

Calhoun Starpark Visioning - September, 2014

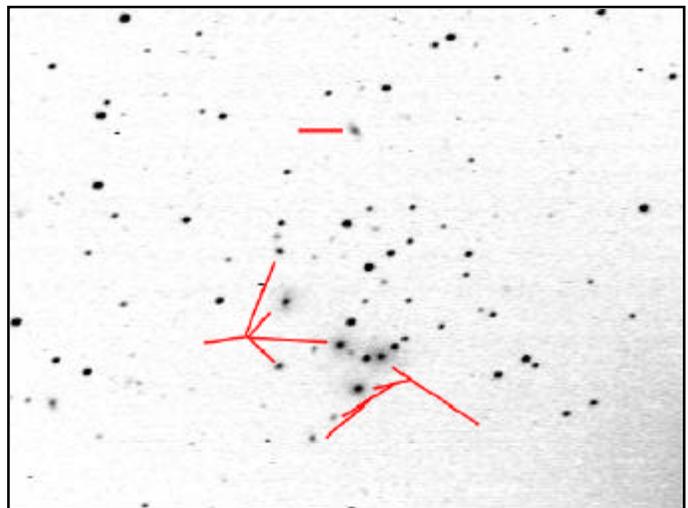
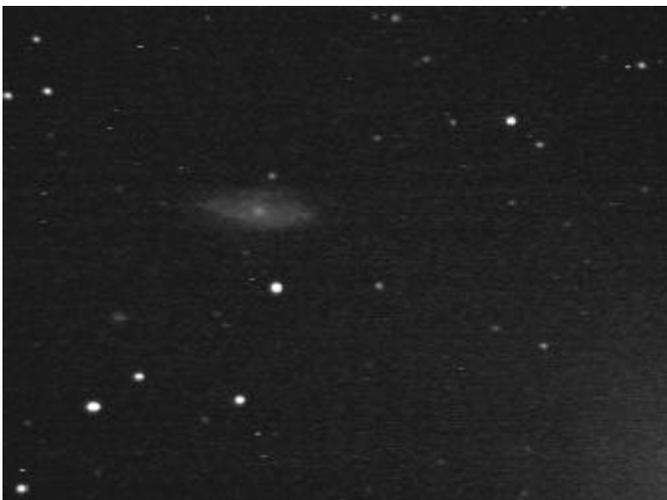
For the past couple of years, I've been involved with a group from the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) in developing a dark-sky location at the Calhoun County Park, near Grantsville West Virginia. Calhoun is one of the the darkest spots in the Eastern U.S. that you probably haven't heard of. <http://stellar-journeys.org/calhounpark.htm>

This September, the ARC and local county officials sponsored a visioning/planning session for creating a starpark. Several amateurs from the Pittsburgh area attended the event.



Friday 09/19/2014 - Sunday 9/21/2014:

Had a good time this past weekend down at Calhoun Cty Park. While the skies weren't the best, there were plenty of good periods of observing on both nights. Friday night was definitely the better night with overall good seeing, but we were bothered by occasional bands of patchy clouds. There was just a few of us on the observing ridge, a local park board member and another fella who lived about a half-hour away, both who were just doing bino observing. There was also a trio who came up from Charleston with a small Celestron reflector. I spent the first several hours entertaining the group with video -astronomy of the usual showcase objects using my C8/CGEM telescope & StellaCam cameras, then I moved on to my Arp Galaxy survey and was able to get in 10 new galaxy observations including Arp14 (NGC7314) and galaxy chain Arp-113 (NGC67,68,69,70,71 & 72) before tiring out at 2:00am.



Saturday, I was woken up early by a high-school cross-country track meet that was going on below me at the Red Barn. By 10:30am, the track meet had "run its course", and the Univ of Tenn organizers of the starparty, along with a project crew from Fairmont U in WV had arrived, followed shortly by my South-Hills buddies Al and Paul, and then Tony & Roz.



We spent the day in several workshops regarding what would be needed to make Calhoun an astronomy destination, and walked the large fields to the south and east of the park. The Univ of Tenn group seems confident that they will be able to secure grant funding to build a modern restroom/shower-house facility at the park and run electrical & water hookups to whichever location is chosen as the astronomy field.



We gave them a lot of feedback on how other places were setup for observing and what us amateur-astronomers looked for in a site, (especially Cherry Springs as an example, for which I had brought a large envelope full of literature on), and I also suggested that they send a delegation up to Cherry Springs to talk to the park and locals and the Calhoun folks were quite interested in that idea.

At the end of the day, I gave my 'Intro to Stargazing' talk, along with a green -laser tour once it got dark. I then spent the early evening doing another video -astronomy demonstration for the park board, local supporters, and Univ of Tenn organizers, with Al and Paul also setting up a C11 for visual observing. Tony and Roz left early, before the starparty ended, as they were making the drive back home. Early on, a high-level haze kept the sky from being very good, but as the night wore on, the conditions improved, and occasionally cleared off nicely.

By the time the crowd thinned-out, I was too tired from the day to do any serious observations, so Paul and I spent the next couple of hours of good sky using Paul's Canon DSLR on my C8's 80mm guidescope shooting widefield images of clusters, nebula, and galaxies, while I used the Stellacam video cameras to find and display the same objects. Paul was able to get some really nice looking DSLR images thru the 80mm without any guiding. (that CGEM mount really tracks great, and it helped that I had spent the time the evening before on doing a very accurate polar align). Al continued to show the Univ of Tenn folks objects with his C11, until his optics finally dewed over, and then talked astronomy with them while everyone was waiting for Paul and I to find and image deep -sky objects. We did open clusters such as M11 and the Double -Cluster, the Swan and Lagoon nebula's, and the Andromeda and Pinwheel galaxies, along with other NGC's. I was quite impressed with how well that DSLR worked with my telescope setup! Finally, around 1:00am, we were all getting a bit tired, (the beer the park folks brought us probably didn't help), so we all called it a night and went to bed.

Was up again early Sunday morning, and was packed and on the road before the rain hit. Overall, the event was a success, with a good day's worth of discussion of what could potentially work out to be really nice dark-sky location and a starparty that evening to peak everyone's interest in making the 'starpark' happen.



Here's a short time-lapse video that I made at Calhoun on Friday, using a low-light Samsung security video camera on a tripod. I wanted to record more of the evening than what I got, but my video-recorder malfunctioned early on. I've loaded it to my Stellar Journeys YouTube site. "Sunset at Calhoun" <http://youtu.be/PtRTuW2Fmo>

Also, here's a link to a newspaper article about Calhoun : <http://www.charlestondaily.com/article/20140918/DM01/140919201>

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