

Boot Leg Astronomerrrr's Star Party

The 1st annual Boot Leg Astronomerrrr's Star Party was held the weekend of May 18th thru the 20th. After a pleasant +/- 1 hour and 40 minute drive from Lombard, I arrived at the Green River Wildlife Conservation Area on Friday the 18th followed by a couple friends, Doug and Dave.

There were roughly 30-35 people attending this event. Our hosts, Paul, Mike and Scott put together a real nice 'welcome package' that contained insect repellent towelettes, a planisphere from Edmund Scientifics, catalogs from Edmund Scientifics and Orion, and copies of the May Binocular Objects List and May Observing Challenge from FVAS (<http://www.fvastro.org>) members Jeff Benuzzi and Mark Christensen.

After setting up our tents, campers, and observing equipment, we did a little white-light solar observing. A nearby camper/astronomer, Art from Joliet, loaned us a Coronado PST to view the Sun through hydrogen-alpha. The views through the PST were really impressive! A little later on Friday afternoon we saw the Moon & Venus through binoculars and then our telescopes.

On Friday evening, we were able to see the Moon, Mercury, Venus, Saturn, and Jupiter a little later, in addition to a multitude of deep sky objects. We witnessed the occultation of 136 Tauri by the Moon. The skies were indeed darker than any of the suburban Chicago sites we have observed from. Later that night, I had the opportunity to see the shadow of Jupiter's moon Io on Jupiter's disc.

The largest telescopes at this event were probably a couple of 20-inch Obsessions, but we got to take a real close look at the new Meade 16-inch f/4.5 LightBridge truss tube Dobsonian. It was nice to be able to look up at the zenith without having to crawl up a ladder, and the movements in both axes were very smooth.

On Saturday afternoon our friend Don arrived, and we once again viewed the Moon and Venus in addition to some solar viewing, although some clouds were present.

Early Saturday evening there was a door prize drawing with nice prizes that I believe were provided by Agena Astro Products (<http://www.agenaastro.com>).

On Saturday night it cleared up and remained clear until roughly 3:30 AM! We enjoyed the Venus & Moon conjunction at dusk, and another wonderful night of observing. In my opinion, Friday night was the best night of the two, but there was no dew either night! The highlight for me was the view of M51 in my Miyauchi 22x60 binoculars. It was huge!

The only downside was that both days were a little windy and the wind kicked up quite a bit of dust from the parking lot to our south. Considering all the plusses, this was a minor inconvenience.

This was a great Star Party, with wonderful hosts; I can't wait until next year's event!

Jeff Benuzzi