

Black Forest Star Party 2011

After a long hot summer, the 4th week of August rolled round the calendar, Bringing with it the 2011 Black Forest Star Party at Cherry Springs. As usual, several of us from the Kiski club went up well in advance of the official start of the convention, to secure our favorite camping site.

Monday 08/22/2011:

Left the house around 9:30am, in hopes to avoid rush hour traffic, but still spent plenty of quality time stuck in local road construction. Arrived up at Cherry Springs at 3:00pm. Bob K was already there setup in our usual spot. I pulled in across from him, as I wanted to make sure that I would have a clear eastern horizon this trip. About an hour later, Denny H pulled in and setup next to me. Here's a few pics of our setup:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-01.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-02.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-03.jpg>

Our friends from the York club, who put on the Mason-Dixon convention, were also there setup next to us:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-05.jpg>

And, our friend Bob K, from the Mansfield Oh club, (Hidden Hollow), was there.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-07.jpg>

The skies started out mostly clear for the day, but by late afternoon was threatening to go completely overcast. Fortunately, by the time of sunset, the clouds had dissipated back to partly cloudy. It was a good evening to get the 6" RC telescope setup, polar aligned, cameras attached and focused, and any kinks worked out for the remainder of the week. I didn't start any serious imaging work that evening, just played around with observing the usual showcase objects over in Sagittarius.

Finally, around midnight, the sky clouded over and we all went to bed.

Tuesday 08/23/2011:

During the wee hours, the clouds rolled away, and the morning dawned brightly. It stayed sunny all day, enticing me to setup my old C8 SCT for solar observing and a sunburn as a result! There were a number of nice sunspot groups and active areas, along with several large limb prominences. During the day, several other folks arrived, Don P from the Hamilton Ontario Club setup next to Bob K, and later Kiski members Terry and JoAnne T arrived and setup across from the main group.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-06.jpg>

Here's an idea of what our camp area looked like:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-08.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-09.jpg>

That afternoon, I went for a stroll along a newly created hiking trail. Right beside the trailhead, there is a brand new restroom facility.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-13.jpg>

The park did an excellent job on the new trail. Lots of shady sections running thru the forest, with display signs located throughout the path. There's even a cool little bridge to cross!

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-14.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-15.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-16.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-17.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-18.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-19.jpg>

Tuesday evening was much better than Monday, but it was not quite the pitch black skies that Cherry Springs is noted for. Too much humidity. Still, it was a great night for video-observing!! In addition to my StellaCam-3 at prime focus of the 6" RC, I had my StellaCam-II attached to the Bosma 80mm refractor piggybacked on the RC.

On the StellaCam-3 I was using a new IR filter, along with an ATIK .5 focal reducer that Bob K loaned me for the week. Finally, I was able to get great performance out of my new 6" RC!!

I spent the early evening again with the seasonal showcase deep sky objects - M8, M17, M16, M20, M22, before beginning my planned observations.

(all 30 second exposures on the 6"RC).

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/M8-08232011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/M17-08232011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/M20-08232011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/M22-08232011.jpg>

I also captured an image of dark nebula B72 'the Snake' over in Ophiuchus:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/B72-08232011.jpg>

I then moved on to my constellation survey work, spending the rest of the night in Cepheus, where I imaged the following deep sky objects: galaxies NGC6946 & 6951, planetary nebula NGC40, 7139, 7635 (the Bubble), 7354, nebulas NGC7023, 7129, 7380, 7538, and open clusters NGC188, 6939, 7055, 7142, 7160, 7226, 7234, 7235, 7261, 7510, 7762.

I finished up Cepheus around 3:00 am, and then crawled to bed.

Wednesday 08/24/2011:

The day started out clear and sunny, but soon became quite windy, with periods of clouds throughout the day. Basically made solar observing impossible.

During the afternoon, Kiksi member Bob N arrived and setup on the other side of Bob K. <http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-04.jpg>

Then Tom and Mario, also from the Hamilton club arrived and setup by Don P.

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-20.jpg>

More and more campers continued to arrive, with the observing field beginning to fill up fast with all kinds of campers and telescopes. A highlight of the afternoon was when a squadron of four A10 'Warthogs', along with a refueling tanker jet flew multiple passes overhead thru the clouds, practicing refueling. Very neat to watch!

Wednesday evening continued to be very windy. I attempted to video-capture objects up in Corona Borealis, but gave up after about an hour. Most of the rest of our group didn't even bother uncovering their telescopes. Finally, by 11:00pm, the skies closed down for the night. After spending a little time standing around taking, we all headed for an early evening to bed.

Thursday 08/25/2011:

Sometime around 3:00am, a thunderstorm blew over the field. A particularly close bolt of lightning and thunderous clap roused everyone out of bed. After a few morning sprinkles, the sky cleared and the sun came out to dry out the observing field. Throughout the day, more campers continued to fill in all the empty spaces, and the park was beginning to look full.

The evening sky was excellent, but extremely dewy!! Even with the dew heaters running at full, it was a losing battle. Optics began coating over, and by midnight, a lot of folks were out of commission. My 80mm refractor was in trouble, threatening to shutdown the StellaCam-II, but fortunately Denny H had a 12-volt hairdryer that was able to revive it. Of course, it didn't help when twice in the early Friday morning hours, a fog cloud literally formed right over us. Another 'feature' that Cherry Springs is noted for.....

With all that I was able to continue my survey work, imaging the following galaxies in Corona Borealis and Equuleus: NGC6107, 6117, 6120, 6131, 6139, 7015, 7046, and IC1375. Some of these were very faint, even using video! After finishing up the two constellations, I went back to just observing the brighter objects such as M13, M27, the new Supernova in M101, NGC891 and 7331: (all 30 second exposures on the 6"RC).

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/M13-08252011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/M27-08252011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/SN-M101-08252011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/ngc891-08252011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/ngc7331-08252011.jpg>

I also mounted my other video camera, a Samsung SDC435 on a tripod with a wide-field CCTV lens set to 8mm. I used it for several constellation shots, along with a few of our campsite at night:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-10.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-11.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-12.jpg>

After the 'fun' break, I went back to the survey and finished up the Constellation Sculptor with the highlight being NGC253.

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/ngc253-08252011.jpg>

I continued with observing the following: globular cluster NGC288, galaxies NGC24, 134, 150, 254, 289, 439, 613, 7513, 7755, 7793.

I then started working over in Auriga, where I video-observed open clusters NGC1664, 1778, 1798, 1857, and IC405, the 'flaming star' nebula & cluster. Finally, close to 4:00am, when the second fog cloud rolled in, I realized that I was doing more stumbling than walking, so I covered up the scopes and went to bed.

Friday 08/26/2011:

The morning dawned nice and sunny. I ended up sleeping in till 10:30. (with a little help from earplugs and a sleeping mask).

I uncovered the telescope to let the dew dry off and discovered that the 6" primary mirror also had dewed up during that last fog cloud.

During the morning, the vendor's tent went up, so we all strolled over to check out the wares. Ended up dropping a few bucks with our friend Jeff from CCTV.

Picked up a nice Batinov mask for the 6", along with a new cover.

Late that afternoon, I went for a quick stroll thru the observing field. Here's what the area around our campsite now looked like:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-28.jpg>

It seemed that big dobs dominated throughout the field:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-21.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-22.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-23.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-24.jpg>

But, there were the occasional grouping of other telescope styles, such as what our friend Eric from eastern PA had:

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-25.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-26.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~kiskiastronomers/images/conventions/BF2011-27.jpg>

Friday evening was almost as good as Thursday night, but again, not as dark as I would have preferred. At least it was much less dewy than the night before. Early on I spent some time imaging Comet Garradd next to M71:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/Comet-M71-08262011.jpg>

I then moved on to the Veil Nebula over in Cygnus and imaged both sides :

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/veil-east-08262011.jpg>

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/veil-west-08262011.jpg>

and then over to the Pinwheel galaxy, M33 in Triangulum.

<http://home.comcast.net/~lemastro/vidcap/images/M33-08262011.jpg>

After a few groups of 'tourist' had passed by, wanting to see a demo of video-astronomy, I went back to the survey and worked in Lacerta.

There I video-captured galaxies NGC7223, 7240&7242, 7248, 7273&7274&7276, along with open clusters NGC7209, 7243, 7245, 7296, 7394, and IC1434 and 1442.

Finally, around 3:00am, a bank of clouds rolled up from the east, ending the night's observing. Was soon off to bed.

Saturday 08/27/2011:

Saturday dawned cloudy and while it thinned out a little mid-afternoon, it never did clear off. According to the weather radio and internet, this was the outer fringes of Hurricane Irene passing to the east. It was obvious that the evening was going to be a total loss, so we all packed up our telescopes. After my presentation on the "Constellations and Mythology", I finished packing up my campsite and even hitched up the camper to the SUV.

A lot of folks packed up and left during the day, especially the east coaster, but most of the Kiski group stuck it out for the raffle drawing.

(Terry and JoAnne T had to leave the day before).

Both Bob N and Denny H came away winners, keeping the Kiski tradition going!! The prize drawing ended late, and before long with the thickening clouds, it became dark. We had a few public visitors from the park rangers star program across the highway come over to see our setup. After they left, we were all to bed by 10:00pm.

Sunday 08/28/2011:

I slept in till near 08:00 am, finished packing the indoor items, and was on the road by 09:30am, the last of the Kiski group to leave.

After 3.5 great nights of video astronomy observing, this concludes this year's 2011 BFSP adventure! I made it through most of my observing list and video-captured 87 new deep-sky objects.

I'll have my video-observations of the various deep-sky objects that I imaged over the past week processed and online sometime later this fall.

Please visit my Constellation Tour page at:

<http://home.comcast.net/~lsmch/constellationtour1.htm>

Larry McHenry

Astronomical Webportal:

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