Black Forest Star Party 2026

With great anticipation, I was awaiting the flipping of the calendar to September and the Black Forest Star Party. I had missed the 2025 event, due to a trip out west to the Okie-Tex Star Party, but this year I was staying in Pennsylvania and was looking forward to attending the 2026 BFSP. The Labor Day weekend prior to the actual starparty had great observing weather and I had high hopes for that to continue into the week, but as the forecast began flip-flopping around, I began to worry that the 'cloud curse' had returned to once again haunt me. Still, the mountain where Cherry Springs is located is renowned for making its own weather, so I crossed my fingers and packed the car and camper for the five hour trip northward.

Tuesday 09/08/2026:

Due to a family commitment, I wasn't able to leave prior to today. So this morning I was up early for the drive up to CS. Left PGH at 8am, other than sitting in downtown rush hour, it was a pleasant drive northwards under a sunny blue sky. Did encounter several miles of orange cone flowers on I80 past Brookville.

Arrived at the park at 12:30pm. Stopped at the new ranger station to register, but the office was closed, so I grabbed a camping form to fill out and headed over to the observing field. Probably around 40 or so amateurs on the field including Karrie with her tents setup in the north section of Orion Ave, and Dean S just south of our section. They had both had several great nights of imaging over the holiday weekend. Down in the SW field were Adam T, Roxanne K, Tony D, and several other acquaintances. Late afternoon, Eric L arrived and headed to his usual spot by the back fence. The sky was initially partly cloudy and hazy when I arrived but began clearing during the afternoon.





After greeting and visiting Karrie and Dean, I spent the next several hours setting up camp and 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 EVO 50mm 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 S30Pro smart telescope on an equatorial wedge & field tripod.

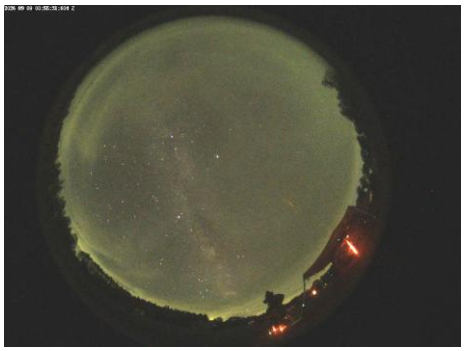
Regardless of how you camp or the astro equipment that you might have while at Cherry Springs State Park during the BFSP, you always know that you're in the right place when "**X**" marks the spot". (my thanks to Karrie K for pointing that out). LOL.



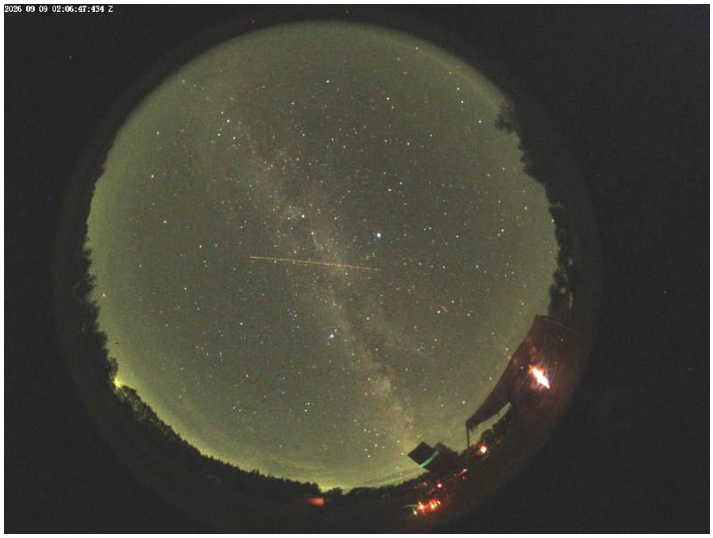
Walking back from the restrooms, I ran in to Roxanne and then later Tony D.
Then got in a late afternoon nap, Adam T dropped in for a visit and I promised to catch him later in the week. Then a phone home and dinner. At 7pm, I joined an ORAS Board zoom meeting till 8:30pm when I dropped off the call to polar align my scopes. Later that evening, I was visited by Tony D.

The sky had gone rather hazy late afternoon towards sunset, but partly cleared at dusk, allowing me to see Polaris and get the scopes aligned and focused.





With the sky conditions rapidly improving, I was able to get in several EAA observations. First up using the 8” SCT was the new supernova SN2026aaiv in the ‘Deer Lick Galaxy’ – NGC7331 in Pegasus. The ~+11.5 mag extragalactic Type 1a supernova was easily visible near the core of the galaxy, the second one to go off in NGC7331 in the last two years! (last one, SN2025rbs, was in July 2025 on the opposite side of the 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).

The sky transparency continued to improve during the early evening, though dew began to become heavy, coating all exposed surfaces. After finishing the supernova observation and sharing it with several folks, I moved on to a couple of Cloudy Nights EAA September Challenge objects – ‘galaxy pairs’, first observing NGC6745 – “Birds Head Galaxy’ in Lyra, one of the few galaxies in this constellation, and then NGC6670A & NGC6670B known as the “Dolphin Galaxy’ in Draco. Using your imagination a little, you can see both of the shapes. The EAA observations are on the next page below.

While hunting these galaxies I was visited by Dean S and Karrie. They were the lucky recipients of several KitKats that I kept in the fridge. While Karrie was there, I demonstrated how to use Sharpcap and its Livestack function to do EAA techniques.
A little later Karrie returned with her tablet and demonstration how to use Nina to plan and execute an imaging session. Good educational stuff to share!

Here are the galaxy observations, first NGC6745, and then NGC6670A&B:





(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 45/30 minutes).

While using the 8" SCT, the S30Pro was also busy collecting a deep mosaic of IC1805 and IC1848 – "Heart and Soul Nebula" in Cassiopeia. IC1805, also known as SH2-190 is around 7,500 light years distant, while IC1845, (SH2-199), is also about 7,500 LY away and both are part of a larger molecular nebular complex of glowing ionized hydrogen gas and dark dust lanes. A pretty sight in a widefield FOV such as the S30Pro provides.





(SeeStar S30Pro, 60 second exposure in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 59 minutes, NB filter, mosaic)

Around 1:30am, the sky went soft again, with clouds rolling-in, so I shutdown the scopes for the night and headed indoors to bed at 2am.

Wednesday 09/09/2026:

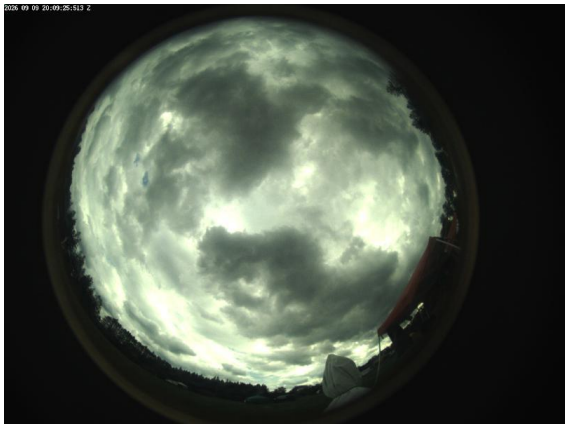
Slept in till 9:45am. While fixing breakfast, Dean S pulled out for home. He already had three great nights at CS and needed to do work at the ORAS Observatory. It was a cloudy morning with temps in the upper 60's. The weather radar showed scattered showers to our north and west. I secured my canopy and shade visor a little better and stowed my camping chair. Visited with Karrie for a bit. Shortly before noon Denny H arrived and setup his camper to my north. More amateurs arrived throughout the day bringing the total on site to about 100. The BFSP staff began arriving, including our buddies Bob and Dave, and setup their starparty HQ across from us.

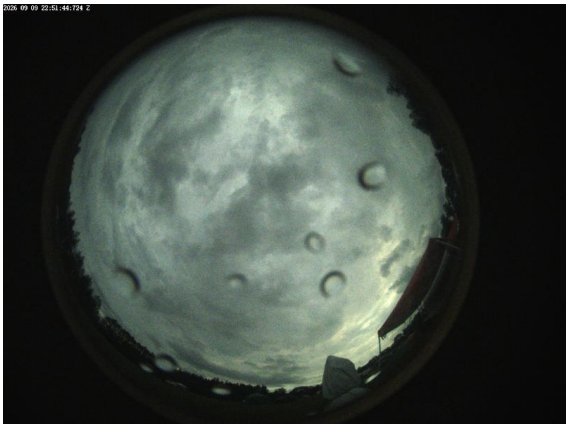




Made a run down to Lyman Park for a shower and once back spent time debugging my AllSky camera to figure out why it kept dropping frames and freezing up. Turns out using a different active USB fixed the problem. Karrie and I then walked over to the Western field to visit Adam T to discuss Winter Star Party, but Adam was on a work call, so we dropped in to visit the LVAAS folks, Kyle, Ben, Eric, and several others. Got to tour Eric's new Tab 360 CS camper, very nice!

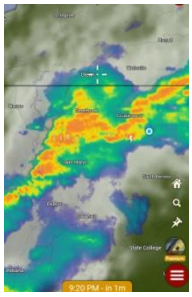
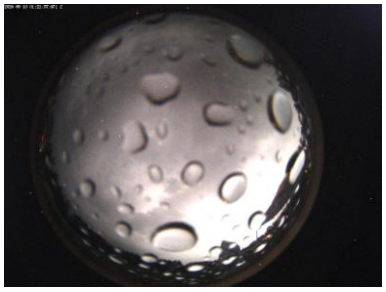
Late afternoon I sat out on my chair to read and watch storm clouds pass to our north. Around 6pm, Karrie and I joined Denny for snacks. While watching angry looking clouds going overhead, a strong wind gust sent a nearby canopy cart-wheeling across the field nearly taking out a big dob and another tent before the owners chased it down. Yikes!! A little before 7pm, raindrops forced us back to our camps.

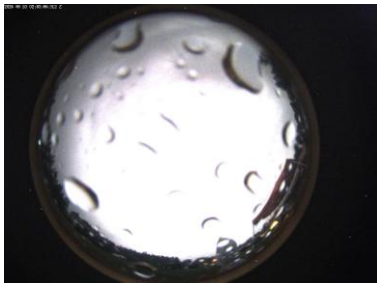




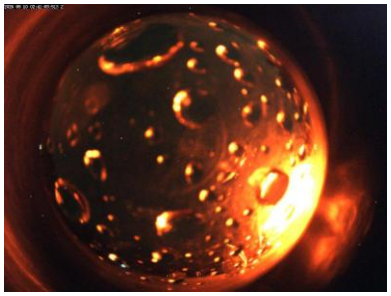
While getting ready to shutdown the AllSky cam, I got the bad idea of leaving the AllSky uncovered and running all night to catch the incoming storms later that evening. (spent the rest of the week regretting that move as the AllSky cam leaked! ☹)

I fixed dinner and phone home, then spent the evening surfing the web and listening to the rain on the camper roof. Between 9:30 and 10:30pm, a long line of thunderstorms with heavy rain rolled thru. It was raining so hard that it was drowning out the podcast I'm listening too thru my hearing aids, lol! Here’s a few pics of the storm with the AllSky cam. (I was hoping to catch lightning bolts but the camera exposure was set too high so all I got was bright flashes).

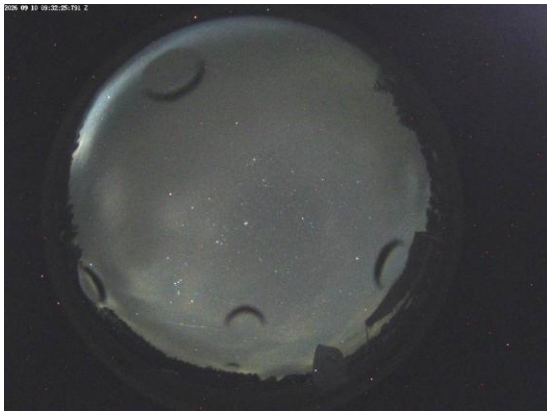


Finally around 11pm, with the storms quieting down, allowing folks to go outside and check for damage. (The next day I learned we got 1.5" of rain). You could hear people out and see flashlights around the field. Karrie's canopy took a beating and collapsed, nearly trapping her inside her tent. Other than a little water pooling in my canopy, my camp came thru the storm fine. Denny had a nice little lake pond next to his truck, LOL.




Several nearby folks had water inside their tents. After checking to see if Karrie needed any help, I headed back indoors. Stayed up awhile longer, went to bed at 11:30pm.

Here’s a video that I made the next day: https://youtu.be/6opLIlX8ios
Those who were awake before dawn got a little treat,,, Stars!



Thursday 09/10/2026:
Up early to check on the camp. Fortunately, my canopy frame was fine and the fabric wasn't too stretched. Karrie had managed to temporarily repair her canopy so it was functional for the rest of the week. My AllSky cam, which I had left uncovered and running all night, leaked and had condensation on the inside of the dome, so I turned on its internal fan and tilted the assembly up to help the water vapor escape. Later I borrowed a hair dryer from Denny to help evaporate the moisture. The morning had started off in the low 60's and mostly cloudy, but by 10am the sky began clearing and temps rose up to 70 degrees. I uncovered the telescopes to let them dry out in the warm sun.

After breakfast, I downloaded the AllSky frames and played with making a rain video. More people arrived on the field and I got two new neighbors to my east. The sky continued to be sunny with temps in the mid 70's

After lunch, Karrie and I walked over to the Western field to visit with Adam and his WSP buddy Ken. They gave us lots of good info on the Winter Star Party. Prior to talking with Adam & Ken, we stopped in to visit with Eric and the LVAS gang. Back at camp, while we were gone, the vendor's tent was setup, and 'Meteor Man' Dave H had setup up a table. The "Out of the Box Stellar Food Truck" vendor was also onsite with their main truck across Rt44 in the public area and an auxiliary vendor cart setup on the observing field.

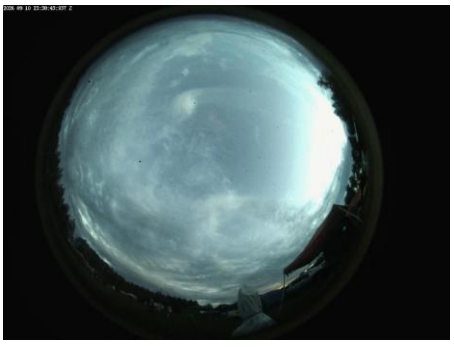




Back at camp, we had multiple new neighbors around us, including Pat from Dayton to my South. Most of the sections were filling up, I'd guess maybe 250 to 275 people were here. There are now seven Tab campers on the field. Almost enough for us to have a rally! LOL.

Late-afternoon, I did a practice session for my talk on Saturday. Then setup the laptop in the camper hatch work area, started up the AllSky cam, and uncovered the 8" SCT. Around 6:30pm, Tony D and Jim D stopped by to visit. At 7pm, I then headed indoors to heat up dinner and check-in at home.

Right before sunset the sky conditions began to go downhill with clouds and light rain advancing from the west. I covered up the scopes and put away my observing notes. Towards dusk, with the storms having past to our north and the sky partly clearing, I joined Denny and Karrie for a few snacks by Denny's trailer while we watched for satellites thru breaks in the clouds. Soon Polaris began to shine thru the haze and with a large cloud free gap in the north, Denny got out his laptop and began working on polar aligning his scope. Karrie and I kept watching for satellites but then realized it was actually becoming mostly clear! We scrambled getting our scopes uncovered.







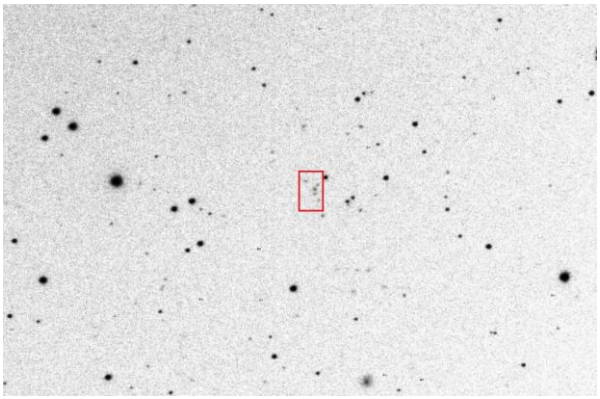
I hurriedly setup and EQ aligned the S30-PRO and began a mosaic on the Veil Nebula in Cygnus. Once that was running, I started up the 8" and camera, and then assembled the blackout tent. I quickly selected my first target of the night, a galaxy trio in Pegasus, part of the CN EAA Challenge objects, and slewed the 8" SCT telescope over to a nearby bright star. Once I had the main camera was focused, I slewed to the location of the three galaxies – NGC7463, 7464, & 7465.
The brightest of the three galaxies is barred-lenticular galaxy NGC7465 located near center FOV. Close by is NGC7463, a large, distorted barred-spiral that is interacting with its smaller neighbor NGC7464. Finally, there's the small, dim, edge-on spiral PGC7028 that's visible in the upper left of the FOV. 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 30 minutes).

I then moved on to the one Palomar Galaxy Cluster from my observing list that is currently visible during the Fall season: +16mag PCG2328+0900, also in Pegasus. Palomar clusters are generally so far distant that about all that is observable is the core of each individual galaxy.

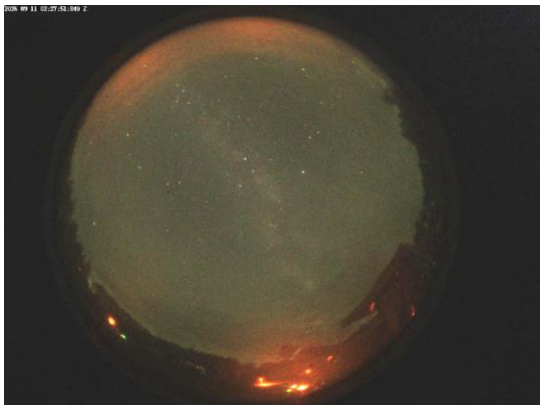




(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 15 minutes).

Around 10:30pm, I delivered KitKats to Denny and Karrie who were both sitting out over by Denny's telescope. Karrie was imaging M8, the Lagoon Nebula, and Denny was imaging M17, the Swan Nebula, both in Sagittarius. After visiting with them, I headed back to camp to continue my galaxy observation. While I was deciding on my next target, clouds began rolling in from the west obscuring the sky. I quickly finished the Veil Nebula mosaic that the S30Pro was working on. Here’s the observation (cropped):





(SeeStar S30Pro, 60 second exposure, 30mm lens stacked for 59 minutes, NB filter, mosaic)

After checking the weather satellite, I decided to call it quits and shutdown the scopes. Visited for a few minutes then headed indoors. In bed by midnight.

Friday 09/11/2026:

Knowing it was going to be a long night of observing ahead, I slept in till 9:30am. Overnight the sky had finally cleared around 4am with temps dropping down into the low 50's. The morning was sunny with mild temps in the mid 60's. A beautiful morning!

With the AllSky cam continuing to have condensation on the inside of its dome, I decided to disassemble the housing and let the interior dry out in the Sun.
I then visited the vendor tent, talked with Dave H about ORAS next month, then with the AstroWorld guys about the new Dwarf Draco smart scope.





Headed down to Lyman Run to freshen up. The drive down the mountain is always scenic, but today I noticed a definite touch of color on the tree leaves. Winter is coming.

Once back at Cherry Springs park, I headed over to register, then checked out the T-Shirts and door prizes, and chatted with the solar observing team. On the way back to my camper, I stopped over by the pavilion to visit with the folks setting up the AV system.
It takes a dedicated team of volunteers to staff a major starparty!!
I'm always very appreciative of their efforts to put on a great event for us attendees.









After fixing lunch, I checked the AllSky cam and everything looked to be dry, so I then reassembled the housing and plugged it into the laptop to test. Works! Yea!
Visited with Denny over at his camper where we experimented using Sharpcap to apply flats & darks to his previously saved images.

The afternoon continued to be a sunny beautiful day here at CS. Pretty much a full house with probably 400+ people now onsite. Most of the prime camping real-estate had been taken with telescope being assembled everywhere.

Due to the damp weather earlier in the week, I didn't take many walks around the field. But the warm sunny sky inspired me to take an afternoon walkabout around the observing field where I met a number of other amateur astronomers. I started off with my own section with Denny and Karrie, and then I met my other nearby neighbors: Margarita, Jeff, Jameson, Matt, Andrew, Erik, Thorne, Tim, Sam, Nick, and Brett. Jarek and Christine, Jasper and Levi, Ian and Dave and Glen.











Most of the time during my stroll, the telescopes looked like little fall Halloween Ghosts with their covers on. LOL!




I always enjoy walking around the field seeing all the diverse astronomy equipment and meeting new folks. Though there were a few particularly interesting ones,,,,,





With the swap meet going on back at the Vendors Tent, I hurried back to camp and grabbed several tube rings that I had brought to try and sell, setting up a small table.
Had some interest, (one fella called me the 'Lord of the Rings',,, LOL!), but no bites.
I did get to meet the keynote speaker Charles B, and bought his latest book.
Back at camp, I prepped a few things for the upcoming night, and then got in a quick nap.
At 6pm, I was invited to join the BFSP club for dinner over in the pavilion. Delicious!!







After dinner, I uncovered my telescope and setup the S30Pro and then went for another walk around the observing field till dusk. Met John, Girish, Jeff, Dean, Jingyi, Don and Rosalie and Christa and Pam, Carl, Arlene and Michael, Pat, Scott and Maria, Carl and Brettny, Art, Mathew, Irene, Adam, Jeff and James and their telescope army, Ben, Jim, David and Roberta, Tony, and Dave.




































So the overwhelming majority of my 'people & telescope' photos came from Friday afternoon and early evening when the weather finally cooperated and the scope covers came off. Sorry if I missed you! ☺

While walking around, Dave M pointed out a great colorful display of the "Belt of Venus" above the trees along the eastern horizon. (caused by atmospheric backscatter and Earth's shadow). You can see a little of it in the last photo with Dave and Tony & his Big Dob.

Continuing on with the walk: Gene, Andrew, John, the group from Ithaca, David, the amateur astronomers from ASRAS and LHVAS - Henry, Hank, Doron, Noah, Mark, Bill, Kyle and Mike and Matt and McKenzie, wrapping up with Tom and his SeeStar.



















(Hopefully, I got everyone's name in order with the photos,,, ☺)

With the sky growing dark and a chill in the air, I hurried back over to my section of the field. Once back at camp, I finished setting up the blackout tent and with the temps at 61 degrees and falling I headed indoors to change into warmer clothing.

It was a beautiful evening, the Summer stars were shinning overhead, Arcturus falling down the western sky, the Big Dipper riding low on the NW horizon, and soon the soft glow of the Sagittarius Milky-Way due south, stretching upwards thru the star clouds of Scutum and Aquila towards the great rift in Cygnus. A magical Cherry Springs night!







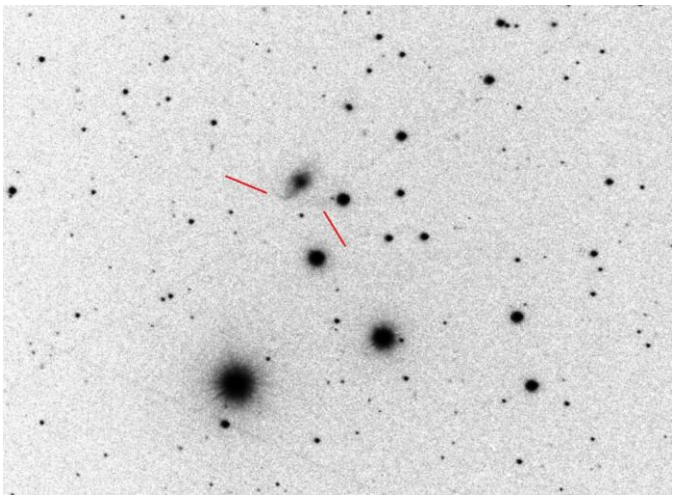
(S30Pro – 3mm widefield 40 minutes)

My observing program plans for the night was galaxy centric with the 8" SCT, working on a number of Arp Peculiar galaxies in Draco and Camelopardalis near Ursa Major.
Once dark enough, I slewed the telescope over to +1.8 mag star 'Dubhe' one of the bright Bowel Stars in the Big Dipper to focus the cameras and sync the mount. There it waited a little while till full astronomical darkness.

While the 8" was in a holding pattern, I fired-up the S30Pro and ran it thru its EQ Align process, then sent it over to a tiny globular cluster in Sagittarius – NGC6522, which lays in "Baades Window", an opening the nearer starclouds allowing a deeper look towards the center of our galaxy. There I let the little SeeStar do a long-exposure of the region using both the main 30mm lens and the widefield 3mm lens. (more on the observation later)

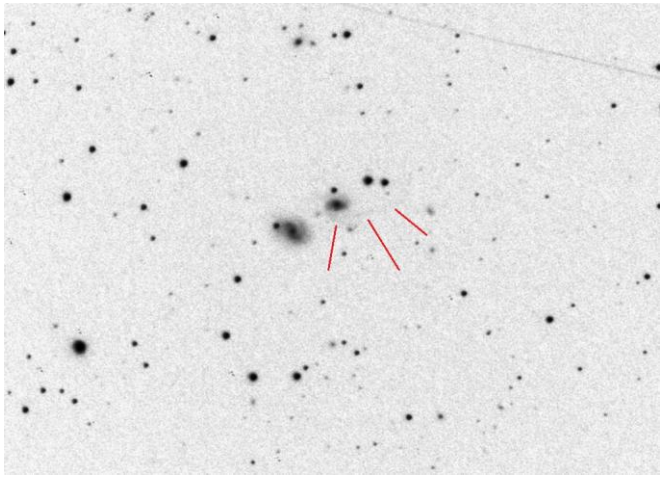
Went on a quick visit to see Denny and Karrie, bringing KitKats. While there I lent Denny a hand in re-aligning his telescope. The dew came quick and heavy, soaking any exposed surface. Fortunately, the dew heaters kept it at bay. Outdoor temps dropped down to a chilly 53 degrees. But under my blackout tent it was a balmy 65 deg.

Back at camp, it was time for my first Arp galaxy – UGC5814, known as Arp156, located in Draco the Dragon. The +15th mag barred-spiral galaxy was easily located near several bright +8th & +9th mag field stars and displayed several disturbed arms.
Here are the EAA positive and negative observations below:

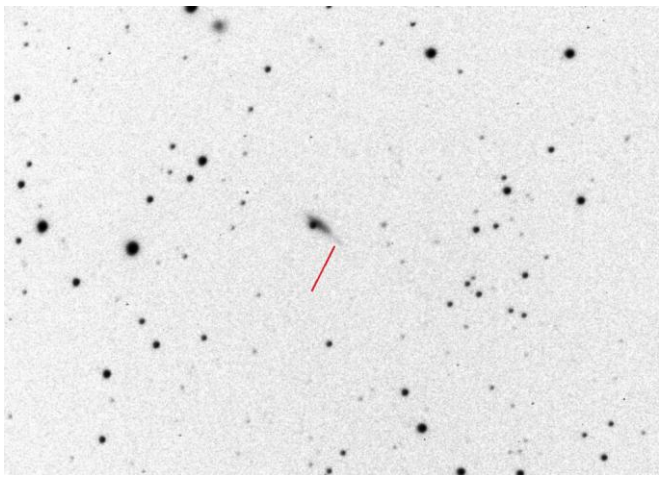
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

I then moved on to AR181 – interacting pair of spirals NGC3212 & NGC3215, still in Draco. NGC3215 is the brighter of the two at +13.1 mag, but galaxy NGC3212 (+14.0) is the more interesting as a long filament can be detected extending southward. (center of 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).

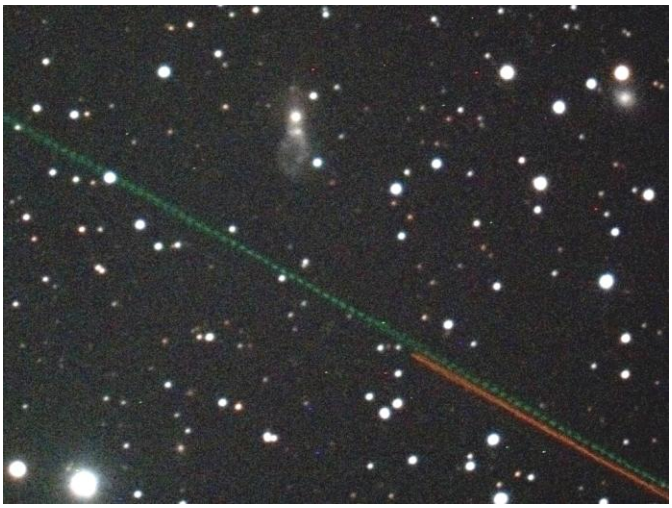
My next peculiar galaxy in Draco was UGC5050 – Arp207. At +15.4 mag, the little edge-on spiral lays close to a faint field star and displays a very faint extension to the southwest of the spindle shape.

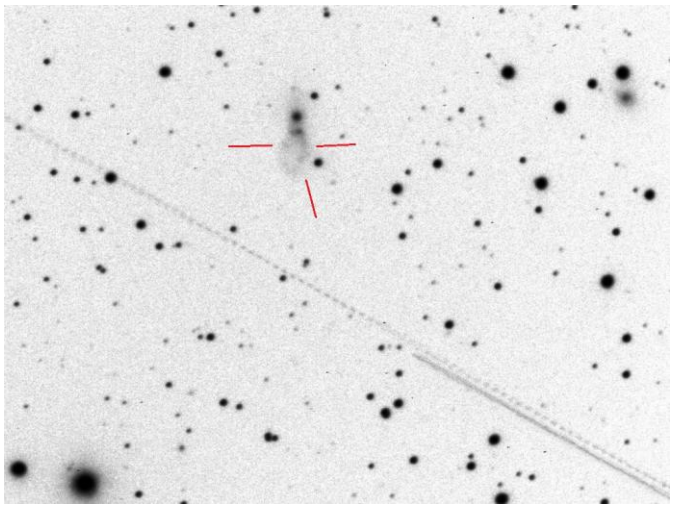



(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

A little later during the evening, both Denny and Karrie dropped in to visit. Also, my next door neighbor, Pat, stopped by to see my EAA observing setup.

And finally, what would be my last observation using the 8” SCT for the night was Arp141, a +13.2 mag elliptical galaxy named UGC3730 located in Camelopardalis. This 132 MLY distant galaxy appears to have a ring-shaped extension off its southern end. The larger elliptical (northern brighter core) is thought to be tidally ripping apart a smaller spiral (smaller southern core) greatly disturbing the smaller galaxy. Interesting!!

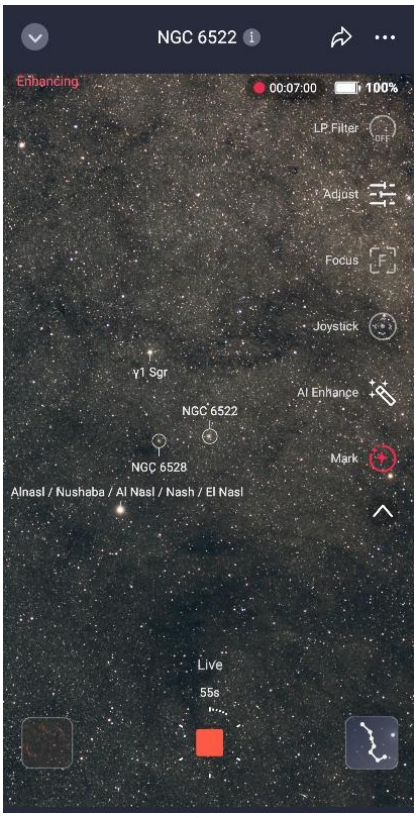


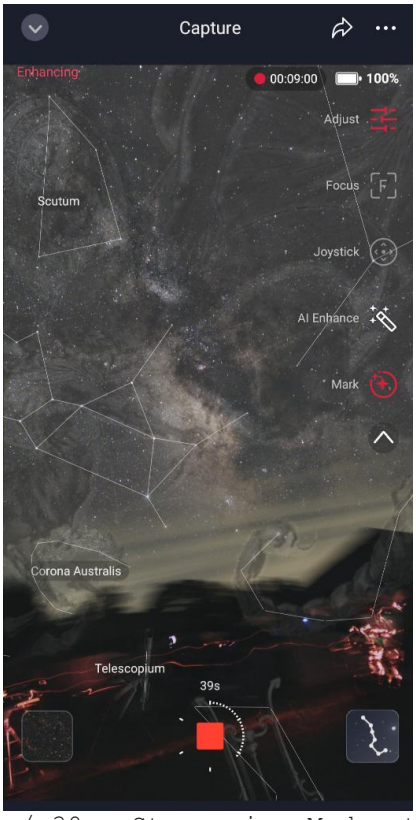


(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

As I mentioned earlier, while the 8” was galaxy hunting the S30Pro was imaging ‘Baades Window’ centered on globular cluster NGC6522. This ‘window’ contains a relatively smaller amount of interstellar gas and dust, allowing us to peer a little closer into the central bulge of our Milky-Way galaxy. In addition to NGC6522, a much smaller globular cluster – NGC6528 can also be seen within the window. Here’s the observation, along with a couple of phone screenshots:



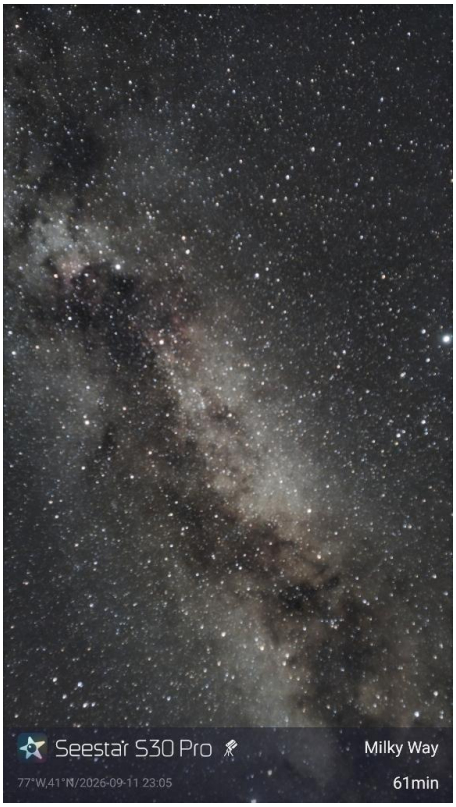


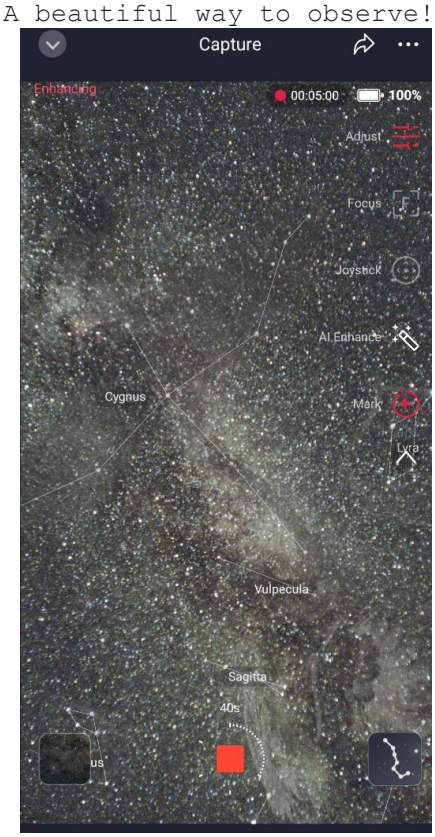


(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 30 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 40 minutes, IR filter)

With ‘Baades Window’ sinking into the southern horizon, I aimed the S30Pro high overhead to the “Tulip Nebula” – SH2-101 in Cygnus the Swan. While the main 30mm lens/camera was capturing the emission nebula, I activated Dual Contextual mode using the 3mm lens/camera to simultaneously observe the bright sections of Milky-Way starclouds in Cygnus, using the SeeStar’s livestack tools to visually enhance each view. A beautiful way to observe!





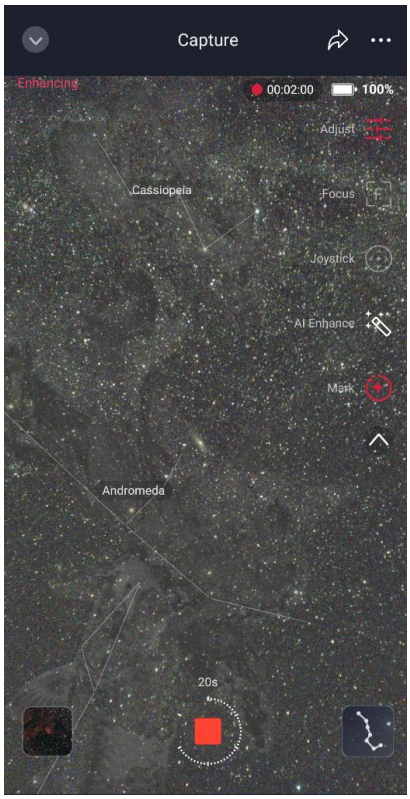


(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 60 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 61 minutes, IR filter)

I then went for a deep dive on the Andromeda Galaxy – M31, also utilizing both lens/cameras for a contextual view of our sister galaxy.

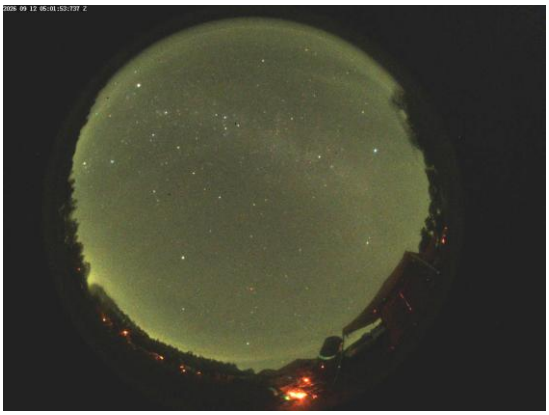






(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / IR filter)

A little after 1am, light clouds and haze began to move on from the west degrading sky transparency. It soon became apparent that the thickening hazy overcast would last for several hours.



Not quite ready to quit, I slewed the S30pro over to the still somewhat clear eastern horizon to try and catch a quick observation of M45 – the Pleiades. Unfortunately, the sky went from bad to worse quicker than I could finish. Here's what I got, a lot of mush around the Seven Sisters!





By 1:30am, Denny, Karrie, and I threw in the towel and called it a night.
After shutting down the telescopes and packing away the blackout tent, I headed inside the camper. Was in bed by 2am. (I heard the next day that it cleared again after 3am).

Here's the AllSky time-lapse video: https://youtu.be/K2M2JxufJwM

Saturday 09/12/2026:

Crowd noise woke me a little after 8am. After a quick breakfast, I headed down to Lyman Run Park to hit the showers. Back at camp, I headed over to the swap meet to see if there was anything I needed. ☺ At 11:30am, I gathered up my notes and laptop and headed over to the Pavilion for my Noon presentation on Observing Wolf-Rayet Shells. The CPO AV folks did a great job preparing the venue and getting me setup. There was a good crowd of eventually around 45 attendees that enjoyed the talk with good questions afterwards.



After walking my laptop back to camp, I dropped by the Dark Sky Fund table to visit with Chip and Maxine. Then I caught the tail-end of Dr. Joel Leja's talk on discoveries made by the Webb Space Telescope's first deep fields. It was very interesting, and I wish I had stayed for the start of his talk. I then joined Denny and Karrie for Steve Taylor's fun presentation on the mechanical side of maintaining the VLA radio telescopes.







After a short break it was time for the keynote - Charles Bracken and his story of writing his latest book, "The Astrophotographer's Universe". A very interesting and fun presentation, particularly enjoyed his 'Period(ic) Table' of objects to observe.





Due to the incoming afternoon rain, it had been a mass exodus from the park throughout the day, but still a large number of folks were in the pavilion for the keynote speaker.

Next was time for the Cherry Springs Park report by park ranger Scott M, Followed by the Dark Sky Fund report by Eric L. The Fund plans on working with the park officials to begin construction of additional fencing and plantings to help with the nighttime car headlight problem.





Then it was time for the Door Prize raffle. Denny won a gift certificate, Karrie got a new guide scope, and I won binocs. With the last of the official starparty activities over, the three of us walked back to camp in a light drizzle where we said goodbye to Karrie who had earlier packed up her equipment and tent and was driving home.
There were probably about 50 of us left on the field sitting thru a steady rain.

While Denny and I were sitting under his awning enjoying a pre-dinner snack, it began to downpour and that lasted for about an hour! But we had some fun, as we got to help the CPO AV crew get their stuck truck full of equipment out of the mud, lending Steve, Dave and Jan a hand. Denny finally drove his tuck over and Steve attached a tow strap and Denny was able to pull the truck back onto the solid gravel road. Steve was able to get the truck and equipment back in time to the rental facility to catch his flight back home to New Mexico.

Back at camp, we continue to visit till about 8:30 when I headed back to my camper for a late dinner and a call home. Spent the remainder of the evening reading and listening to the rain gently tapping on my camper roof.

Sunday 09/13/2026:

After a good night sleep, listening to it rain all night, I was up at 8am. It was a cool misty morning, but before long the sun began popping out thru the clouds and the field began to dry. Denny was finishing packing up and was on the road home by 9:15.
Most everyone else on the field was also breaking camp, but after checking the weather forecast, I decided to stay a few more days. There were several small "lakes" on the field so you had to watch where you walked. We asked Dave and Bob from the BFSP club if they knew how much rain we got, And they said the area got between 2 - 4" overnight.

I have my own little pond going in my canopy, came close to losing the easy-up, as water ponded on one side overnight and I had a big water bubble that stretched the fabric, but fortunately didn’t bend the aluminum frame, and after emptying the water, the top shrunk back to normal in the warm sun.




By 10:30am, we were down to about 20 people left on the field, and probably half of those were packing up. Spent the morning and early afternoon drying out things and sitting out enjoying the warm sunny weather. By 3pm, there were just five of us left on the field, including Christa, Jameson, and this fella. I think there were now more porta-johns on the field than people! LOL.





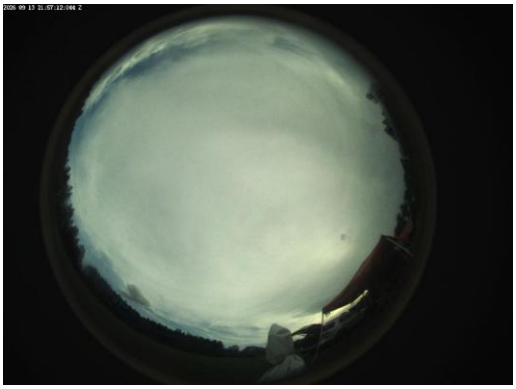


After driving down to Lyman Run to register for three more days, I kicked back in my camping chair under sunny skies and caught up on reading the latest Sky&Tel.



Around 5pm, I had a couple of visitors, Dave and Jan R, part of the AV folks from CPO, who stopped by to thank me for helping get their truck unstuck the previous evening. They had noticed my uncovered AllSky cam and were interested in learning about it. Christa also joined in with questions. With storm clouds beginning to move in at about 5:30, the group broke up and I began putting a few things away. Having finally got the AllSky Cam dried-out and not wanting to get it soaked again, I shut it down and covered up. Hurried a phone call home then made dinner before the storm arrived.





Around 7pm, we had some wicked looking clouds began moving in from the northwest. Jameson stopped over to warn that high winds were expected. I had already battened down, so I was ready for the incoming storm.





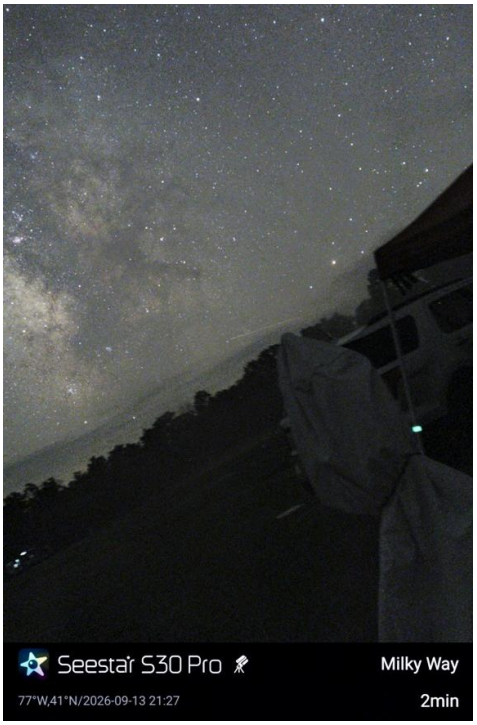


At a quarter after 7pm, several strong guests of wind went thru, with a heavy downpour set in that lasted for around 15 minutes, then a gentle rain that lasted till 7:30pm. Outdoor temp dropped 10 degrees, from 77 to 67. It was too damp and chilly to sit outside, so I decided to work on starparty photos inside the camper on my laptop. We were rewarded with a nice rainbow!



A little after 8pm, Christa stopped by to say it was starting to clear, but with all the rain it was very wet outdoors ant neither of us was very motivated to uncover and try to observe. Around 9pm, I strolled over to the restroom and on the walk back decided it was clear enough to do some work with the S30-PRO. After a quick polar align I slewed it over to the globular cluster M62 in Scorpius. After about 15 minutes the smart scope began having trouble stacking due to a band of clouds scurrying along the southern horizon. And soon after, a thick fog began covering the field.



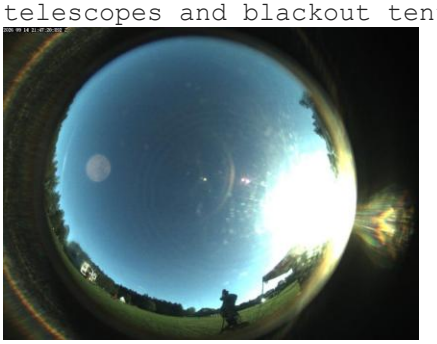


I decided to toss in the towel, powered down the SeeStar. Stayed up to 11:30pm reading.

Monday 09/14/2026:

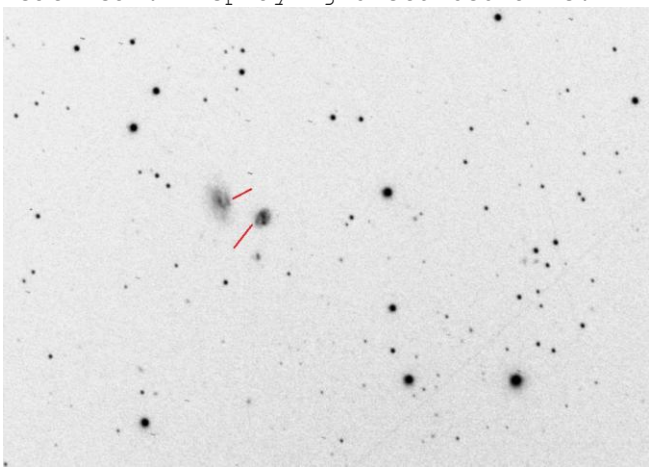
Slept in till 8:30am, woke to a partly sunny day, breezy with a chilly temp of 52 degrees. The field was still a bit damp but was drying quickly. Around 10am, the tent vendor arrived and dissembled the big tent. After breakfast, I ran my trash over to the starparty dumpster just in time to toss it in and watch the provider pick it up. The park staff was also busy on the field moving picnic tables back into the Pavilion and cutting grass. With temps in the mid 50's and a steady breeze blowing, it wasn't comfortable sitting outside, so I spent the morning and early afternoon in-out of the camper reading and working on my laptop. With the Sun evaporating the clouds and drying up the soggy field, it was a good day to dry out my carpet runners and pack them away.

A number of tent campers and several RV's arrived during the day to setup. Met my new neighbors across from me, Gary and his wife Terry from over near Philly. They had a camper van which initially got stuck in a soft spot in the southern field, but with help from the park staff they were able to free it. After an early dinner, I prepped the telescopes and blackout tent as I had a club zoom meeting at 7:30pm.



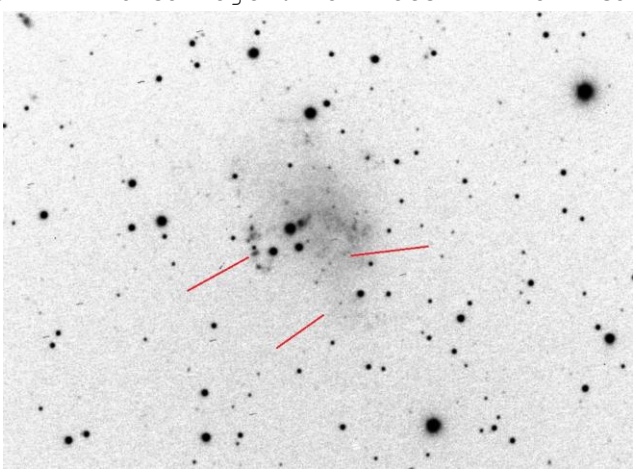


Arp peculiar galaxies in UMA:
Arp300 – UGC5028 & UGC5029 in Ursa Major, the Great Bear. Displaying disturbed arms.

(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).

Arp268 – UGC4305, also known as Holmberg-II, still in Ursa Major. Ha knots in Dwarf Gal.

After sitting for a week, while the imaging scopes were capturing starlight, I finally used the little 80mm visual refractor, sweeping up various deep-sky objects along the Milky Way from Sagittarius up thru Scutum. (M8, M22, M24, M16 & M17, M11, then M31, M33, the Alpha-Persei OB Association, and the Double-Cluster). Good visual fun!
Later I got out the binoculars and did a comparison test between the 12x50's and the 10x42's against various Messier Objects, While the 12x50 had better magnification, and resolving power the lighter-weight 10x42 was the winner for hand-held optics!

The heavy dew was insane! Moisture was dripping off the 80mm while I was using it.
I was also constantly wiping down the AllSky dome throughout the night as the heaters couldn't keep up with the outside condensation. I cranked the 8" SCT heaters to high and hoped the heater inside the little SeeStar could keep up. The outdoor temps fell thru the 50's all the way down to 44 degrees. But inside my blackout tent, I was able to keep it a nice warm 68 deg.

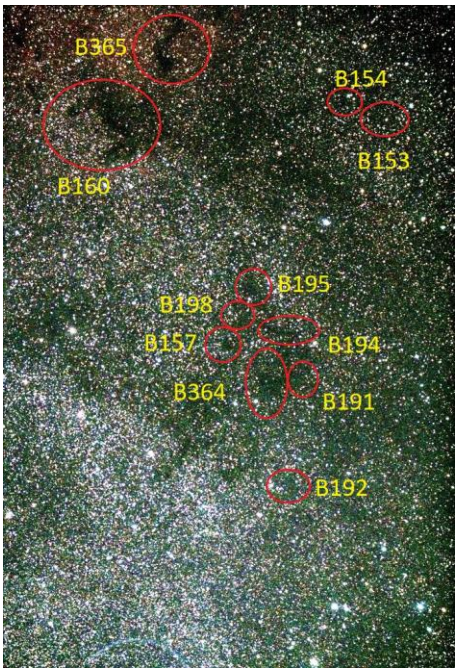




I then switched over to my Barnard Dark Nebula project.
B157 region in Cygnus with the 8" SCT. Then a wider field using the EVO50mm Refractor including B15, B160, B191, B192, B194, B195, B198, B364, and B365.



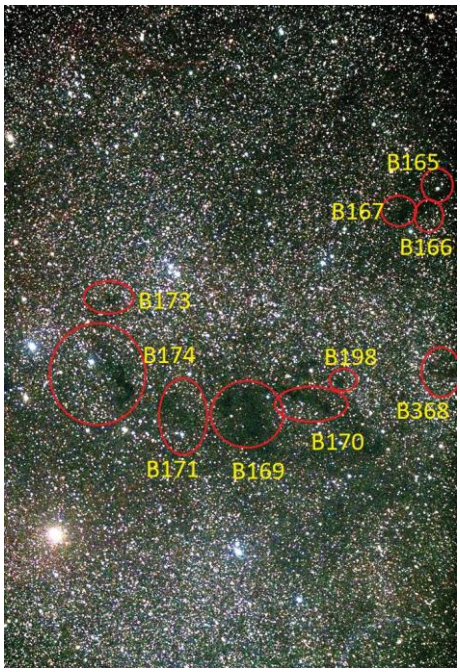




(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).
(EVO50mm piggybacked on the 8" SCT, ZWO ASI294MC, L-Pro filter, 60 sec subs, for 30 min).

Next was the B171 region in Cepheus using just the EVO50mm Refractor: B169, B170, B171, B174, B165, B166, B167, B198, and B368.

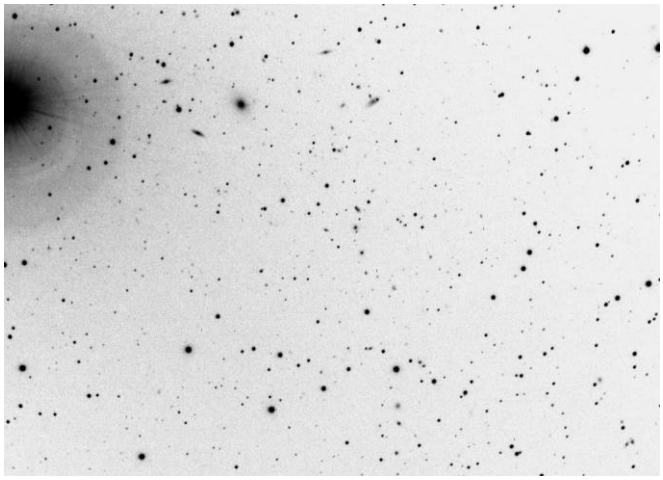




(EVO50mm piggybacked on the 8" SCT, ZWO ASI294MC, L-Pro filter, 60 sec subs, for 30 min).

I then went back to my Abell Galaxy Cluster project for several clusters rising in the eastern sky. First up was Abell71 in Andromeda.

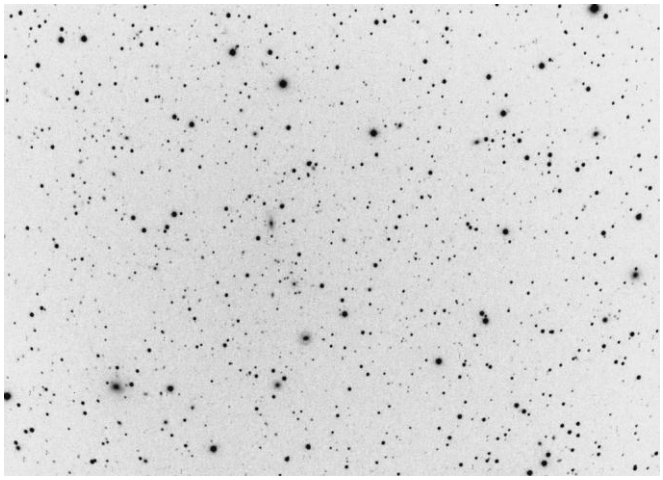




(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

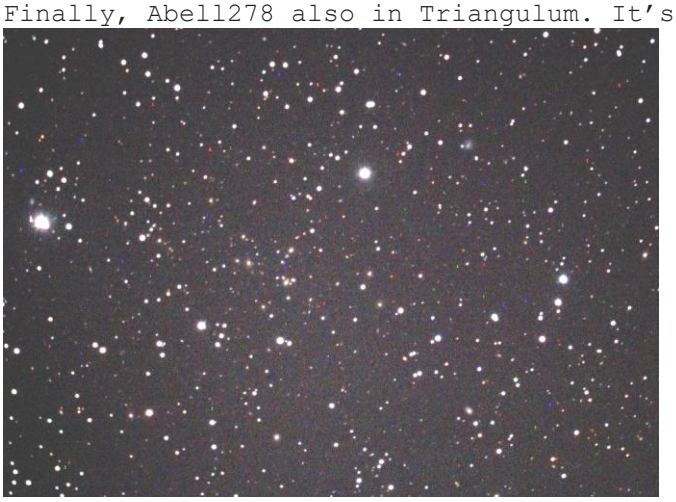
Next was Abell260 in Triangulum.

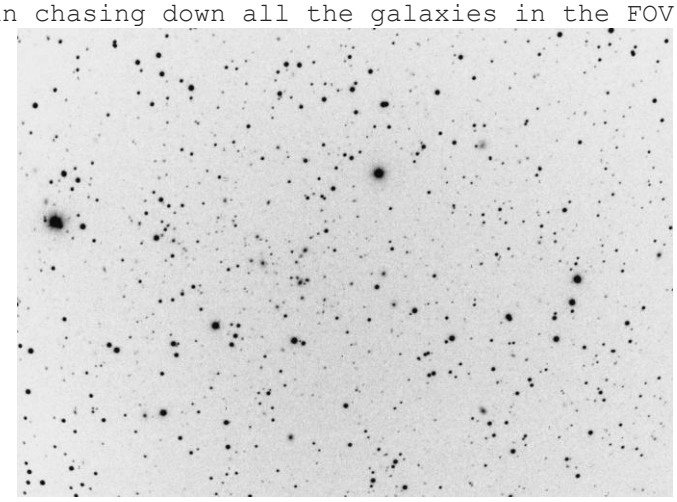




(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

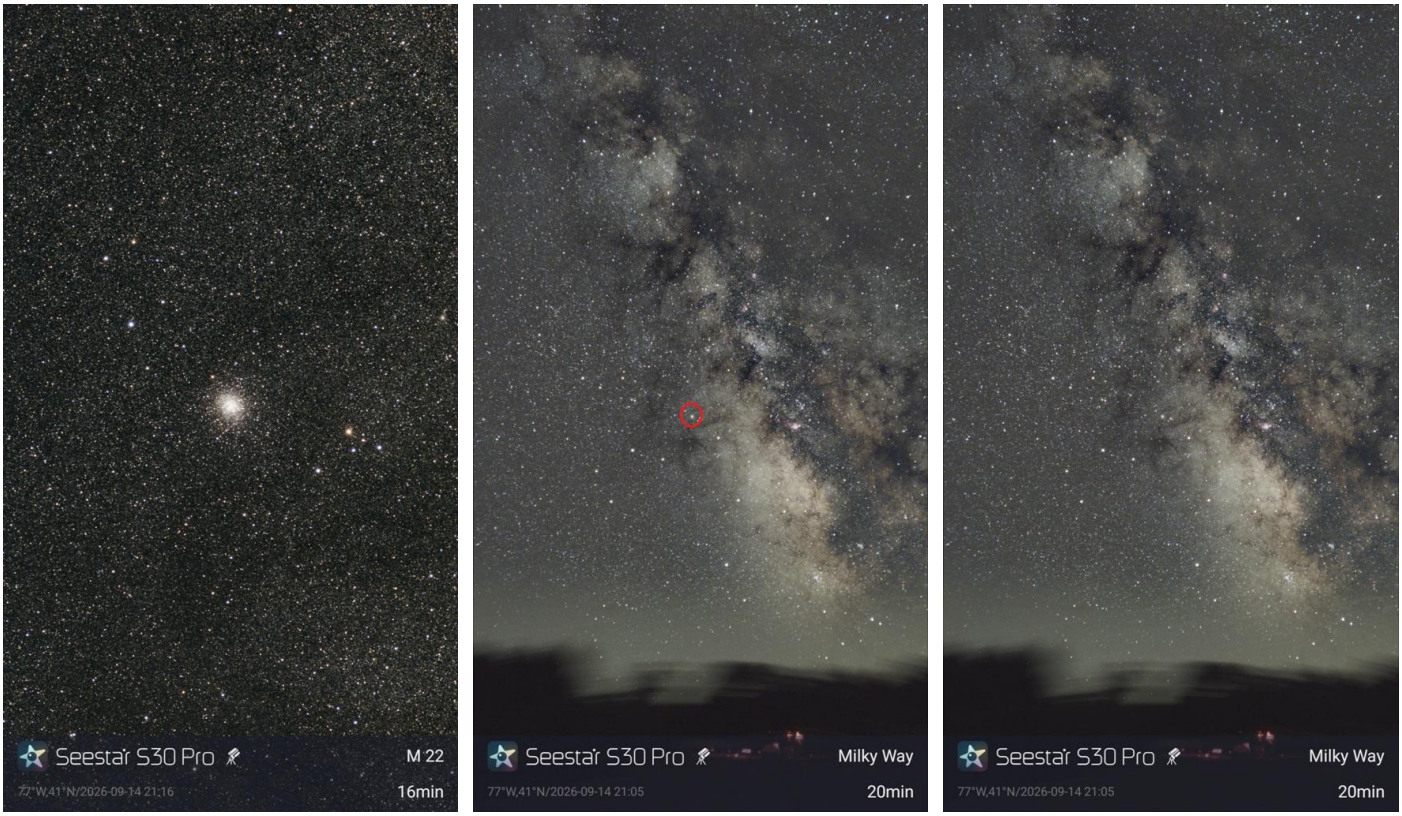
Finally, Abell278 also in Triangulum. It's Fun chasing down all the galaxies in the FOV!





(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).

Prior to my putting my visual skills to use with the 80mm refractor, I polar aligned the SeeStar and started the S30Pro off on globular cluster M22 by the Sagittarius Teapot using the 30mm lens and also the great starclouds with the 3mm lens for contextual EAA.



(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 16 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 20 minutes, IR filter)

Then I went for a deep dive on the 'Iris Nebula' – NGC7623 in Cepheus, hoping to catch some of the IFN (Integrated Flux Nebula), also called Cirrus nebula that surrounds the reflection nebula area. I let the capture go for 60 minutes before doing a little live tweaking of the image and saving it. Then I let the capture continue for another hour and made extensive use of the SeeStar integrated software tools to remove the stars and enhance the dusty regions. Turned into an interesting EAA observation of dusty IFN!





(SeeStar S30Pro, 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 60 and 123 minutes, IR filter)

I then made a contextual observation of the 'Triangulum Galaxy' - M33 in Triangulum using both the S30Pro 30mm lens and the widefield 3mm lens. Thought it might be fun to use the SeeStar tools to remove all the stars around the galaxy.





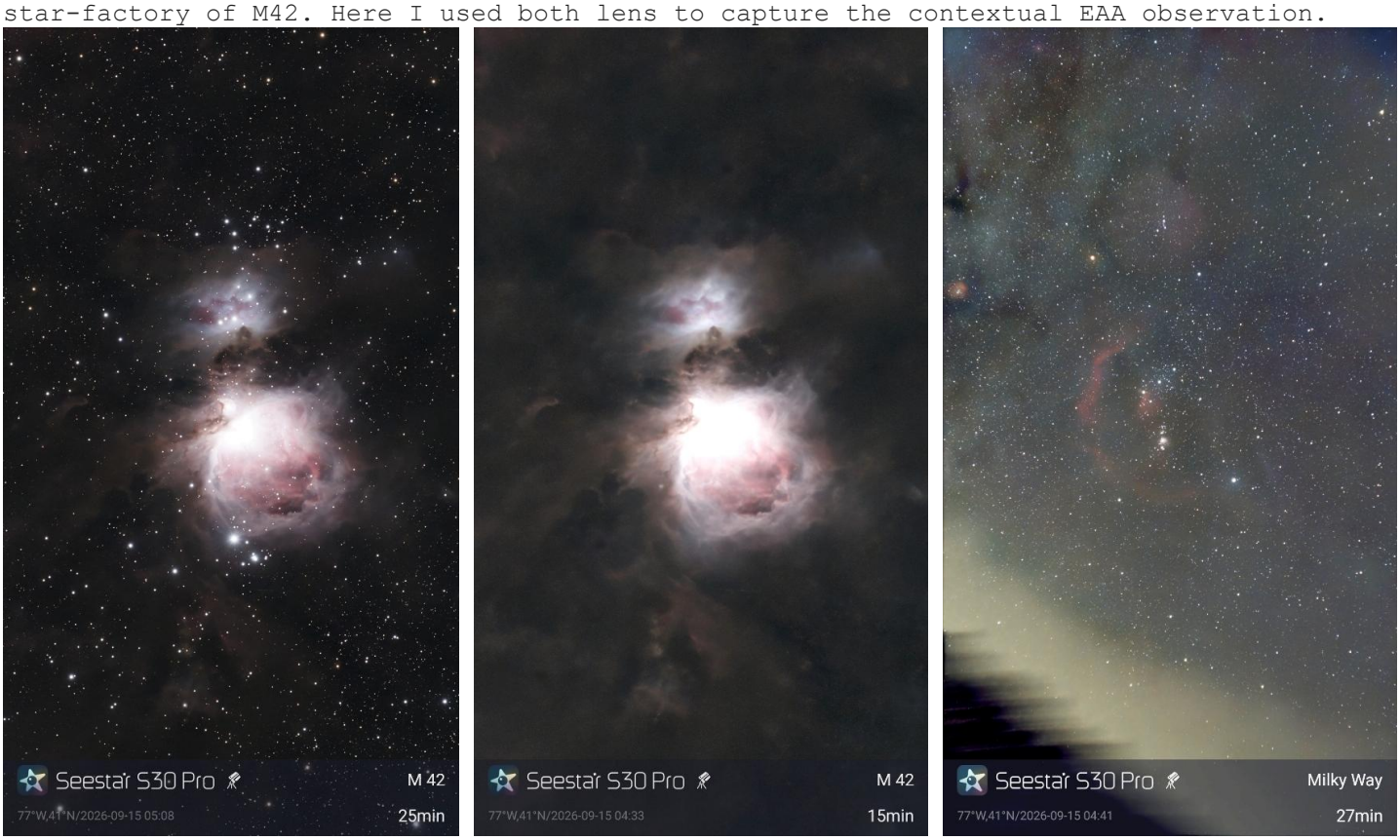


Then it was time for a mosaic of the Andromeda Galaxy – M31.
Here's the observation – normal, reduced-stars, and no stars:



(SeeStar S30Pro, 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 51, 55, and 53 minutes, IR filter)

My last S30Pro observation of the night was Orion, centered on the "Great Orion Nebula" star-factory of M42. Here I used both lens to capture the contextual EAA observation.



(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 15 & 30 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 27 minutes, IR filter)

I also utilized the livestack editing tools to once again remove all the stars in the image of M42 & M43, and SH2-279 – 'Running Man Nebula' for a different perspective of the nebula, which also eliminated the star-clusters NGC1977 & NGC1980.
In the widefield image, using a mild setting of star removal along with a few other tweaks, I was able to bring out multiple other deep-sky objects including "Barnard's Loop", 'Orion OB1-b' the OB Association around Orion's Belt, IC434 backlighting B33 - the HorseHead Nebula, the 'Flame Nebula' – NGC2024, and the large circular Ha region SH2-264 around the bright star– "Meissa", representing Orion's head. (the "Rosette Nebula" is visible in the upper left FOV)

As with most nights at Cherry Springs "Too many objects to observe, not enough time!". Finally, with clock going past 5am, I hit the wall and decided to call it a night. Had a good view of the Zodiacal Light while disassembling the blackout tent. The scopes were dripping wet so I didn't bother to cover them. In bed by 5:30am.



Here's the AllSky time-lapse video: https://youtu.be/y96v1dGpHrs

Tuesday 09/15/2026:

Slept in till 10:30am. Wow! What a night of EAA observing! Last night made up for all the previous week of rain! Had a great night! Not that often anymore that I stay up all night (past 5:00am) to see the Zodiacal Light rising!

A number of tent campers had already packed up and left. Christa was in the process of loading her car so I walked over and wished her safe travels. Fixed a combined brunch, and afterwards began backing a few camping/astronomy things away, including the 80mm visual refractor. I decided to leave the 8" up for one more night as the weather forecast showed haze and clouds not moving in till after midnight. Headed down to Galeton to gas-up the SUV for the drive home. Back at camp I took down the camper awning and easy-up canopy. Also switched the S30-PRO over to alt-az mode for widefield Milky Way mosaics.

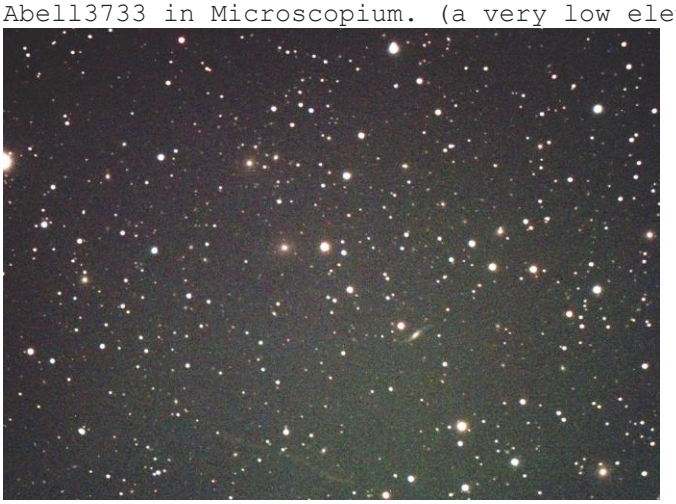
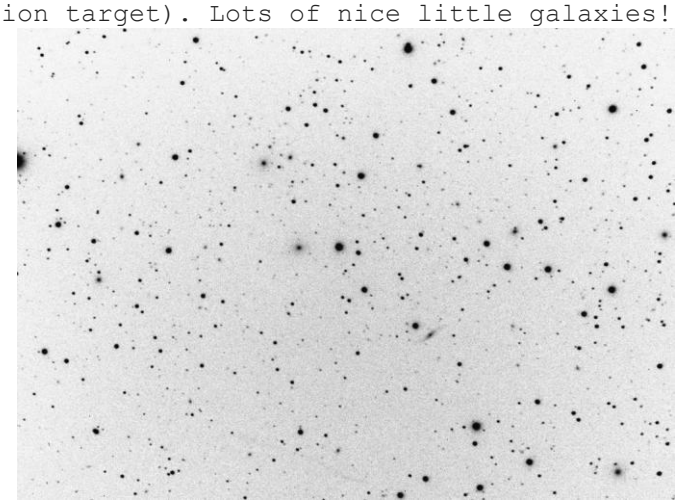
Went for a late afternoon walk around the field. There are eight of us here tonight. Christa decided to stay one more night. After calling home, I fixed dinner and prepped the telescopes and the blackout tent. The sky was once again beautiful at sunset. This time of year, darkness comes on quick, so it wasn't a long wait before the stars began to appear overhead. Soon the soft glow of the Milky-Way rising up from the northeast arching down to the southwest horizon was visible.





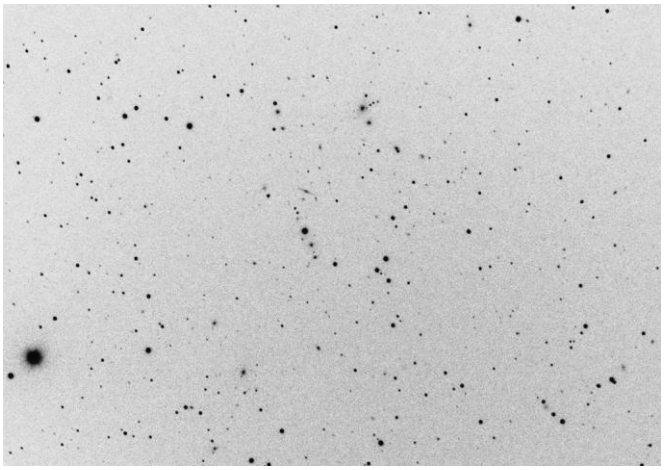


My Observing list for the last night - Using the 8”SCT: Abell Galaxy clusters.
Abell3733 in Microscopium. (a very low elevation target). Lots of nice little galaxies!

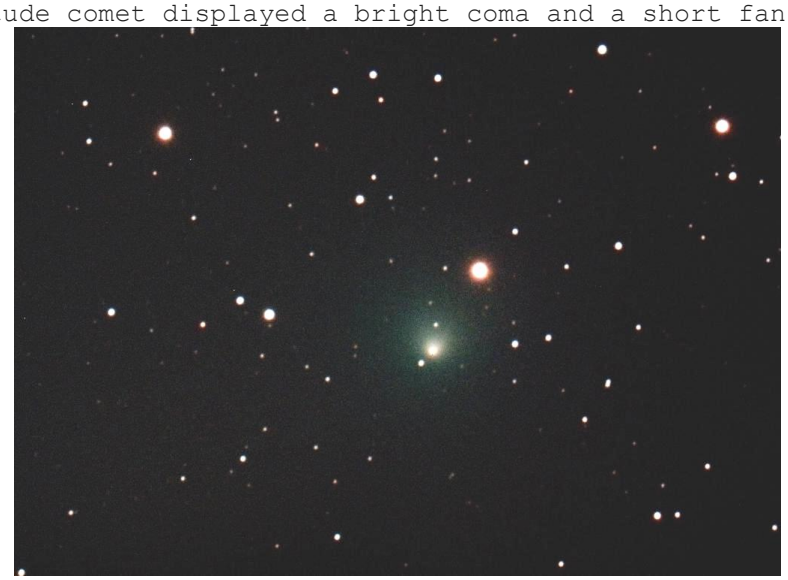
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 30 minutes).

Abell397 in Aries.

(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 time for a little ‘Shallow Sky’ observing - Comet 10P Tempel in Piscis Austrinus.
The tiny +9th magnitude comet displayed a bright coma and a short fan-shaped tail.

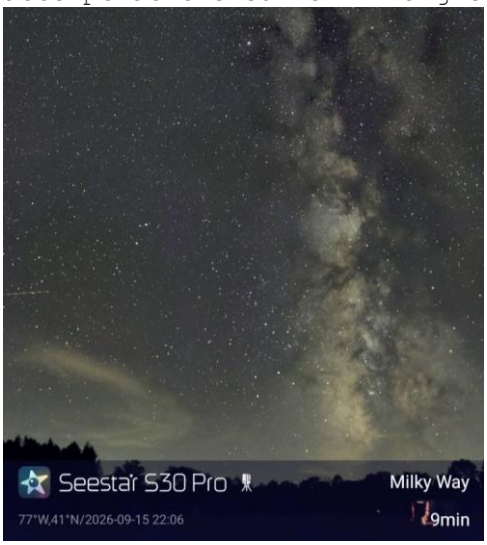


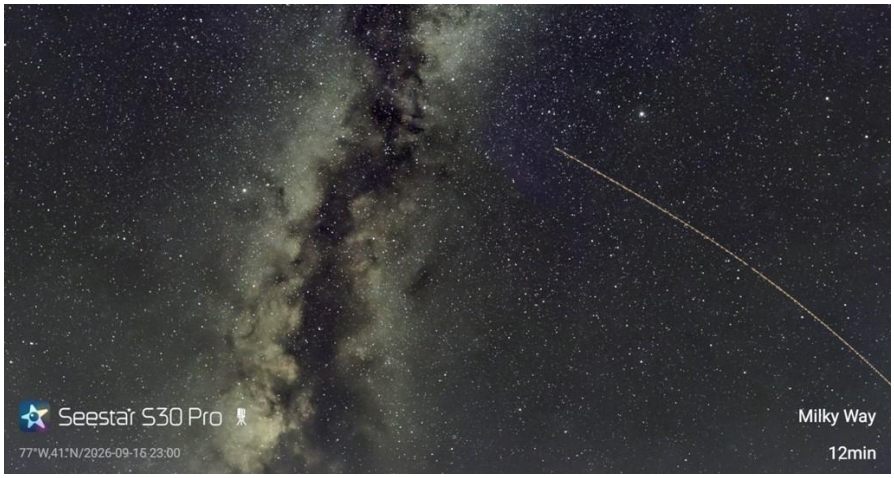
(8" SCT @ f6.3 on an Atlas Gem, ZWO ASI294MC Pro camera with L-Pro broadband filter, 180 second subs, dark & flat, PHD guided, livestacked using Sharpcap for 9 minutes).

The Milky-Way continued to shine as a transparent sky slowly wheeled westward.



While the 8” SCT was gathering starlight, the S30Pro was working on Milky-Way starclouds. First was a portrait mosaic of the Sagittarius region starclouds. Then a landscape attempt at the Summer Triangle region.





(SeeStar S30Pro, 30 second exposures in Alt-Az mount mode / 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 9 and 12 minutes, IR filter, slight star-removal applied)

Around 11:15pm, dark clouds began creeping in from the NW. Radar showed a line of storms heading our way. Within minutes the sky was overcast, so I hurriedly shutdown the telescopes and stowed the smart scope and blackout canopy, and covered the main scope.



Fortunately, the storms kept to our north and missed the park, keeping things dry.
In bed a little after midnight.

Wednesday 09/16/2026:

Up at 7:30am.
After taking a quick look at the weather radar, rushed packing up the 8" SCT and readying the camper to hookup to the car to beat the rain. Then grabbed a quick breakfast.
On the road with a few sprinkles at 9:50am. Only needed to get a few miles south of the park to get out from under the rain. Other than a few orange cones along the way, the rest of the drive was uneventful. Backed the camper into the driveway at 2:30pm.

So,for this trip, Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday were complete washouts! Tuesday, Thursday, and the following Tuesday evenings were cut short by clouds, only Friday night was nearly a full night, but it was also impacted a little after midnight by occasional scattered clouds. But Monday night made up for all that! Had a great night! Not that often anymore that I stay up all night (5:00am) to see the Zodiacal Light rising!

While I had a good time at this year's BFSP, it did not break the 2026 'cloud curse'. Eight nights total for this trip, two good full nights and three half nights of clear skies vs. three nights of monsoon rains and another three half nights of clouds. That tally's 3.5 clear to 4.5 cloudy for this trip, so once again I didn't break even. (at least there was no wildfire smoke this time).
For 2026, this brings me up to: 7 trips and 44 days - clear=16, cloudy=28 ☹
My EAA observing list backlog continues to build,,,



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