

REFLECTIONS / REFRACTIONS

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University Lowbrow
Astronomers

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A NIGHT IN SCIO FARMS ESTATES

Charlie Nielsen, Sept. 3, 2011

On the night of August 26, 2011 the Lowbrows made their second attempt to hold a public star party in Scio Farms Estates. This is a large (nearly 1000 homes) manufactured home community of about 3000 people. It is located about 4 miles south of Dexter, about a mile east of Baker Road on Jackson Boulevard. With Dexter to the north, Ann Arbor to the east and those nasty overkill lights at the truck stop at I-94 and Baker Road; well this is not what you would call dark skies. However, though there are unshielded overhead street lights in Scio Farms, they are low pressure sodium lights, and the community sits in Scio Township, which does have an outdoor lighting ordinance. This translates into darker skies than you would expect to find considering the location. If you can keep the streetlights out of your eye you can see some faint fuzzies reasonably well. On one especially good night years ago I was able to see the Helix easily in my 12" DOB.

A year or two ago I tried to do this event and was joined by Jim Forrester. All we saw was the Moon, for about five seconds. That was it. So we tried again this year and had better results. I was joined by David Jorgensen, Norb Vance, John Wallbank, Mike Radwick, and John Causland. I especially thank John Causland and Mike for staying in the area and helping out. They were thinking of going to a much darker site up north, but club loyalty got to them. This meant that we had two 8", a 12", 14", 14.5", and 24" set up to show some residents a few deep sky wonders.

We set up at around 8:30 PM while being attacked by a swarm of mosquitoes. They were so thick that I accidentally inhaled one, but was able to spit it out. I hope the experience was at least as unpleasant for the little vampire as it was for me. I think Mike said something about almost eating one too. I used repellent three times but just having them hovering around me was aggravating. The good news is that by 10:30 PM or so it had cooled down enough that they largely went away. However, that cool down and the fact it was a humid day and evening, made for copious dew. Being right next to a large pond likely did not help much either. By the time we packed up our feet were wet. I forgot to bring my battery for my Telrad dew heater, so I dewed up before the first time I used it. I would wipe it off but by the time I leaned over to look it was dewed again! Plus I had dew on the inside of the glass too! Fortunately my 12" scope is an Orion Intelliscope, so I just used the controller to find my way around. Thank you electronics! The sky conditions were only fair, with some bands of light clouds passing by at times. The steadiness was pretty good, but would go bad now and then. Despite this our views of some of the showpiece summer objects and comet Garrard were pretty nice. Seeing the comet in the same field of view with M71 was the highlight of the evening. As a demonstration of the beauty of this view I have included an image taken by Mike Radwick that evening. Mike got this shot by stacking 25 images of 20 seconds each. It was taken using his Canon 30D DSLR and his excellent 14.5" F 4.3 StarMaster telescope. The scope was unguided and Mike operated the camera manually. Let this be an example of what can be done under even less than ideal conditions. Note the darkness of the background and number of background stars. Nice work Mike, and thanks!

We had about 25 happy guests and they were all very happy with what we showed them and taught them. I have since heard several comments from residents about how much fun they had. Maybe they will talk to their neighbors about it and we can get more turnout next time. I would call this event another success for our club and worth repeating some day. Thanks to all that participated, and I think that despite the little blood sucking friends and the dew, we all had a good time too. And that is why we do these things, isn't it?

LOWBROWS AT LESLIE SCIENCE CENTER

Charlie Nielsen, August 23, 2011

After a drought of appearances at Leslie Science and Nature Center for several years, we have held several events there the last year or so. This article is about our last two.



We showed up on the evening of July 14 to show the Moon and some other goodies to a group of elementary schools students who were camping out on site. We had 16 students, majority were girls. I started them out by explaining what we were doing and going to look at and how to approach and handle (actually not to handle) the telescopes. Then we proceeded to the paved area

just off the parking lot where we had several scopes of various types and sizes set up. Club members that participated were: Amy Cantu, John Wallbank, Jim Forrester, Yasu Inugi, Yumi Inugi, Jack Brisbin and Mike Radwick. We had fairly good skies off and on, but a nearly full Moon. We of course showed them the Moon, as well as Saturn, Alberio, and some of those other brighter eye candy objects. There is plenty of light pollution at this site, but at least we found the circuit breaker for the parking lot lights, and we weren't afraid to use it. One of the great things about this site is the convenience of parking right next to a hard surfaced set up area. It makes set up and take down about as easy as it ever gets. The kids were pretty well behaved and they seemed to have a great time, as I know we did.



Our next date was August 4, and for a while that day I thought I may have to cancel. The weather forecast did not look good, but at the last minute it improved. The skies were mostly clear when we were setting up, but it did not stay that way. This time we did not have to deal with a too full Moon, but as it became dark it also became cloudy. Again we had a group of 16 kids camping on site, but not the same group of kids. They were pretty excited to look through some scopes, but as luck would have it, the sky was now totally cloudy. Oh, that **** Michigan Nebula! However, as I was explaining the situation to the anxious group the sky started to clear! Within minutes we had the best conditions since we had set up. So we immediately started to show them Saturn, some doubles and triples, globulars, various nebulae, and the like. Our crew for this event was John Wallbank, Mike Radwick, Jim Forrester, Abhilasha Anna, and Jack Brisbin. We all had a great time and the timing of the weather was noteworthy.



So there you have it. Two consecutive events and the skies allowed us to do both of them! Who would have predicted that during the cruel summer we experienced up to that time? I want to thank all the participants listed, and thank Mike Radwick for also providing the images. Also, we are not done for the year at LSNC, as we have an "Observe the Moon Night" scheduled for October 8. I hope to see you there.



M8 7-9-2011 Seven Sisters Observatory Manchester Michigan
Orion 8" F5 Newtonian, Baader MPCC, Canon 10D Modified DSLR, G11 Mount
Guided using Orion Starshoot AG and WO ZenithStar 66SD. 8 X 600 Seconds at ISO800

M8 - The Lagoon Nebula

"An absolutely beautiful film...nothing less than captivating."

— Austinist

WINNER!

Jury Prize for Best Score/Music at SXSW Film Festival!

WINNER!

Grand Jury Prize, Environmental Film Fest at Yolo!



Coming to Ann Arbor

Date: Tuesday October 11, 2011

THE CITY DARK

a search for night on a planet that never sleeps

Time: 6:30 pm

Location: **Ann Arbor District Library**
343. South Fifth Ave
Ann Arbor 48104

Screening will be downstairs in the
Multi-Purpose Room.

A FEATURE DOCUMENTARY FROM WICKED DELICATE FILMS

THE CITY DARK

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Emmet County's "Headlands" International Dark Sky Site:

An Astrophotographers Perspective

By Clayton Kessler

While visiting up north last weekend I had the opportunity to stop at the new International Dark Sky Site in Emmet County – "The Headlands". "The Headlands" has been an established recreation park in Emmet County for a while. It is located on the shores of Lake Michigan about 2 miles west of Mackinaw City. Now – two miles sounds close but this is out in the boondocks!

The website indicates that this is primarily for naked eye observing or perhaps observing with binoculars. As an astrophotographer I say "Hokum!" A dark sky site NEEDS to have astrophotos taken there. There are, however, "issues".



When you enter the site the first thing that you come to is an information/picnic shelter. This gives a lot of information on the Headlands as well as a map of the site.

The way to the dark sky viewing site is very well marked. Just look for the blue signs. After a short drive there is a fairly good sized parking lot – and a "Porta-Potty" at the closest point to the observing beach.

It isn't all good news. If you want to bring a significant amount of observing equipment to the beach you have to schlep it all down this path from your car.



And then find a spot to set up here.



It is pretty rocky and uneven on the beach as well as having a lot of brush to deal with. Not insurmountable problems but you must be aware of them. There were a few visitors on the beach.

Nothing I would not expect to see at any remote site – or my backyard. The payoff is the view from the beach – this is looking west-ish over Lake Michigan.

By walking out on the beach a bit you have a pretty good view in all directions. I don't know what plans – if any – are in place to groom the beach scrub and make it more manageable for equipment placing. Please note that I did not find any convenient 120VAC electrical outlets so plan accordingly if you require power.



There are some other possibilities for this site. Right next to the rocky beach is this beach house – called “The Beach House” for some reason ;-).



As you can see this is a large place that is rated to hold 20. There are two bedrooms, each with two queen beds and two trundle beds (each trundle is two twin beds). There are also a pair of couches in the living room that fold out to queen beds. The house includes bathrooms, showers, a kitchen and power. Note the grassy lawn areas – just begging to have telescopes set up on them. This facility is available for rent at a rate of \$250.00 per night. Kind of pricey to head up yourself for a weekend but split among a group of 8 or 14 people it might be a good option for a long weekend! I can see some mini star parties that include dark skies and real comfort!

Congratulations to the Emmet County people and everyone that worked to get the Dark Sky Site designation here. This really looks to have great possibilities and only needs a bunch of dedicated observers and astrophotographers to start using it on a regular basis. If you are heading anywhere near Mackinaw City I recommend a visit to the site – well worth the stop!



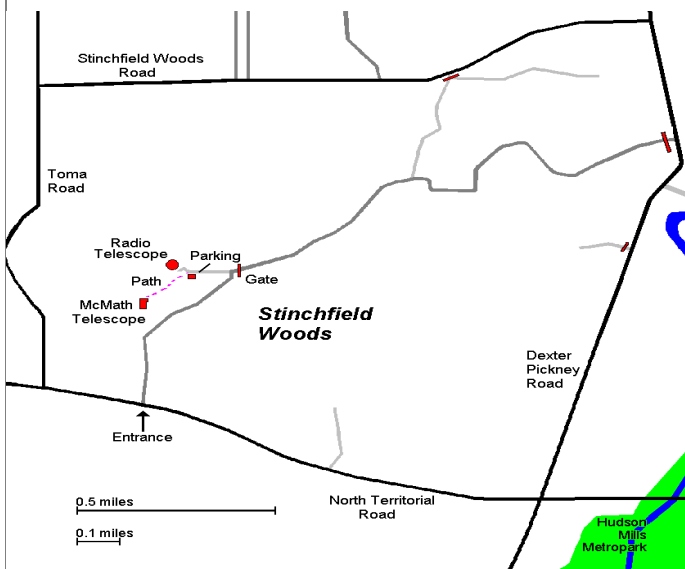
NGC 7635 by Clayton Kessler Manchester Michigan 7-30-2011
Orion 8" F5 Newtonian, Baader MPCC, Canon 10D Modified DSLR, G11 Mount
Guided using Orion Starshoot AG and WO ZenithStar 66SD. 18 X 600 Seconds at ISO 800

NGC 7635 - The Bubble Nebula

Places & Times

Dennison Hall, also known as The University of Michigan's Physics & Astronomy building, is the site of the monthly meeting of the University Lowbrow Astronomers. Dennison Hall can be found on Church Street about one block north of South University Avenue in Ann Arbor, MI. The meetings are usually held in room 130, and on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7:30 pm. During the summer months and when weather permits, a club observing session at the Peach Mountain Observatory will follow the meeting.

Peach Mountain Observatory is the home of the University of Michigan's 25 meter radio telescope as well as the University's McMath 24" telescope which is maintained and operated by the Lowbrows. The observatory is located northwest of Dexter, MI; the entrance is on North Territorial Rd. 1.1 miles west of Dexter-Pinckney Rd. A small maize & blue sign on the north side of the road marks the gate. Follow the gravel road to the top of the hill and a parking area near the radio telescopes, then walk along the path between the two fenced in areas (about 300 feet) to reach the McMath telescope building.



Public Open House / Star Parties

Public Open Houses / Star Parties are generally held on the Saturdays before and after the New Moon at the Peach Mountain observatory, but are usually cancelled if the sky is cloudy at sunset or the temperature is below 10 degrees F. For the most up to date info on the Open House / Star Party status call: (734)332-9132. Many members bring their telescope to share with the public and visitors are welcome to do the same. Peach Mountain is home to millions of hungry mosquitoes, so apply bug repellent, and it can get rather cold at night, please dress accordingly.

Membership

Membership dues in the University Lowbrow Astronomers are \$20 per year for individuals or families, \$12 per year for students and seniors (age 55+) and \$5 if you live outside of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

This entitles you to the access to our monthly Newsletters on-line at our website and use of the 24" McMath telescope (after some training).

A hard copy of the Newsletter can be obtained with an additional \$12 annual fee to cover printing and postage.

(See the website

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/theclub/>

for more information on joining the club).

Membership in the Lowbrows can also get you a discount on these magazine subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope - \$32.95 / year

Astronomy - \$34.00 / year or \$60.00 for 2 years

For more information contact the club Treasurer. Members renewing their subscriptions are reminded to provide the renewal notice along with your check to the club Treasurer. Please make your check out to: "University Lowbrow Astronomers"

Newsletter Contributions

Members and (non-members) are encouraged to write about any astronomy related topic of interest.



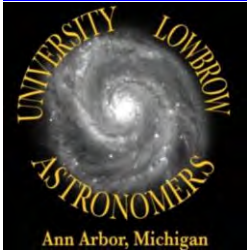
Lowbrow's Home Page

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/>



University Lowbrow Astronomers

Reflections & Refractions



NGC 6888 by Clayton Kessler Manchester MI 9-18-2009 and 7-26-2011
Orion 8" F5 Newtonian, Baader MPCC, Canon 10D Modified DSLR, G11 Mount
Guided using Orion Starshoot AG and WO ZenithStar 66SD. 9-18-09 12 X 300 and 7-26-11 10 X 600

NGC 6888 - The Crescent Neb.

Website

www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/

