

Kiski Astronomers at Cherry Springs - April, 2011

A small group of Kiski Astronomers decided to head up to Cherry Springs Park for the April New Moon.

Saturday 4/30/2011:

Bob K and I made the drive up on Saturday April 30th, Bob leaving in the early morning, and I a few hours later.

The drive Saturday was mostly uneventful. The sky was blue and the drive scenic as usual, especially along RT555. But the real fun began as I was driving thru the village of Driftwood, where the road does that zigzag across the river and up the hill. I heard my spare tire, on the hitch, hitting the road, 'burning rubber'!! I kept on driving, but after a few more squeaks, I pulled over to take a look. Didn't see anything out of order, so I thought maybe I just had too much weight in the back of the car, so I took the spare off and threw it in the back of the car and went on down the road.

After a bit, I began to hear an occasional grating sound, like something dragging behind me. By the time I got to Wharton, it was becoming annoying, so I pulled over, and looked under the camper. One of the trailer frame joist had split down the middle and sagged, taking the end of the hitch with it. The hitch welding on that joist had also cracked and mostly given way. What a disaster!

Here are the pictures of the structural failure issue I had with my camper.

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

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

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

After I finished giving birth to the cow, I got back into the car and decided to see if I could make it to the park.

(it was either that or call for a flat-bed wrecker).

At the point where I passed the gas well, the dragging over the bumpy road was almost continuous. Thank goodness for all of the new sections of paving that I encountered the closer I got to the park, as it was nice and level so that I barely dragged. Still, I was only driving about 15 miles an hour for that last 5 miles. I finally limped into the park about an hour and a half later that I had estimated.

The observing field was so wet from all the rain, that the park officials were having the campers park their trailers on the gravel side roads. As my teardrop is very lightweight, and I had no idea when, if ever, I would be able to leave, I parked it in the grass, and the car on the gravel road, next to Bob K. While I was unhooking the camper, Bob N arrived and parked around the corner. With help from Bob K and Bob N, we jacked up the front of the camper to investigate. After everyone there spent time eyeballing up the problem and expressing amazement of the structural failure, Bob K met a local astronomer, Mike G of Cherry Springs Optics, who thought he could fix the camper on-site. He had a local person who worked for him that could weld. (unfortunately, the welder had gone out of town that weekend).

So we decided that if I could put some all-thread bolts up thru the bottom and use 2x4's on both sides, I could create a vise that would pull the joist

and hitch back up into place to get me home. The rest of the day, it rained, but in the early evening, a partial clearing went thru for a few hours. I setup my telescope to get a little practice in with the mount, but the observing conditions were so bad that you couldn't do much more than look at Saturn and the bright globulars M3 and M13. Everyone went to bed early.

Sunday 5/01/2011:

So Sunday that's what Mike and I did, spent the day lying on a wet field, getting rained on, and bracing the hitch. (the Bob's had packed up and went home that day as rain was in the forecast for the rest of the weekend). By the time we were done with the repair, it was too late to attempt the drive home, so I camped out with a few other folks Sunday night on the field. Again, it rained, so there was no observing. Oh, and to add insult to injury, Sunday morning, while packing up my camping equipment and taking down my new easy-up tent canopy, a sudden wind gust caught one end of the canopy, pulled the long tent stakes right out of the soggy ground, and flipped the tent over destroying the frame!! nice!!!

Here are the pictures of the 'temp' repair:

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

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

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

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

Monday 5/02/2011:

Got up this morning and drove nice and slow all the way to the RV store in Ellwood City to drop off the camper. They were also very impressed with the joist fracture, and will call me back later in the week with the welding repair estimate.

So, all I got for the weekend was an hour or so of very hazy stars!! :(

Saturday 5/14/2011:

Picked up my teardrop from Clems RV today.

The welding job looks very good, hopefully, nothing else will fall off.....

Here are a few pics. On the front joist, they welded an additional angle brace and welded the hitch to that.

On the middle joist, (the one that split), they welded an angle brace to both sides of the crack and then welded the hitch over that wider area.

Pictures of the 'final' repair:

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

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

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

So, I've got the camper cleaned back up, and everything re-loaded into it. I'm ready to go for the CSSP on the 24th!

Larry McHenry

Astronomical webportal:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lsmch/>