

Date: 2002 April 20/21
Time: 21.00 → 01.30 Local time
Location: Ekerö
Stockholm

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Temperature: About 0 - 5°C.

Observation report #4

A couple of days ago I found out that one in my class also was interested in the great hobby of amateur astronomy. We were talking a little and after a while I found out that he had a Meade 10" LX-200, which is a great telescope. Leif, which is his name also had a great collection of accessories. Anyway, after talking about telescopes & stuff for about 3 hours we decided that we should have a small star party before it got all too bright here. A quick check in Skymap showed us that we should get about 2 hours of really dark skies. Unfortunately the moon was going to be up, but we decided to have the star party anyway.

When we were all set up and ready to go we warmed up with watching the usual stuff as The Moon, Venus, Jupiter & Saturn. I immediately saw that this night wasn't one of the best, but it sure was acceptable. Air was clear, but a little turbulent. As we were standing on a beach, there were sometimes visitors who were curious about what we were doing. Nothing could explain this better than just showing them the moon (yes, the moon is always beautiful). There were a lot of "AAAH's" and "OOOH's". About 22.00 when we thought that most people were sleeping we could start the serious work. But no. About 20 kids not older than 16 year came there with motor crosses and beer starting to drink. Most of them seemed to be drunk after about 15 minutes. Too bad as this was a great place to observe from, quiet & pretty dark. Now it was neither quiet (loud music) nor dark (motor crosses lights shining directly at us just to disturb). As we had equipment there worth.....a lot of money we decided that we should pack and search for another place to observe from. This would take us time; packaging two LX 10 inch tubes takes time. About 23.00 we had the equipment up and running again at a new site (actually 10 meters from Leif's house, which I thought was a GREAT place to observe from).



Me posing with my telescope ☺

Now, we could start. After levelling and aligning the GOTO-system of Leif's telescope, I thought that we could test it. I had actually never been out with an LX-200 in the field before so this was very exciting for me. My LX-50 was already up, but it was only roughly polar aligned. However I didn't think much of it as I was checking Leif's LX-200. Now we were about to enter the first object M51 (Whirlpool Galaxy) and it started to slew, and slew and slew...after a while it stopped. Well, I looked thru the 40mm eyepiece and I thought that I could see something. None of us were sure that we saw the galaxy so we entered M81 instead. Now, I looked again. There it was, in the middle of the eyepiece! Incredible! Now that we knew that the GOTO made the object appear in the very middle of the eyepiece we slewed back to M51 and this time we were sure that we were actually looking at the galaxy. "What next?" I thought. We didn't have a sky map with us except for a portable computer with sky map



The whole setup (with Leif in the background)

pro installed. It was cold this night so I was sure that the batteries wouldn't hold for long. Usually the batteries hold for over 2 hours, this night they would not hold for more than 40 minutes. Disappointing. We searched for interesting objects in the Big Dipper (just like M51/81) and skymap showed us M94, a third galaxy. No problems to see this one either (thought it was just a small smudge). As a final we entered M13 the great cluster. "Very nice", I thought. It occupied a big part in the FOV even though we were using a 40mm eyepiece (giving us approx. 60X). I could see some stars at the edges of the cluster. The whole object looked like a glittering ball.

I was pleased with this night. We took some short exposures of M13 and M81, not longer than 4 minutes just for fun. I'll be happy if just one exposure comes out good. As the film is not yet developed, that is yet to be seen.

