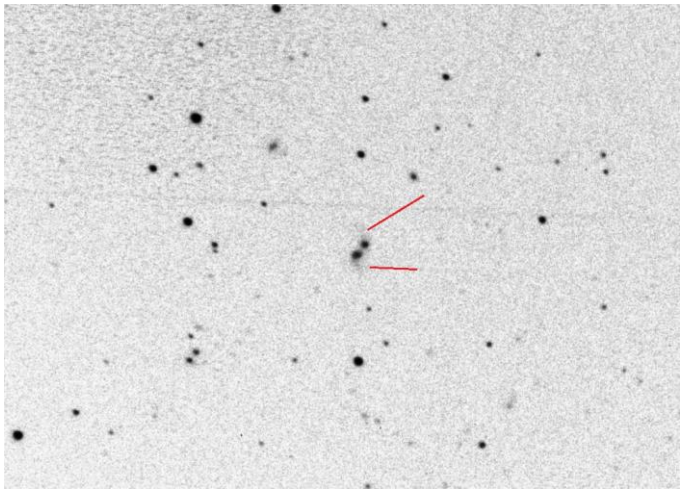
At 6pm, we closed the registration table and I headed back to camp. Prepped the telescope and blackout tent before heading in for dinner. The last remaining daytime clouds were soon dissipating into the night air.





At dusk, with the stars beginning to shine, Roxanne and Elizabeth stopped over to visit and I gave Elizabeth a demo of EAA using Sharpcap. After about 15 minutes along with a little quick deep-sky binocular viewing, they headed up to the observatory where Tim S with help from Ed T and Amy were hosting a IAU Workshop group using the observatory 30" dob. Later in the evening, I walked over to join in for about 30 minutes, catching views thru the 30" of the Veil Nebula supernova remnant and planetary nebula M27.

Prior to visiting the observatory, I started off the nights EAA observing by continuing to chase Arp Peculiar galaxies over in Bootes, before I lost them in the trees. I had just enough time to observe Arp241 – UGC9425, a small +15 mag spiral that displayed two separate cores and two spiral arms rotating in opposite sides of the double core.

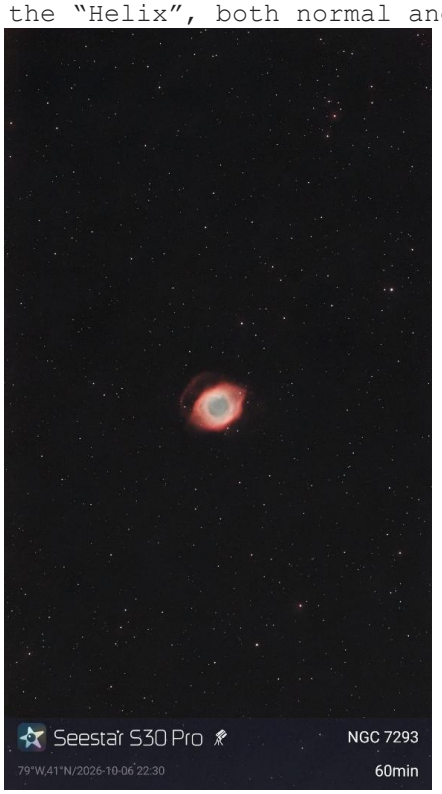



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

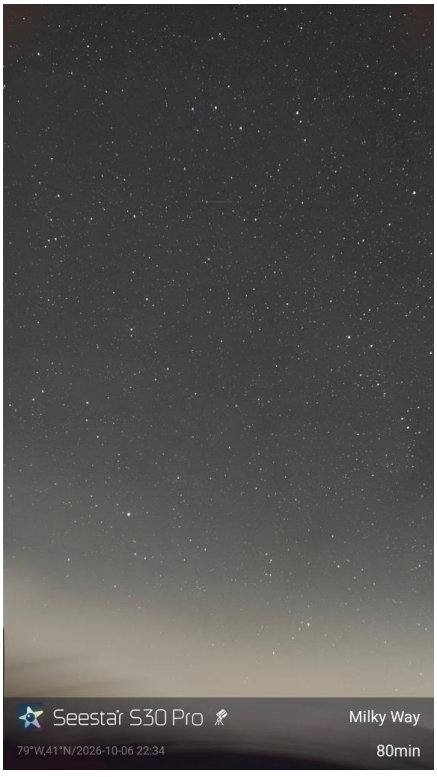
I then slewed the 8" scope up to Pegasus to start a deep exposure of "Stephan's Quintet" – the NGC7318 galaxy group prior to heading over to visit with the IAU folks.
More on the results further below. The S30-Pro was also working a deep livestack of the large planetary nebula NGC7293 – "Helix Nebula" in Aquarius. This +7.6 mag object is one of the closets planetary nebulae, only around 655 LY distant and nearly 3 LY in diameter, which is why it is so large in the FOV. After verifying the SeeStar was correctly capturing the object, I set a timer on my phone to warn me when the exposures were coming due and headed over to the observatory. After enjoying some visual observing time with the IAU folks, my phone too soon warned me to head back to camp to finish both observations.

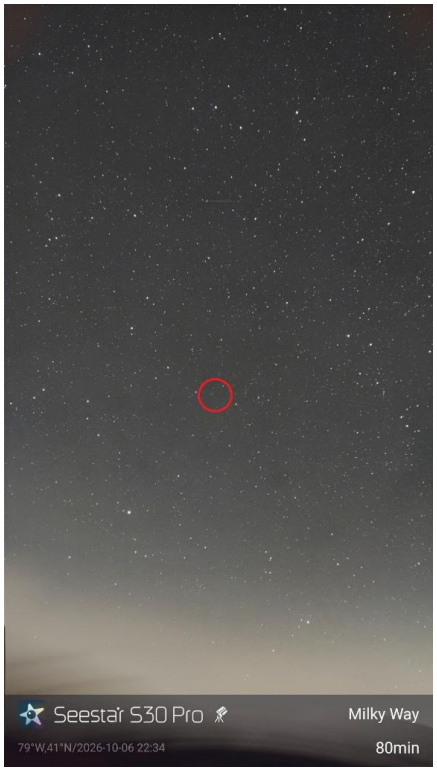
First, here's the S30-Pro 30mm results for the "Helix", both normal and star-reduced:

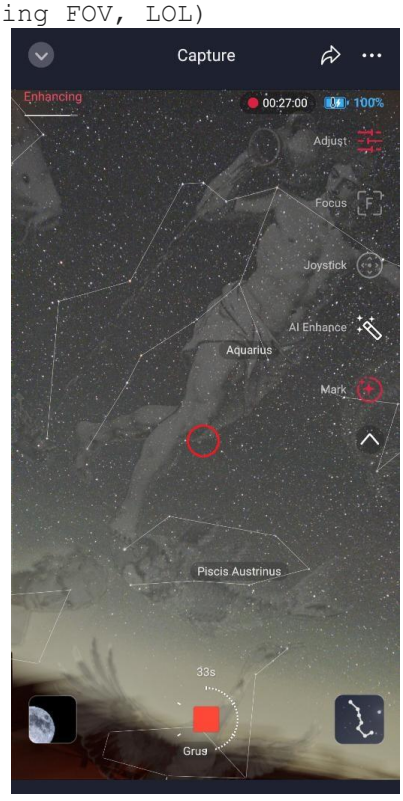




And dual 3mm contextual widefield image: (not a very exciting FOV, LOL)







(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 76 & 60 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 80 minutes, NB & IR filters)

While I was busy with my observing program and visiting the observatory, Dean S was imaging the "Heart Nebula" – IC1805 and later the "Wizard Nebula" – NGC7380, Dean M was chasing little emission nebula in Cygnus, Karrie was working on Saturn.
Denny was also shooting the Heart, and later after Orion rose over the eastern tree-line began working the "HorseHead nebula" – B33.

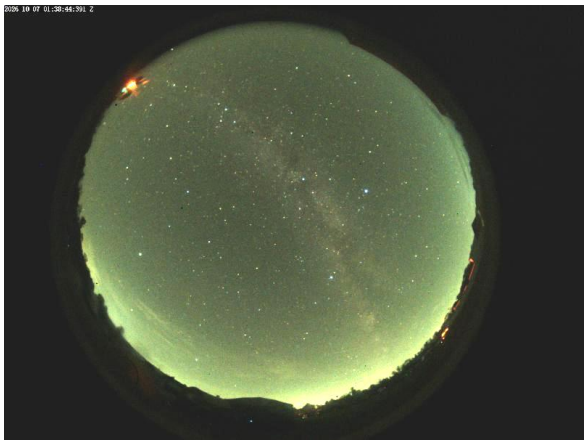
Here's the 8" SCT's deep livestack of "Stephan's Quintet" – the NGC7318 galaxy group in Pegasus. This cluster of five +12.6 to +13.9 mag interacting galaxies, (also called Hickson-92),is located about 90 MLY distant.



I normally don't go that crazy, a 15 minute exposure! The stars went a little 'eggy' due to guiding issues, but still really good detail in the interacting galaxies.

(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 15 minute subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 75 minutes).

Around 11pm, Denny, Karrie, and I walked over to visit with Gary and Dean S, but Dean was already crashed for the night. Then we walked over to visit with Dean M for awhile and exchanged cookies. Snickerdoodles and Pumpkin Spice, Yum! The sky continued to look great overhead and northwards, but a distant cloud bank had settled in along the southern horizon, ruining the sky transparency in that direction.





The AllSky cam was doing better tonight handling the dew, but there was still a little occasional buildup along the SE side of the dome.

The broken sleep from doing the Jupiter-Moon occultation that morning was beginning to catch-up with me. So I put away my observing project books and just worked a few more objects with the 8" SCT from my re-observe list: a couple of galaxies in Aries and another in Aquarius. The S30-Pro worked on a mosaic of Melotte-20, the Alpha-Persei OB Association around the bright +2nd mag star Mirfak that makes up the shoulders of Perseus.

Here's the galaxy observations with the 8":

NGC697 in Aries:



NGC770 & NGC772 in Aries:



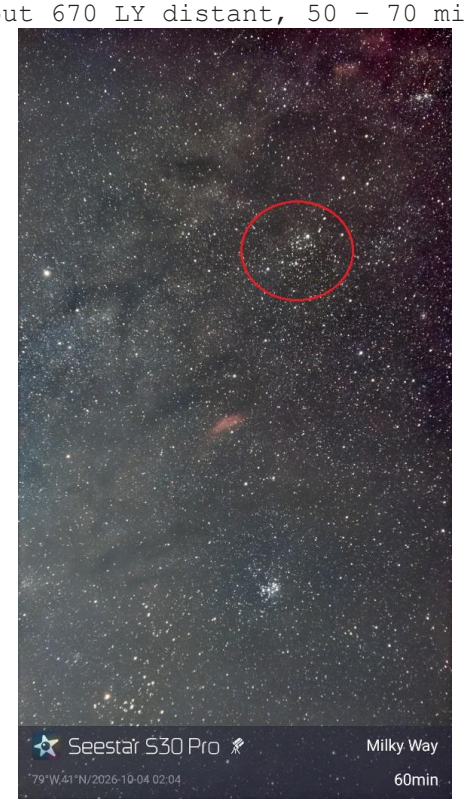
NGC7188 in Aquarius:



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

Here's the S30-Pro observation of Melotte-20, the Alpha Persei Cluster in Perseus:
The +6.1 mag OB Association/cluster is about 670 LY distant, 50 – 70 million years old.





(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 66 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 60 minutes, IR filter)

At 1am, with temps down to 42 degrees, I was beginning to get cold under the blackout tent, along with having trouble not falling out of my observing chair, so I decided it would be best to called it a night. So I shutdown the telescopes, stashed the blackout tent in the car, and headed inside to bed.

Here's the AllSky time-lapse from the night: https://youtu.be/bsR3-BMRfao

Wednesday 10/07/2026:

Up at 9am, another crisp cool morning temps at 45 but rising. After greeting Denny and Karrie who were already up and about outside, I uncovered the telescopes to dry out and fixed breakfast. Spent the morning out around camp. Denny and I took Karrie over to show her how to close the observatory roof, which had been left open overnight. Around noon, Roxanne stopped by to get a few things out of her camper and setup a small observing tent and table for later in the week. Denny and I got a quick tour of her conversion trailer.

After a bite of lunch and flipping thru a magazine, I made the short walk over to the new outdoor classroom showers. It's really nice not to have to walk 100's of feet down the hill to the Jones Building! Around 2:30pm, Dave A from the Toledo club stopped by for a visit. Afterwards I prepped my observing notes for the night and got in a short nap.

Around 3:30pm, I started to walked down to the Jones building to help setup registration, but along the way I first stopped in at the outdoor classroom to sit in for a few minutes on a talk by IAU Workshop attendee Albert F on the radio telescope array on Mauritius.





By the time I made it down to registration, the crew there had it well in hand. (Mark, Karrie, Dave, and Gary), So I went for a stroll around the observing field to visit with folks and take a few photos. Stopped in to visit with Meteor Man David H and his friend Pat P, and ORAS club member Duane D, Then with Mike M and Rich C.













Also stopped in at the Jones Building and the outdoor classroom to checkout a couple of IAU workshop activities where I attended Abbas M's talk on the professional-amateur astronomy community in the era of big data, interesting stuff! I then headed back to camp to prep the telescopes and startup the AllSky cam. Took a few minutes to phone home.





A little before 6pm, I headed back down to registration to help pack up, but once again the crew had everything taken care off. Karrie and I were walking back to camp when we were invited down to Camp Coffman to join dinner with the IAU Workshop folks. Very nice! Tim S, along with Susan P, gave a closing speech to finish out the conference.

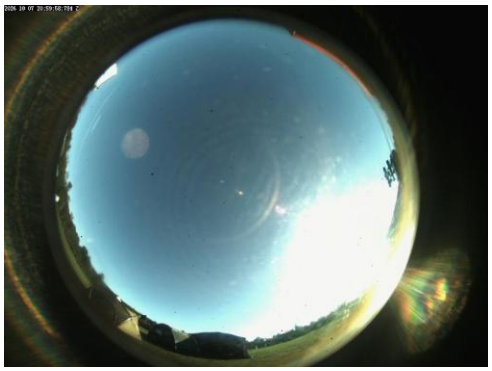


Back at camp around 7pm, Karrie and I opened the Observatory roof and then walked down to hear Ed Ting's presentation on beginner's telescopes. As usual, Ed's talks are entertaining! We didn't stay for the whole time as we wanted to get back and get ready for a night of observing, but I heard afterwards that everyone really enjoyed it.



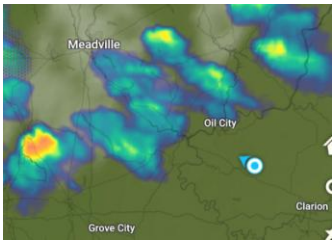


At dusk, with the Milky-Way just beginning to softly glow, and while powering on the equipment back at camp, I caught a glance of clouds off to the NW.
Throughout the day, we had had sunny, clear skies, and every time I had checked the forecast, it was calling for another great night of observing ahead.





Now, checking the forecast, I was gobsmacked to see a line of storms heading our way, a little over an hour out. WTH!!!

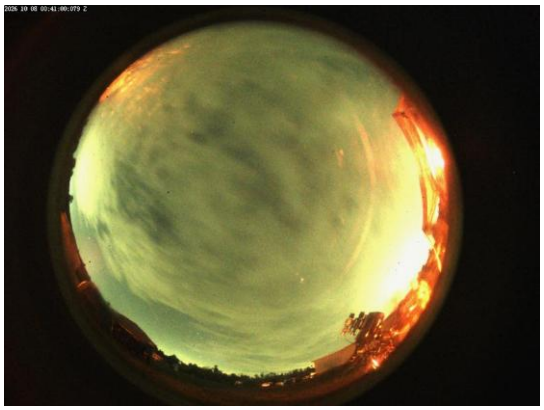






I hurriedly warned Denny and Karrie and those walking up the hill from the talk. I then headed around the observing field to warn folks there.

As I was getting ready to close the Observatory roof, several groups of workshop folks arrived, including Diane T of PGH, so I gave them a quick overview of the Observatory telescopes and then demonstrated how to close the roof. I then led a small group over to my camper and showed my EAA setup as I disassembled and covered my equipment under the now cloudy sky.





Once the visitors had left and I had finished stowing my equipment, Denny, Karrie, and I walked over to Dean S's camp where we joined Dean, Gary, and Tim S in refreshments.
We were soon joined by Dean M. A little after 10pm, under sprinkles and with heavier rain imminent, we headed back to camp. Before long there was steady rain and thunder at 10:30pm. I stayed up till after 11pm trying to read, but the rain put me to sleep.
Sometime after 2am, the sky cleared and those awake got several good hours of observing/imaging the winter season skies.

Thursday 10/08/2026:

After a good night's sleep I was up at 8am. The Sun was just finishing burning off the morning fog.





It was going to be a busy day, so I fixed breakfast and straightened up around camp. Visited with Karrie, Denny, and Roxanne. Denny was in the process of packing up camp, as he was heading home today. At 10am I walked down to the Jones Building to catch the start of Dean S's Photoshop Workshop. Then headed back to camp to see Denny off.





Around 11:30am, club members, local dignitaries, and IAU Workshop attendees began to arrive for the noon McElhattan Outdoor Classroom ribbon cutting ceremony.
There were speeches by ORAS President Tim S, the chairman of the McElhatten Foundation, then Vice-President Dean M, and committee chairs Susan P and Dean S, along with recognition of Penn Fencing, and the excavation company and other contractors involved with the project, and acknowledging the local political representatives present.















Then the official ribbon-cutting. A very nice event!





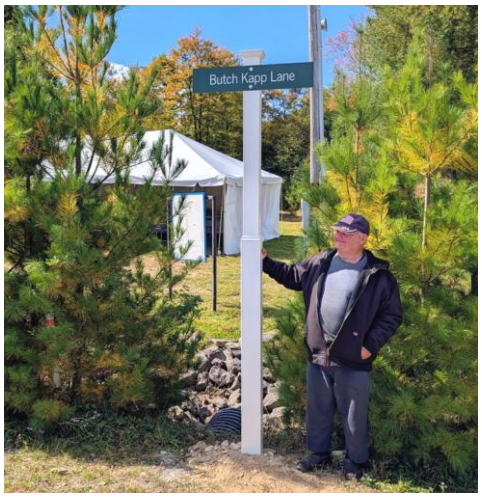
After the ceremony was over, Randy R setup his Ha solar telescope for viewing the Sun.



Finally, there was a special honors unveiling for ORAS member Butch K, with the official naming of the observatory road for him.







Afterwards, I visited with Dave A and Steve B where we discussed the latest smart telescopes and then with Paul R regarding AllSky cameras. Finally made my way back to camp at 1pm to make lunch, and freshen up.

Sat around camp relaxing and getting in a little 'Sky & Telescope' magazine reading. Around 3:45pm, I walked down to help setup registration. Also stopped in on Tom F's virtual spectroscopy talk in the Jones Building. And, along the way, I stopped by to say hi to Dave H with his meteorites setup in the outdoor classroom.





Late afternoon, before dinner, I uncovered my equipment and assembled the blackout tent. Also started-up the Allsky Camera & laptop, and organized my observing notes.

Then I went for a walkabout around the observing field to see all the astronomical equipment being uncovered for the evening. Talked with a bunch of folks: Nate S, Mike M and Dave R, Paul and Jan B, Geoff C, Dave A, Mark, Steve M, Pat P, Randy R, and Dave H, Alexi & Mike, Joe M (I may missed a few names, sorry!)











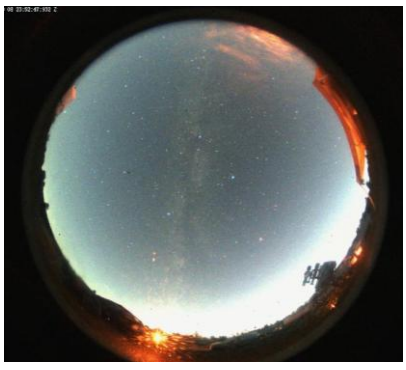






I finished up my walk just in time for a group dinner at Dean S's camp, brats and potato & macaroni salad provided by Gary S, with snacks and treats from Dean M and myself. During the dinner, folks dropped in and nibbled at the veggie and cheese tray. ☺

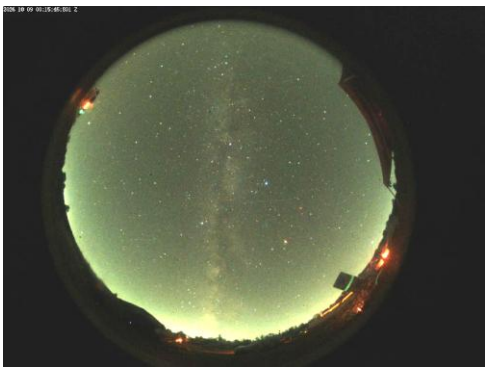


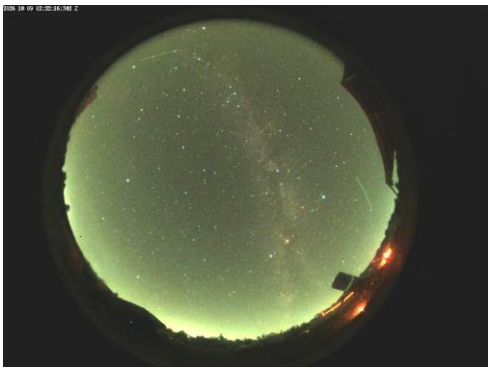


With the first stars of the evening beginning to shine, and a chill in the air, I headed back to my camp to change and power on the telescopes.

My observing plan for the night was to work on my Abell Galaxy Cluster project with the 8" SCT, and widefield imaging of the Pleiades with the S30-Pro. Once I had the 8" connected to my laptop and the camera cooled down, I slewed the telescope over to the SE and the bright star Fomalhaut in Piscis Austrinus to focus the camera and await full darkness. I then powered on the S30-Pro, polar aligned it, and sent it to M27 – "Dumbbell Nebula" to work on a long exposure while I went back to starting the 8" SCT on its first target.

With the sky now nearing full darkness, the Milky-Way was glowing nicely overhead.





As the 8” was already sitting in Piscis Austrinus – the “Southern Fish”, I decided re-observe a couple of galaxies from my re-do list, NGC7361 and the pair NGC7313 & NGC7314.

First up: NGC7361 is a +12.5 mag highly-inclined spiral about 50 MLY distant. It has an obscured dim core but does display some dusty detail in its arms. The primary galaxy of the second pair is NGC7314, a +11.9 mag spiral about 55 MLY distant. It displays a bright galactic core and well defined spiral arms with dust lanes. To the lower left of the big galaxy is its smaller line-of-sight companion – NGC7313, a + 14.4 mag spiral at 262 MLY.

Here’s the EAA observations:

NGC7361



NGC7313 & 7314



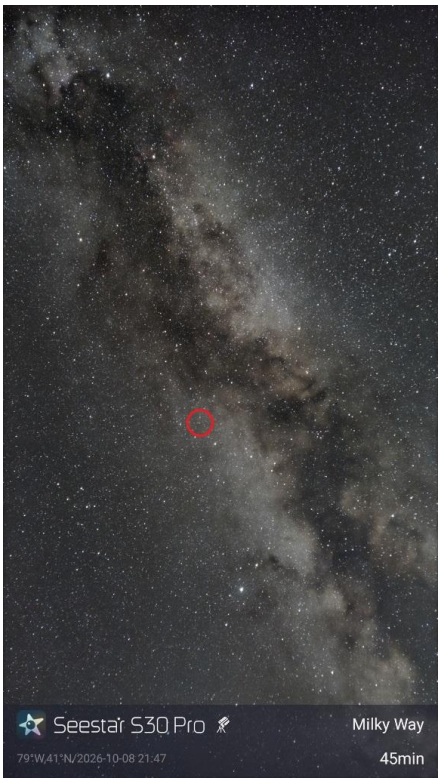
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap, NGC7361 for 60 minutes, NGC7313 & NGC7314 for 30 minutes).

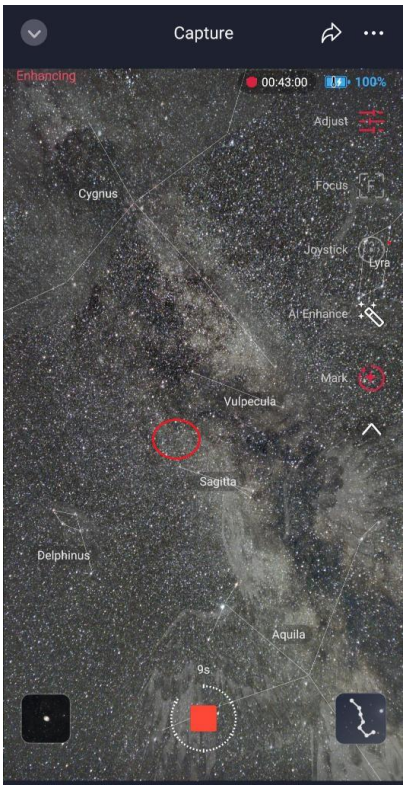
While working on these ‘fishy’ galaxies, Roxanne stopped-in and needed a little assist with using the Sharpcap Livestack feature. I walked over to her observing tent and helped her get livestacking running on her laptop for her target – M8 ‘Lagoon Nebula’.
I think I may have converted Roxanne to the “EAA” way! ☺

Duane D also stopped by to say hello and talk about AllSky cameras as he’s working on putting one together for himself. He has the basic setup ready to go, so I hope to see AllSky images from him in the future. Later Karrie dropped in to visit for a few minutes, and then Steve B popped-in to talk about S30-Pro SeeStar app user tips around the “AI Enhancement tool” star-reduction feature, and Dual Milky-Way mode. Steve explained to me how well he’s doing with the ‘Planning Mode’ feature, something that I haven’t really tried myself. Now I think I’m going to have to try that out.

Here’s the S30-Pro observation of M27 – “Dumbbell Nebula” which I used to demo the SeeStar app tools to Steve B:





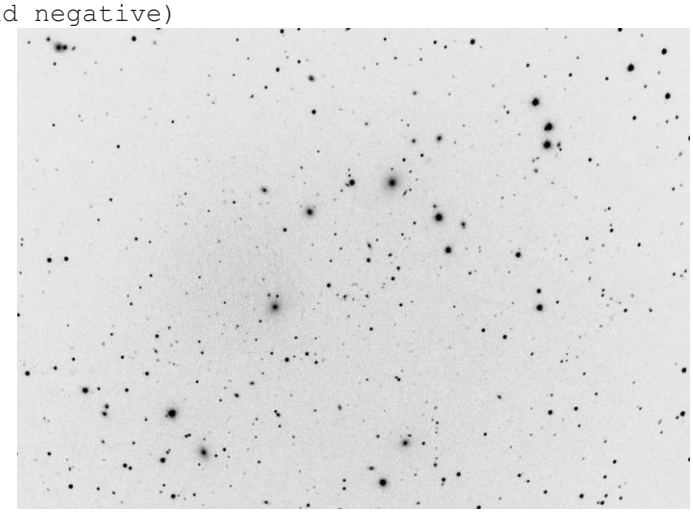


(SeeStar S30Pro, both 48 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 30 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 45 minutes, IR filter)

With the two southern galaxy observations finished, I pulled out my Alvin Huey guide book on "Observing the Abell Galaxy Clusters" and slewed the 8" over to the big fish of Pisces rising in the SE. After checking the focus, I pointed the scope to Abell76, a +15th mag cluster of around 42 galaxies, centered on IC1565, a +13.4 mag elliptical galaxy around 511 MLY distant. In the FOV I was also able to identify several other galaxies – IC1566, IC1568, IC1569, and a number of MCG# and MAC# galaxies.

Here's the observation of Abell76 (light and negative)





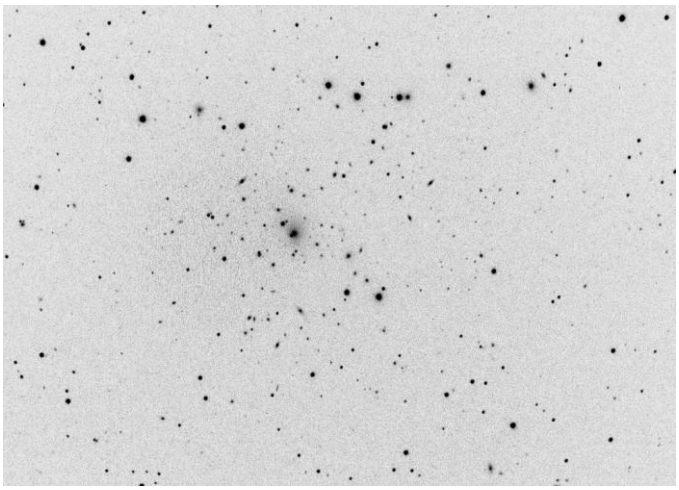
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

While I was working the Abell galaxy, I sent the S30-Pro over to M45 - "Pleiades" for an hour long soak. Had a lot of fun with that. I'll save that observation for the end.

Around 10:30, Karrie and I walked over to the Western field to deliver Snickerdoodles, stopping in to visit Dean S, Dean M, Duane D, and Geoff C.

Back on camp, I continued the Abell Galaxy Cluster hunt, with the next target still in Pisces – Abell193. This +16th mag cluster contains around 58 galaxies centered on IC1695, a +14.9 mag elliptical galaxy around 662 MLY distant. Many little Mac# galaxies in FOV.

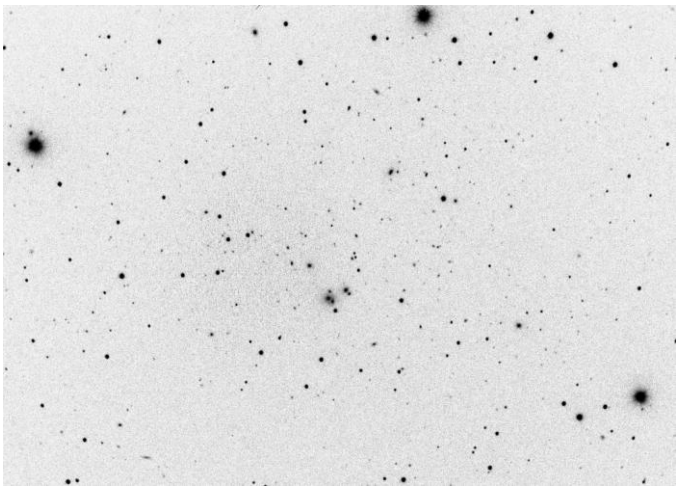




(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

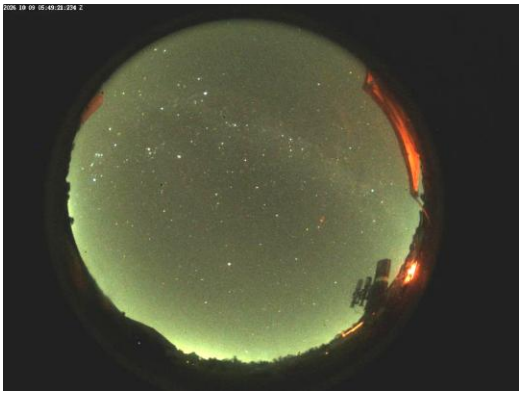
Then on to Abell240, consisting of around 43 galaxies, +15.6 mag at a distance of 1 BLY centered on elliptical galaxy UGC1191.





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

A little after midnight, I delivered KitKats around the field, visiting with Gary S, Steve & Deb B, and Mike M. While the night started out promising, sky transparency went soft, dimming the Milky Way.



Finally, here's the M45 - "Pleiades" S30-Pro observation. First using the 30mm lens and the 3mm lens for dual contextual viewing. (normal view, then 40% star-reduction)



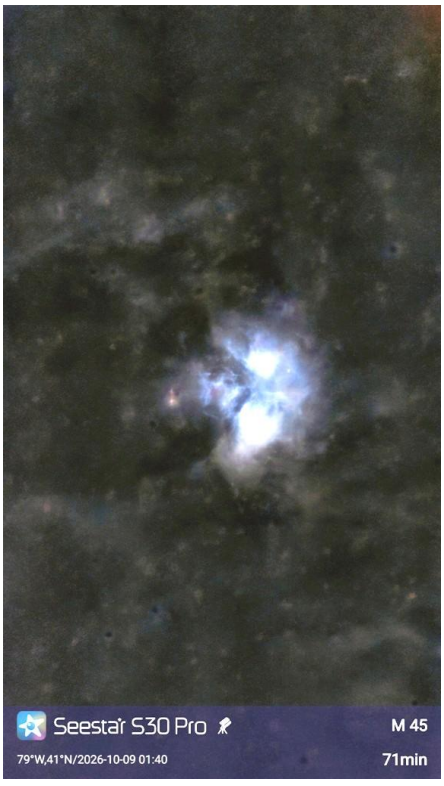




I then decided to go for an even wider FOV on the Pleiades, to try and catch the faint IFN (cirrus) dust that surrounds the open cluster. So I put the 30mm in mosaic mode and re-imaged for around 70 minutes. Here's the normal view and then 40% star-reduction. Then I completely 100% removed all the stars and boosted the brightness/contrast and I was able to pull out the surrounding dust. Pretty Cool!!!







At 1:30am, the 8" SCT gem mount became stubborn, and as the outdoor temp was down to 41 degrees and I was too tired to debug, I shutdown the scopes and called it a night. Here's the AllSky time-lapse from the night: https://youtu.be/ahlry2u8uXQ

Friday 10/09/2026:

Slept in till a quarter after 9am. Enjoyed a leisurely breakfast, and then headed outside to uncover the scopes to dry from the dew. After consulting the weather forecast, with the new gulf Cat-2 hurricane Isaias pushing cloud bands northward, I decided to pack up the main telescope later today. Walked my trash down to the dumpster and helped Steve B move tables back up to the outdoor classroom for the raffle prizes. Also caught a bit of Gary S's Pixinsight workshop.





During a break in Gary's workshop, we moved the doorprizes out of the Jones building into the registration tent. A little later, Dean M and I move the doorprizes in his truck up to the outoor classroom and setup on the tables. With the weather forecast having gone downhill, Several folks packed up and headed home, including Geoff, Duane, and Dean M.

Caught the welcome speach by ORAS President Tim S and then sat in for a few minutes on Isa M's talk on Indigenous Caribbean Astronomy. Isa was very entertaining with his Caribbean mythology stories! Later I sat in on Olayinka F's presentation on Astronomers without Borders in Nigeria. Also helped out at the registration desk.





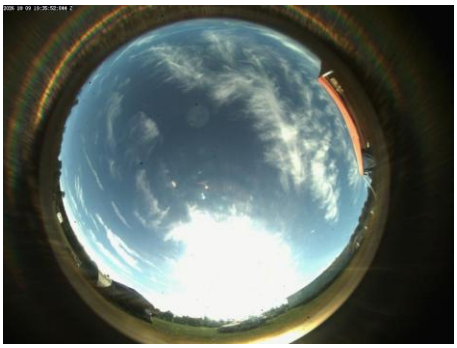








At 6pm, I headed back to camp for dinner and to prep the S30-PRO for the night.
The partly clear sky had begun to go mostly overcast, with a pretty sunset.





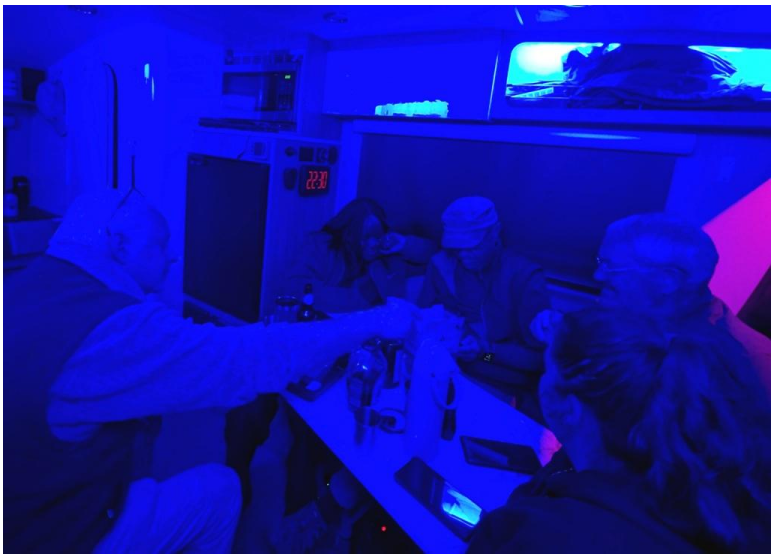


From 7 to 10pm I worked the observatory with help from Tim S. (Observatory Tour and Green laser tour). The observatory comes equipped with a 30" f/3 Starstructure GOTO visual reflector telescope, a Celestron 14" SCT GEM pier-mounted dedicated astrophotography telescope, and a Meade 14" LX200 equatorial tripod-mounted telescope for both visual and beginning imaging, all under a roll-off roof.

The sky was hazy with thick bands. But, we were still able to observe M31, M13, M11, M15, and Saturn thru the gaps and I was able to point out the brighter constellations with my green laser. It was a nice little crowd of about 12 to 15 visitors.
We were even treated to a tight group of recently launched Starlink satellites passing overhead thru the Summer Triangle.



Around 9:30pm, after the last guest had left, Tim and I closed out the observatory, and I headed back to camp. With the haze, I decided not to bother trying to use the SeeStar, so I put it away and instead headed over to Dean S's camp for refreshments. He already had a little crowd there, Olayinka, Gary, and Karrie,and we were soon joined by Tim. Dean kept his inside blue night lights on in case someone was trying to observe or image thru the sky muck, which made for an interesting 'lounge' effect, LOL!



Around 12:30am, the group broke up and Karrie and I headed back to our camps.
After spending a little time reading, I turned in for bed at 1:30am.

Here's the AllSky time-lapse from the night: https://youtu.be/o2yQOzbFhUg

Saturday 10/10/2026:
Up early at 8:30am and a quick breakfast.
It was a hazy, partly cloudy morning with thicker outlier cloud bands from the hurricane. I spent the next hour packing away the easy-up canopy and the AllSky camera and S30-PRO EQ tripod. Around 10:30, ORAS member Bob K arrived for a day visit and I spent time catching up with him. It was good seeing Bob back up at the observatory where he had donated a lot of sweat equity over the years.

At 11am Abbas M have a great talk on hands on astronomy.



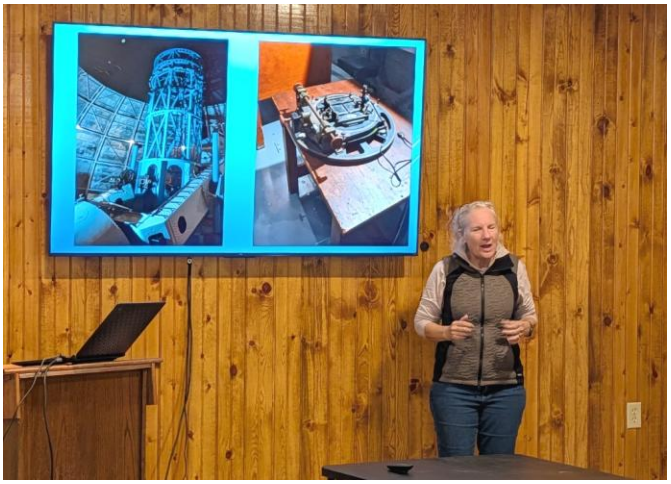




Bob and I headed down to registration at noon to collect the observing contest entries and Bob gave me a hand in tabulating and judging the winners. While Bob was attending Roxanne K's 1pm talk on her adventure out in California with the 100" Hooker Telescope, I grabbed a bite of lunch from the food booth and finished completing the observing award certificates.

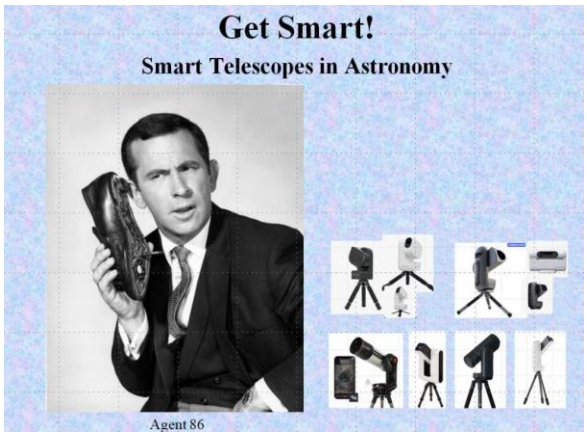








At 2pm, I hosted a discussion on smart telescopes with audience participation such as Steve B and his Celestron Origin telescope. It was an interesting discussion.





At 3pm, Dave Holden gave a presentation on meteorite classification.
And at 4pm Rachel F gave a talk on her becoming a professional astronomer.





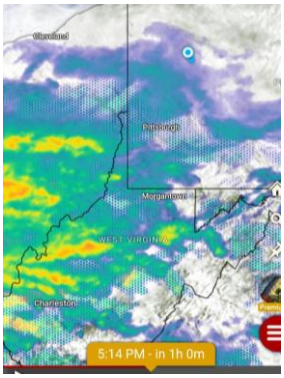
At 5pm, everyone gathered around the new sundial for the group photo by Steve B, with assist by Dean S. Then everyone headed up to the outdoor classroom for the Pizza Party, Observing Contest awards, and the Doorprize drawings. Our buddy Karrie cleaned up on both the observing contests and the doorprizes!







With AstroBlast officially concluded and rain inbound, most attendees left for home while the AstroBlast and Facilities Committee members cleaned and packed up the observatory grounds and buildings. Just nine of us were staying overnight on the field.
At dusk we gathered under the outdoor classroom pavilion for an after starparty 'party'.





Around 10pm the party began to break up, and I headed back to my little teardrop at 10:30pm, barely beating the raindrops. Stayed up till midnight, then to bed.

Sunday 10/11/2026:
Overnight we had a steady light rain. Up at 8am to finish packing the inside of the camper and hitch up the car in-between rain showers. Roxanne was the first to head out. After making a few goodbyes I was on the road home by 9:30am. Drove thru a few rain showers along I80 that slowed me down, but finally hit drier weather once I was heading south on I79. Pulled into the home driveway at 12:15pm.

So this brings to a close my 8th astro-camping trip of the year. While I had a streak of great observing nights early on, the weekend weather wasn't good, and though I consider this a successful trip, I did not yet break the overall 2026 'cloud curse'.
But I did whittle-down my EAA observing list backlog! ☺

Saturday, Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday evenings before and at the start of AstroBlast were great nights! Wednesday, was bombed by storms, Thursday was a decent night, though the sky transparency was soft after midnight, Thanks to a hurricane, Friday night was a hazy unusable mess and Saturday cloudy. Eight nights total for this trip, four good full nights and one half night of clear skies vs. three and a half nights of haze, clouds, and rain. (But no wildfire smoke!). Still, my home clubs, 2026 AstroBlast convention in conjunction with the IAU International Pro-Am Workshop at the observatory was a fun event with lots of great presentations!

For those keeping track of my trips, (and I actually had two people tell me they were keeping up with my tally, lol), this brings me up to:
8 trips and 52 days: clear=20.5, cloudy=31.5.
Next month I'm planning a trip south to Calhoun, and maybe also in December, so there's still hope of breaking even this year!

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