

Date: 2001 December 23

Time: 23.30 → 01.00

Location: Balcony in Skärholmen
Stockholm

Temperature: -14°C

Observation report #2

It was -14°C outside this night. I went out on the balcony to get some fresh air, to my big surprise I saw that the sky was clear of clouds, which made me a little bit of happy. I started to wonder whether Saturn & Jupiter would be visible from my balcony. I leaned a little bit and saw Saturn! I thought "In about an hour I should be able to observe it from a comfortable position". This would be my first time looking at Saturn & Jupiter with the LX-50 as I didn't have any time over before (school, mostly). The balcony was covered with snow so I got in to get some warm clothes on and started shuffling the snow. After that I took out the telescope so it got to chill down for about an hour. I didn't mount it on the wedge because this is a 2-man work (it's HEAVY) so I mounted it in ALT-AZ position on the ground. To my big disappointment I saw that the finder was not adjusted so it took me about five minutes before I even found Saturn. While searching I realized how extremely cold it was outside, it did really HURT. There was no problem with the clothes, the problem was that astronomical observing is not so very athletic. At first I used my 40mm ScopeTronix eyepiece but immediately I switched to the 26 Meade SP. WOW! With my 3.5" refractor I only saw Titan, with the LX-50 I saw 4 "dots" more. At first I thought "But hey! Maybe those dots might be stars?". I got a notebook and pen and sketched the positions of the "dots" relative to Saturn. At the computer I later saw that I did see moons of Saturn! The moons were (with magnitude in parentheses): Titan (8.1), Dione (10.1), Rhea (9.4), Iapetus (10.8) and Tethys (9.9). Thought Iapetus was the faintest moon it was the most easily observable moon (after Titan). This must have been because of the fact that it was the moon at the greatest distance from Saturn. I now realized the power of a 10 inch telescope :)

The atmosphere was terrible at this time, Saturn looked like it was boiling. I only saw the moons sometimes, and only when I did NOT look at them, but when I was looking at the side of them. This is because of the fact that the eye is more sensitive "at the sides" than in the centre. At some second I could see the Cassini-division, but Saturn has been looking better even with my 3.5" refractor when the atmosphere has been steadier. The difference here however was that Saturn was BRIGHT. Really really bright! It did ruin my night vision! This was not the case with the 3.5" refractor. I have to get some filters :)

After some failed attempts at photographing Saturn, Jupiter came in position, the time was almost 01.00. The cold weather had made one of my legs to fall asleep. I went in to warm up a bit. When I started to observe I again realized that the finder was not aligned, so it was just to start looking with the 40mm eyepiece again. When I found it I set in the 26mm SP and again I thought "This is BRIGHT!". Thanks to the atmosphere I could not see any particular details except for some bands and the moons. It would be fun to take out this telescope on the country so I could really appreciate what can be done with this telescope. When I realized that I probably wouldn't see any more details I started to pack it all together (it was coooooold). Lifting it back in was a real pain, now it was not only something heavy, it was cold as h*ll too!

I was pleased with this night, thought the atmosphere was not so nice. The telescope worked GREAT at -14°C, even the DEC-motor did not disappoint me. I followed the planets at 8X speed with the hand controller and no problems there either! Now I can only dream of being out on the country with this scope.....