

Mason-Dixon Star Party 2009

With the Fall Season in full swing, Mid-October arrived, bringing with it the Mason-Dixon Star Party. I had high hopes for a late Fall observing session to close out the camping convention season. One last opportunity to catch the Summer Constellations and Milky-Way lingering on the western horizon, while the stars of Fall and Early Winter rise high in the East. Orion would be well placed by midnight for observing his deep-sky treasures!

I had my fingers crossed for a bit of 'Indian Summer' to go along with the trip. But, it was not to be. Instead, we were 'treated' to a taste of November Gales, with blustery damp weather and temperatures struggling to make it into the mid 40's during the day, while plummeting to the low 30's at night. Because of the foul weather, I decided to cancel going that Thursday, the 15th, and wait till Friday afternoon to make the drive over to east central PA.

That Thursday afternoon, the weather worsened, with the predictions now calling for snow accumulation! At that point, I decided to skip camping altogether and just drive up Saturday morning, Oct 17th, give my presentation on 'Stargazing & Mythology', and drive back home after the raffle. A few hours later, one of the MDSP organizers, Bob F, called me to suggest the same, and later that evening they revised their website with a weather statement cancelling most activities, including the camping, and only going with the speaker and raffle presentations during the day Saturday. <http://masondixonstarparty.org/>

10/17/2009 (day-1) Saturday

Up early, and left the house around 7:30 AM for the drive to MDSP. Traffic was lite and the road good until I reach Somerset, when the weather turned to rain and scattered snow showers. Going over the mountains, you could see a little snow accumulation on the grassy areas. Several times while traveling thru the various tunnels, I would enter one side from a rain shower to exit into dense fog on the other side. I finally arrived shortly before noon at the starparty site.

Here are a couple of pics of the outdoor doorprize area:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/MD2009-01.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/MD2009-02.jpg>

Not a lot of fun standing around in the cold and damp.

Spent most of the time in the speakers 'hut' trying to stay warm. It wasn't heated, but I had brought my little propane heater, along with one of the other MDSP organizers, Mark, and we tried to warm up the room as best as we could.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/MD2009-03.jpg>

I setup and gave my 'Stargazing' presentation, and then hung out for the day attending the other presentations, and playing the raffle.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/MD2009-04.jpg>

The other presenters were interesting: Ruben Kier on the "100 Best Astrophotography Targets", Dr Martin Rice on how to quickly find

Messiers and other deep sky objects without using goto, and the keynote speaker, Mike Wentz on the latest Hubble Telescope servicing mission.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/MD2009-05.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/MD2009-06.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/MD2009-07.jpg>

The last speaker finished late, and it was getting dark, so the MDSP organizers moved the raffle drawing into the hut, where we had light, and was a little warmer. You would think with only about 25 people in attendance that my odds for winning one of the two telescopes, or the eyepieces were pretty good. But I had no luck and didn't win anything.

Left for home around 7:30 PM in a constant rain shower. Once in the mountains, the rain turned to snow, and I encountered white-out conditions along the turnpike near the Tuscarora Tunnel. Fun driving!! Arrived home close to midnight.

While not a great way to close out the starparty season, I have to give credit to the Mason-Dixon Convention - York Cty Astronomy club. While they were dealt a real lemon in the weather, (considering it is going to be sunny and in the 50's all next week), they did a good job rolling with the punches and kept it interesting for those who attended. I still like the idea of a Fall Starparty, and I hope they have much better luck next year!!

Larry McHenry