

ORAS August Perseid Week, 2026

Normally, August is somewhat of a dry month. But this year, the spring rain showers have continued all summer, and we were looking at a damp August New Moon, which might spoil the annual Perseid Meteor shower. Still, being a member of the ORAS Observatory Facilities Committee, we had a punch-list of work to be done to ready the facility for our annual October AstroBlast convention, so a group of us was heading northward regardless of the weather forecast.

Sunday 08/09/2026:

Got a late start, didn't leave for ORAS till about 1:20pm. Nice day for a drive, sunny and dry, though a little on the warm side. After an uneventful drive, I arrived at the observatory at 4pm.

On the field were Dean S and his brother Gary S, setup in the western field near the outdoor classroom. Denny H was also there with his camper over on the east side. I pulled in over next to Denny and after visiting with everyone for a half-hour and seeing how much work they had already accomplished, I setup camp. Denny left for the evening as he had a service appointment for his truck the next day. Over the last day the guys had disassembled the old scope sheds, which were rain damaged beyond repair, and did a general cleanup around the facility. Dean M was also there earlier, but had left for home by the time I arrived. They also started in on constructing the human sundial.

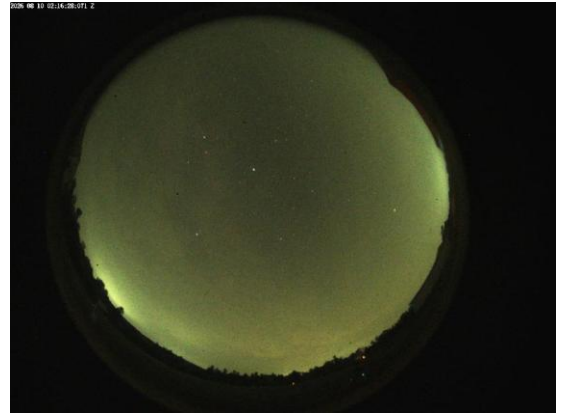
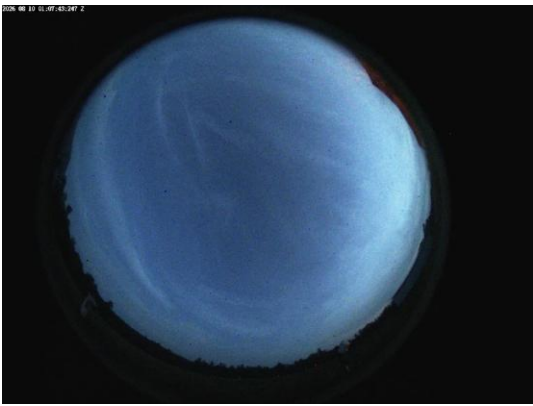


At 6pm, having sorted out my camp, I joined Dean and Gary for refreshments. At 7pm, I headed back over to the east field to setup my astro-equipment: 8" Celestron SCT optical tube @ f6.3 with a ZWO ASI294MC-Pro camera, ZWO filter wheel & focuser, on an Atlas EQ GEM mount, along with a piggybacked Sky-Watcher 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 and equatorial wedge & field tripod.



While finishing up the 8" SCT, club member Susan M pulled in and visited with us. She was hoping to stay overnight to see the Milky-Way, but after checking the weather forecast, decided to head home at dusk. Using my red flashlight, I completed getting both the

AllSky camera and the SeeStar S30Pro setup in EQ Mode, and assembled the camper hatch blackout tent. But it was all for naught, as the once promising weather forecast for the evening went downhill, with storms expected late evening. With dusk, there were actually a few short-lived breaks in the cloud over, enough for me to polar align both the 8" SCT and the S30Pro. I was even able to take a quick test image of part of the Veil Nebula, NGC6995, in Cygnus using the S30Pro. (I guess not a total waste of an evening, lol).

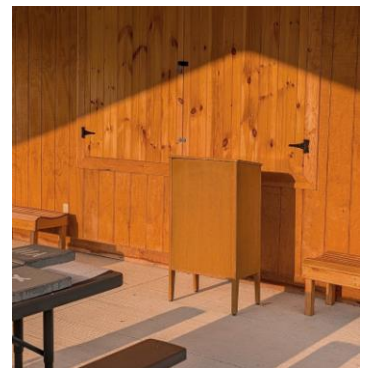


With the sky rapidly closing up, at 11pm, I shutdown and covered up the scopes and walked over to visit Dean and Gary, but both had just called it a night, so I headed back to camp to read. Up till midnight. Overnight, several rounds of thunderstorms went thru.

Monday 08/10/2026:

Up at 8am to a damp morning. Temps in the mid 60's. After finishing breakfast, I joined Dean and Gary in working on placing the railroad ties for the human sundial. Made good progress, but was interrupted at 11am by a thunderstorm. We decided to take a break for lunch to let the storm pass.

At 1pm, Dean hitched his truck to the scrap trailer and the two of us drove down to the Jones building to load additional scrap and parked the trailer out of the way. After spending time inside the Jones Building rummaging thru the AstroBlast storage bins looking for the observing contest forms, I waited out a short rain shower before heading back to camp where Dean and Gary had started work on the sundial project. We spent the rest of the afternoon getting the railroad ties in place and back filling around them. Called it quits at 4pm.



Around 5pm, Laura O stopped by and dropped off a podium she had found for the new outdoor classroom. Looks great!

Gary, Dean, and I then gathered under Dean's camper canopy for snacks and beverages. At 7pm, I headed across the field back to my camp to make dinner and phone home. With the sky looking like it could rain, I sat inside the camper reading with the AC going till about 9:30pm when Dean and Gary dropped in for a visit. After they left, I watched a video and stayed up till midnight.

Tuesday 08/11/2026:

Woken around 3:30am by a strong thunderstorm, gusty wind, and torrential rain. Finally got out of bed at 8am. Another dreary morning with low clouds, damp field, and temp at 64 degrees. After breakfast, I straightened up a few things inside the camper, and then at 10am I headed over to the sundial worksite. Dean was there installing corner posts around the railroad tie perimeter and had that well in hand.

Gary and I decided to re-install the observatory AllSky cam, which had been out for repairs. Fortunately I thought to test the camera before we mounted it on its mast, and discovered the camera wasn't working. After trying different cables and reaching-out to several other Facilities Committee members for suggestions, we decided to set the camera aside until it could be looked at.

Gary and I then drove to the local shopping area to get weed killer and mirrors for the new restrooms. Back at the observatory, we took turns spraying the weeds inside the sundial work area, and long the landscape rocks around the outdoor pavilion. Then the three of us installed landscape fabric inside the sundial area and with help from new member Kevin, shoveled several wheelbarrows worth of gravel to hold the fabric in place. We stopped for the day at 4pm and installed the new mirrors in the restrooms before cleaning up for the night.



At 6pm, we gathered at Dean's camp for snacks and then a group dinner of brats and macaroni salad. Yum! With a thunderstorm threatening, we put things away just in time for a brief shower. I had just headed back to my camp and waited out the rain there.



By 7:45pm, the rain ended and the clouds lifted, so the three of us headed over to the sundial worksite to rough-in the general location of the dial stones finishing at dusk. The overall shape of the sundial was starting to take shape!

Took about an hour break to phone home, then we gathered at Dean's for a nightcap. Headed back to camp at 11pm, stayed up again till midnight.

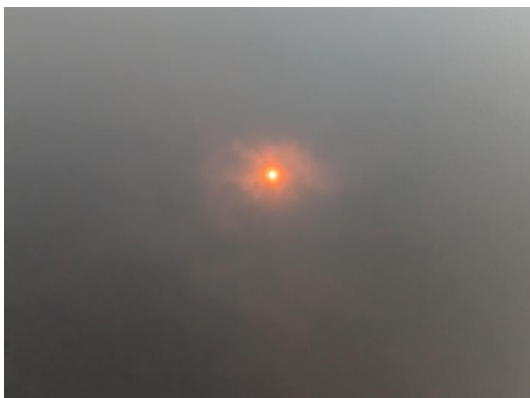
Wednesday 08/12/2026:

Up early at 7:30am today. Going to be a busy day, with additional ORAS members arriving, Gary packing up for home, and preparations for today's partial solar eclipse in the afternoon and the Perseids meteors later that evening. Around 9am, a light shower went over the field, just enough to soak everything. While waiting for more ORAS club members to show up to help with the sundial, Dean S and I hung up one of the new bulletin boards at the outdoor classroom.



Around 10am, Denny H and Dean M arrived, and Gary finished packing and pulled out for the long drive home to Maryland. The Dean's, Denny and I had barely started slinging gravel when Bob K drove up. As it had been 5 years since Bob had last been able to make it to the observatory, Denny and I gave him a quick tour before getting back to work. Bob also pitched in when it was time to setup a tripod for casting shadows.

At Solar Noon, (1:20pm EDT), we aligned the shadow being cast by the tripod and used string to mark our locations true North/South line, and adjusted the 'month' pavers. And it was during the total solar eclipse! Stonehenge has nothing on us! LoL here's a photo of both the alignment and the shallow ~ 5% partial eclipse which we observed using eclipse glasses that I had.



After our success, we broke for lunch under the classroom pavilion. Bob stayed and visited for a few more minutes before heading back home. It was good to see Bob at the observatory again! A little later Jim H and then Susan P arrived to help, and between the six of us, we made short work filling in gravel around the dial stones and outer perimeter of the railroad ties. We even had a chance to test the dial with several of us standing in for the gnomon, and it works! A great group effort and a job well done!



While Jim headed out for the day, the rest of us cleaned up and relaxed for a bit. The group gathered over under the classroom pavilion at 6pm for snacks and refreshments. Susan P brought a cheese tray and pesto, Dean M also had a cheese tray with different varieties, and the rest of us contributed too. A well earned break from today's work. During the break, Dean S was also prepping to give a short impromptu talk on meteor photography later that evening, if the skies cleared and we got a crowd to watch meteors.

At 7:30pm, with sprinkles in the air, I headed back to camp to phone home and have a late dinner. While catching up on home events, the drizzle turned into a steady rain that turned heavy around 9pm. The temp also dropped to 68 degrees. It was setting up to be another washed-out night of no observing. Arghhh!!!!

Around 10:30pm, I stepped outside for a few minutes, low clouds, ground fog, no stars. Walked over to visit with Denny before heading back to my camper to read. Called it a night around midnight. Woke at 2:30am to look out a window, still no stars. So much for viewing the Perseid meteors!

Thursday 08/13/2026:

Woke at 8am to a partly cloudy sky, temps at 68 deg. After breakfast, assisted Denny in adding gravel to a few low spots in the sundial. Then the four of us, Denny, the Dean's, and I conferred and decided that adding red pavers around the "month" gnomon pavers would really make them pop. So while Denny continued to fill low areas and Dean S added glow-tape to the road markers, Dean M and I drove into Cranberry to get the red pavers and several other project items.

Back at the observatory, under sunny skies, we placed the new red pavers and added more gravel. The sundial project looks really nice!



Afterwards the Dean's worked on a water leak in the north restroom, and weather-stripped the new bulletin board. I sprayed another application of Round-up weed-killer along the sides of the classroom. I then cleaned up and went for an hour long nap in the camper.

At 5:30, the four of us met at the classroom pavilion for snacks. The sky had gone overcast with darker storm clouds to our west. I headed back to my camper at 7:30pm to phone home and make a late dinner. Spent some time sorting thru my original planned observing list for the week, cutting it back to what I could possibly accomplish if the next two nights were clear, taking into account the smoky skies we were going to have. At 9:30pm after checking the sky for any signs of clearing, we headed over to Dean S's camper for a nightcap. At 10:30pm, under a misty looking sky I headed back to camp to read for about an hour before going to bed.

Friday 08/14/2026:

Up at 8am for breakfast. At 9am, the group met over by the classroom where we re-worked the access from the west field, removing about four feet of rock and adding a wheelbarrow of gravel left-over from the sundial project, allowing a more direct path/route into the pavilion classroom. Dean S added two reflector posts to help guide folks. Looks good!



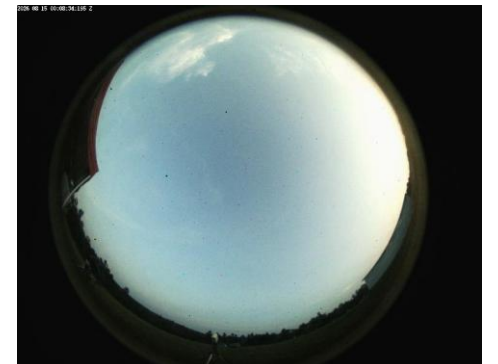
Denny and I then installed the new outdoor bulletin board down on the Jones Building. Then Denny and Dean M worked on water leaks, while Dean S second coated weather sealed the sundial stones. Later while the Dean's mowed the observing fields, Denny and I went for mower gas.

I did a practice run of my talk for the Saturday night public program, and then as the weather forecast was finally looking good for the evening, I got in a much needed nap. Around 5pm, club member Duane D arrived and setup his tent on the southern East field. About the same time, Geoff C pulled in with his camper and went to the west field. At 5:30pm we all met under the pavilion for snacks and were joined by Susan and John P.

After snacks I headed back to camp around 7pm to uncover my scopes and setup the blackout tent around the back camper hatch. Then fixed a quick dinner while phoning home. At dusk, I walked around and took a few pictures of everyone setting up.



Duane stopped over to see my AllSky camera and I gave him an in-depth session on setting up Sharpcap to run the camera. (Duane then took a photo of me and my main telescope).



While the sky was clear of clouds, the transparency was extremely poor due to thick wildfire smoke overhead. You could barely see the Milky-Way dimly stretching from the Summer Triangle down to a very fuzzy southern horizon in Sagittarius and Scorpius. Everyone made due with sticking with higher elevation deep-sky targets.



With the weather forecast for Saturday night beginning to look 'iffy', I decided to focus the 8" SCT on a list of re-observations of Wolf-Rayet nebula that I needed for a new presentation I was giving at the BFSP in September. First up was the tiny planetary-nebula-like object WR124, (SH2-80), with a nickname of "Merrills Star", located in Sagitta. I then went nearly overhead into a rich starfield in Cygnus for a much larger WR object - WR127 (SH2-92). Here's the EAA observation of both:



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

I then slewed the 8" telescope northwards into Draco for the "Cats Eye Nebula" - NGC6543, which was just this past spring identified as a WR nebula: (same scope/camera info)



My two final WR star/nebula was the close pair of WR152 & WR153 (SH2-132) in Cepheus, along with WR157 (SH2-157) located along the Cassiopeia / Cepheus border:



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

At 11:30pm, I went for a walk and delivered KitKats to everyone. Stopped in to visit with Denny and Dean M, along with Jim and Duane in the Observatory, Denny was in the warm-room imaging M102 with the C14 and ASIAir, while Dean and Jim were out under the opened roof doing visual work with the Meade 14" LX200GPS telescope.



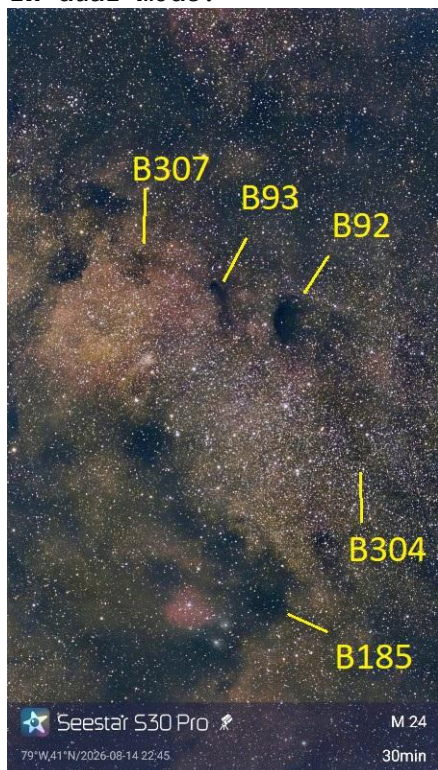
Geoff and Dean S at their campers, Geoff using his 80mm Vesperia smart scope to image Barnards "E" in Aquila, while Dean was imaging the "Witches Broom" side of the Veil Nebula.

Throughout the evening light fog would develop and then quickly dissipate. Thick enough to soak everything in dew. At times the transparency would show signs of improving, to then only after a little while, once again thicken up. The haze really accentuated the local light-pollution domes!



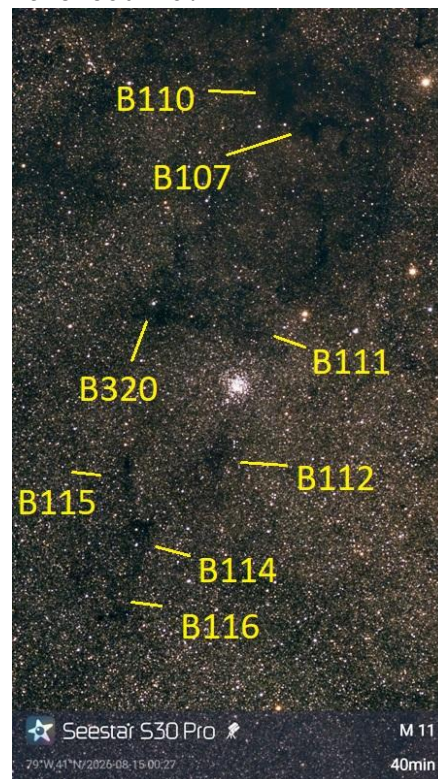
While I was using the 8" SCT for the multi-hour dive into WR nebula, I also had re-polar-aligned the S30Pro, and had put it to work. With my success at observing the WR nebula, I decided to take more risk with the S30Pro and hunt for Barnard Dark Nebula at lower elevation, into the thicker haze. I wanted to finish the objects listed in the August Sky&Tel article on "Dark Clouds of Summer", (page 14), starting with B92 & B93, located in Sagittarius. This was a twofer as both dark nebulae were located near M24 - the Small

Sagittarius Star-Cloud, which was also on my target list. In addition to the two main targets, I was also able to identify several additional Barnard's - B185, B304, and B307. Here's the S30Pro EAA observation using the 30mm lens, along with a contextual observation using the 3mm lens in dual mode:



(SeeStar S30Pro, both 60 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 30 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 48 minutes, IR filter)

I then went for a grouping of Barnard's near M11 and the Scutum Star-Cloud. B107, B110, B111, B112, B114, B115, & B320. As always, my battered copy of Barnard's Photographic Atlas, (Gerald Dobek 2011 revision), greatly helped in identifying the dark nebula that I EAA observed with the S30Pro.



(SeeStar S30Pro, both 30 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 40 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 66 minutes, IR filter)

The S30Pro was having difficulty stacking frames during the M11 observation, due to thickening haze. So for my next widefield target I pointed overhead to Cygnus and executed a mosaic on the North American Nebula - NGC7000, including the nearby Pelican Nebula - IC5070. Here are two versions of the observation, the right-hand image utilizing a heavier in-app star and noise suppression, and color saturation tool settings:



While doing mosaics with the 30mm, the app doesn't allow for dual Milky-Way mode. (SeeStar S30-Pro, 30 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode mosaic stacked for ~ 36 minutes, NB filter)

While the 8" SCT was working the last WR nebula - WR157, I also set the S30Pro on the same object, and went into dual mode giving me a multi-view contextual observation:



(SeeStar S30Pro, both 30 second exposures in EQ mount mode / 30mm Stargazing Mode stacked for 30 minutes, and 3mm Milky-Way Mode stacked for 28 minutes, NB & IR filter)

With most of the other folks having crashed for the night, a little after 1am, Denny dropped in for a visit, taking a break from the observatory to setup his S30PRO to hunt SH2 nebula in Cygnus. Around 2:30am, Denny closed the Observatory for the night, and spent time imagining the Bubble Nebula in Cassiopeia with his S30PRO, before turning in around 3:15am.

I ended my last observation and headed to bed at 3:45am. Didn't do too badly tonight, got to see a little Milky Way, a little dark nebula, and a little bright nebula. Right before stepping inside the camper, I was rewarded with a very bright Perseid meteor streaking thru the Summer Triangle below Lyra.



Here's the AllSky time-lapse from Friday night: https://youtu.be/Zgi5S7_RfUQ

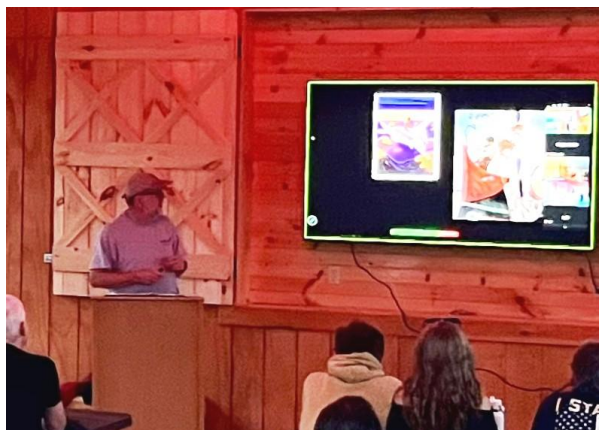
Saturday 08/15/2026:

Slept in till 10am, waking to a sunny warm morning. Duane had already packed and left for home. Denny was busy loading his truck, and on the road by 11am. After checking the weather forecast, I decided to pack away my main scope and AllSky and only use the S30PRO tonight. Sunday looks like a rain day, starting early. Had everything mostly stowed by 1pm.

It was a warm muggy day, partly cloudy with temps pushing 80 degrees. Spent some time relaxing in the shade. Got in a long afternoon nap.

At 5:30pm, I headed over to Dean S's camp for a group 'Happy Hour', where we were joined by Geoff C, Dean M, and Bill W. At 6:00 I headed back to camp for a quick dinner and prepare for my 8pm presentation on 'Stargazing and Mythology'.

I headed back over to the pavilion a little after 7pm to setup and visited with several early arrivals. I then led a small group over to the Observatory for a quick tour prior to 8pm. After Dean M made a few announcements and introduced me, I gave my talk to a nice little crowd. (~15 in attendance, including club members, and maybe another 8 online?)



Too bad it was the usual Western PA cloud show and we couldn't do a green laser tour of the constellations or observe thru the Observatory telescopes. We made do with another tour of the telescopes led by Dean M for the additional folks who arrived after the earlier tour, and with rain showers heading our way, gave everyone a demonstration of closing the observatory roof.

Afterwards, I said my goodnights and headed back to camp. A short while later, Geoff stopped by delivering goodies. I stayed up and read till 11:30pm.

Sunday 08/16/2026:

Up at 7:30am to finish packing. A light shower was passing over so I took my time inside. Dean M was the first to leave at 8am. I completed packing while having breakfast and was soon outside hooking up the camper. After saying goodbye to Dean S, I left for Pittsburgh at 9:50am and after driving under cloudy skies arrived home at 12:35pm.

So, seven nights total for this trip, six cloudy and one clear night under smoky skies. My streak of bad 'clear-skies' luck continues with little EAA observing getting done. But, we did get thru our task-list of work projects around the observatory, and enjoyed good company with our ORAS astro-friends.

Next up - the Black Forest Star Party where I hope to finally break this damp curse! ☺

Larry McHenry

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

