



# O.A.O.G. NEWS

Volume 8-8, September 1999

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## **1) About this newsletter...**

Welcome to the 8th issue of OAOG News. This monthly email newsletter plus observing alerts, and reports are sent to all those who have responded to me. I am also mailing this newsletter to other friends. If at any time, you would like to be removed from this mailing list, please send me an email to let me know. This issue is certainly a busy one! Thanks to everyone who contributed!

August has been quite a memorable month for many. With the warm summer nights, it has been a great opportunity for many to come out and join the various star parties. A spectacular total solar eclipse over Europe and the Perseids meteors have been the highlights of the month. In September, we can expect nights to start cooling down and bring us some of the clearest skies of the year. Watch for Jupiter and Saturn as they begin to be more easily visible in the evening.

Your observing reports, observing tips and astronomy announcements are all welcome for OAOG News. Simply email your submissions to me and they will be included for next month's issue.

## **2) REPORT: Sidewalk astronomy...**

...by Rock Mallin

Well we did it again!!! Sidewalk astronomy has to be one of the many rewards astronomy as to offer! Roland Prevost, Pierre Martin, Jason Mainville and his son, myself, setup at St-Laurent shopping center in Ottawa, on Aug.24 1999. Many people showed up and about 25 took the time to stop to view through our telescopes. Many were asking questions and were thrilled to view simple objects like the moon and planets. The "high lite" of the evening was when a car pull up. A gentleman and his young girl friend came out to look in one of my scope and said.... W O W ! ! He could not believe what he was seeing. He then told his girlfriend to look and she too was amazed. But when he thank me for letting him have a look, he asked me if it was a photograph he was looking at or if it was the real thing!!! I assured him it was real... He then proceeded in front of the scope to look at the image.... I then lowered the telescope and I had to show him myself that there was no image or photograph in front of the optics!!! The gentleman left puzzled and could not believe it was possible to see so well!!! It is an event that marked many of us and I'm not ready to forget!!! If any of you have never done sidewalk astronomy, I encourage you to do so at least once in your life... It is guaranteed to leave you with a permanent memory that will last a life time!!!

Ps. The object the gentleman was looking at was.... the moon!

## **3) REPORT: Foymount Stargazing sessions - August 14, 21...**

...by Rock Mallin

I would like to thank every one who made it on Saturday, Aug. 14 1999, at Foymount. I got there at about 5:00P.M. but someone beat me there!! Alderic Sabourin made it with his new Kendrick portable observatory, and was just getting ready for an intense all night observing session. And it was intense!! From about 8:00 P.M. to 6:00A.M. the next day, we all observed intensely!! It was one of the best night I have seen yet for this location. With a visual magnitude of 7.1 at about 1:15 A.M.,I did some imaging with various ccd cameras. We got some visiting people from the town of Foymount, and I entertained a

bunch of teenagers well into the night sky. I even showed them the art of ccd imaging! I got an assistant volunteer to operate my new laptop computer, and she was very good at it! Her friend took over for a while, and they were all excited the whole night!! The parents of some of those kids came along and stayed until 2:30 A.M.!!

And to put an end to this exiting weekend, I ended up on Armstrong Rd., behind the Ottawa airport on the following Sunday night. To my surprise, I was joined by an impressive amount of observers, all looking forward to view the night skies!! Then, I did some more ccd imaging, and helped some new observers with their new telescopes. I then left at about 1:30 a.m., ...with both eyes in the same socket!!!! .... But it was all worth it...

August 21...by Pierre Martin

We had planned another Foymount session for Sat. Aug 21. Early in the day, it was virtually certain that weather conditions would wash out the event, so we cancelled. With disappointment, I unpacked my gear. Then at 7:00PM, I got a call from Rock Mallin to warn me that some people had made it to Foymount regardless of the unpromising forecast. Not only that, but those at Foymount reported clear skies! So I changed my mind, loaded up the car and took off. It would be a small get-together after all. By the time I arrived, the sun was well below the horizon and I was greeted by Alderic Sabourin who was there alone since mid-afternoon. He was all set for an all night observing, and well equiped with Kendrick tent. A few minutes later, Roland Prevost and Richard Harding both arrived. We each had our own 8in S/C telescopes for the night, complete with grocery paper bag dew caps!! Yes, we had regretably left our real dew caps at home. We have rarely ever seen dew at Foymount before, but this time it was present quite heavily. We spent the first half of the night casually observing some of the easier sky objects, while the bright gibbous moon was still up. When the moon finally set later at night, we enjoyed dark magnitude 6.8 skies. We took some time to go visit the (truly dark!) hill further from the towers. Constellations seemed buried in so many stars! We finished off by viewing the surprisingly bright comet Lee, just before morning twilight began. A very good night!

#### **4) REPORT: Solar Eclipse Adventure!...**

...by Frank Bayerl

The chance to see a total eclipse tracking across all of Europe which also happened to be the last of the millennium seemed too good an opportunity to miss. Having witnessed the February 1998 Caribbean eclipse, I had become hooked on the experience, truly the greatest show on earth. After weighing the costs and attractions of various tours, I made

plans to join a 12-day eclipse tour to the Czech Republic and Hungary which would view the event from the Lake Balaton area of Hungary. Weather prospects were for a 60-70% chance of clear skies on eclipse day, not as good as Turkey, but decidedly better than England or western Europe. Since this is not a travel article, I will not dwell on the many attractions of Prague and Budapest. The former city, in particular, is probably the most picturesque I have seen anywhere. We had four days there and three in Budapest and then headed for our hotel in a town by the name of Hérviz at the southern end of Lake Balaton. This was some distance from the centre line and was not the hotel originally chosen for the tour, which would have been directly on the line. Roads in the area were congested with summer holiday traffic, so it was decided that no attempt would be made on eclipse day to reach the centre line. However, we did find a site somewhat closer that could have been designed for a Hollywood movie: a ruined castle on a hilltop overlooking Lake Balaton with a 360-degree view of the surroundings. This, we decided, would be our site, if weather conditions allowed. The day before the eclipse turned cloudy late in the afternoon and many anxious glances were being cast at the sky. I got very little sleep that night and so was able to monitor sky conditions. Between midnight and 3 a.m. it was crystal clear, with Jupiter and Saturn dominating the eastern sky and I allowed my hopes of seeing a spectacular eclipse the next day to rise. They were dashed, however, shortly afterwards when clouds rolled in followed by a sheet lightning, thunder and rain. I tried to console myself by thinking of all the interesting sights the trip had included, but somehow the thought of going home without seeing the main event left me feeling quite unsatisfied.

Things were still iffy at breakfast time, but patches of blue had begun to appear. The consensus was to proceed to our site and hope for the best. The weather continued to improve and by the time we reached the area (a town called Szegliget) we were confident of good conditions. The climb to the top, perhaps 300-400 ft. above the Lake, proved worth it for the view alone. The photographers set up their equipment and the rest of us settled in to await first contact at about 11:25 local time. While not too crowded, the site was obviously known to others and we were hardly alone.

The partial phase was seen in near-perfect conditions. As in my only previous total eclipse, the moon's progress seemed slow at first, then to speed up and finally to slow down again as totality approached. Our vantage point gave us a good opportunity to watch the changes in the landscape as the light dimmed. There was the familiar sharpening of shadows, a general greying of colours and the many crescents cast by the leaves of trees on the ground. This time I particularly wanted to look for the approaching shadow and for shadow bands, as I had missed these aspects in last year's eclipse, viewed from at sea.

As totality approached, I faced the usual dilemma of where to look, for the approach of

the shadow or for the last glimmer of sunlight. I tried to do both, of course, and to some extent succeeded. Totality came at about 12:48 local time. After the diamond ring, several bright prominences were visible to the naked eye and Venus was obvious at approximately the 8 o'clock position. I failed to see Bailey's beads again this year, but the shadow bands were clearly visible on white towels placed on the ground and continued for a surprisingly long time. The corona was as bright as I remembered from last year but seemed spikier, all around the sun. I attempted to take a few photos during totality, as well as to observe visually and with binoculars and found that there was too

little time even for these simple activities. Allowance has to be made for the almost overwhelming emotional impact of the event. Far too soon, the reappearance of prominences and the second diamond ring signalled the end of totality. The greatest difference for me between this year's event and last year's was in the duration of the diamond ring, which last year seemed to hold for an unbelievable 15 to 20 seconds. This year it was a more typical few seconds only, both at second and third contact. This year, however, the prominences were far more prominent. No one was counting, but I estimate from our position that we saw a few seconds more than two minutes of totality. This eclipse seemed significantly shorter than last year's when our position gave us 3'22" of totality and made me resolve that I want my next to be a really long one! The skies had co-operated perfectly and remained cloudless until well after totality ended.

Our tour members were about equally divided between veteran eclipse chasers and neophytes. I fell somewhere in the middle, this being my second eclipse. In the end, everyone was delighted with the weather conditions and the photographers most probably got some excellent results. As we went our separate ways the following day, there was much talk of meeting again in June 2001 for the great African eclipse!

## **5) REPORT: Perseid Meteor Shower results...**

...by Pierre Martin

On the evening of Wednesday August 11th, weather conditions did not look too promising for Ottawa, with a forecast calling for mainly cloudy. After some debate, I decided to take a chance and go out anyway. I went for a one hour drive out south-west of Ottawa to a friend's observatory near Perth. About halfway there, I began to seriously question the weather as the sky was completely overcast with occasional drops of rain. Once there, I was greeted by an optimistic Mike Wirths saying that the weather was on a clearing trend. I looked up into the west to see that patches of blue sky were indeed forming. We then checked the latest satellite imagery, and to my amazement, it showed a large clear hole approaching with clouds dissipating quickly. Indeed, within a few minutes the sky cleared up completely and remained that way all night.

Early earthgrazing Perseids first appeared in deep twilight, as I was getting ready to start. One of them was a nice orange magnitude -4 that travelled close to Ursa Major with over 30 degrees length. A few minutes later, another long Perseid of about magnitude -3 went high overhead. I signed on at 2:25 UT to observe for 6 hours time. Not long after I began, patchy ground level fog formed and resulted with reduced limiting magnitude of 6.2. Eventually, as the night went on, the fog cleared and the sky gradually rose to 6.5 for the final hour. In all, a total of 250 meteors were seen. The first hour had low rates with only 15 meteors (only 8 of those being Perseids). As the radiant rose higher and fog cleared, meteors gradually picked up with 19 Perseids for the second hour, 27 for the third and 38 for the fourth. The fifth hour had similar activity, but my final hour surged to 49. Activity also present in small numbers from the Aquarids radiants and Alpha Capricornids (CAP). Only one Kappa Cygnid (KCG) was seen. Sporadics produced at best 15 meteors in a single hour.

There were a few good “highlights of the night”. The most impressive sight was seeing two meteors nearly crossing paths! One was a fast magn +3 Perseid in the north, and at the same time, a magn +3 sporadic sliced through on a 90 degree angle, “barely” missing each other! At 6:58 UT, another Perseid and sporadic appeared simultaneously, this time both meteors quite far apart. There were 4 more instances of two meteors appearing within a second. Long meteors were also beautiful. Two Perseids were seen travelling long 40 degrees path. One of these earthgrazer had a magnitude -3, vibrant blue-white color and left behind a 9 second persistent train. During the final hour before dawn, another magnitude -3 blue-white meteor appeared, this time producing a terminal burst and leaving behind 8 sec.train. As morning twilight grew, I signed off at 8:40 UT. Before leaving back home, we (Mike Wirths, Attila Danko, myself) enjoyed viewing the planets under good seeing with the 25inch telescope. It was the most dewy night in my memory, as everything got awfully wet in the morning. However, a really enjoyable night.

The next night (Thursday Aug 12/13), we had a weather system approaching from the west, and forecast called for clouding over in the evening. However around sunset, the sky was relatively clear, so I took a chance and headed out to Casselman in hopes of outrunning the approaching clouds. I had no idea what to expect, but figured it was worth taking a chance. This time I had some success. Skies remained clear and very transparent until 2:00 in the morning. The Milky Way was unusually good even in the early evening. As I arrived after sunset, I was greeted by over 15 other people also there to catch the Perseids. I was surprised by all the cars already there despite the chance of clouds! Not long after, some nicely colored Perseid earthgrazers high overhead soon had everyone “oooohing!” and “aaaahing” together.

With over 3 hours of clear sky, I logged 137 meteors. Of those, 107 were

Perseids. The first hour had 33 Perseids, including a good number of brilliant long meteors. The best was a yellow magnitude -4 (as bright as Venus) that shot over 35 degrees, leaving behind a 12 second long train. It sure got the sudden attention of everyone! Many other Perseids were seen far from the radiant often showing path lengths of 20 degrees. The second hour had 45 Perseids, with many fainter meteors. The exception was a spectacular magnitude -4 yellow Alpha Capricornid. It was slow moving and with a terminal flash. The CAP's also had a few more meteors, even this late in the month. The final hour was a bit disappointing with rates declining to only 29 Perseids. Clouds began to roll in near the end of that hour, but rates clearly seemed to slow down sharply. Minor activity came also from other showers. I was running my camera on tripod with 50mm f/2, B&W 400 ASA. There is a decent chance I may have captured a few bright Perseids, if I'm lucky? A few others at Casselman were also attempting meteor photos. I hope they got lucky? Anyway, everyone seemed to enjoy this session.

## **6) Foymount: A Serious Site for Stargazing...**

...by Rock Mallin

One of the most important item that a BACKYARD astronomer needs is a good clear sky.... you know... the one I'm talking about...maybe we should go to Arizona... But watch out!!! We have Foymount!! Only 1:45 hour away from Ottawa!! Now, Foymount is very high in altitude, 1,835' above sea level. When you consider people like Ray Cash and Steve Gothlieb of California's San Francisco Sidewalk Astronomer travel an incredible 4.5 hours to get to their favorite site, and it happens to be also on top of a mountain a lot higher than our Foymount, the question becomes clear that: Is it too far to go to Foymount to gain an extra .3 to .8 in magnitude? The answer is no!!! When you look at observers in the Toronto area, have to travel and average 3 to 3.5 hours to get to a site that is ONLY decent, the results becomes clear.

The only problem we have at this time with Foymount, is those famous RED lights in the communication towers. But different tests that some observers have done, indicate clearly that we are indeed LUCKY to have such a site available to us for astronomy purpose. Last month, an observer came with a small Bushnell SPOTTING scope with an aperture of 2 inches in diameter. When he was able to clearly see M51, the whirlpool galaxy, I had to see it to believe it!! Not only it was there, but it was CLEARLY resolved in a fashion that only much bigger scopes would have in a less dark sky. The Foymount location has been confirmed to be one of the best and with a little bit of work, we could make this an incredible site for all to use.

But, I must warn some of you, that Foymount is for the one who want the best possible skies, and for the ultimate observer with a passion to view the night skies like never seen before!! There are other locations around Foymount that I will investigate, but for now, it is a site for the most SERIOUS observer and astrophotographer alike.

If you think a magnitude of .3 to .8 won't justify the trip, than go behind the airport, on Armstrong Rd. or the old site that I have found years ago, Casselman, or there is always the F.L.O. for those in the RASC, or stay in front of you computer at home with some sky software and simulated stars.

All the work that went in making Foymount a success is so rewarding, that I will not have no one stop this venture that will profit all of us involve in a serious astronomy program. When you consider that the F.L.O is seriously affected by light pollution, sooner or later WE WILL HAVE to travel the 1.45 hour drive. Even bad seeing nights that I have witness at Foymount are were very usable.

We have a small portable toilet that I purchased for ANYONE to use, plus I generally supply the abundant cola refreshment to anyone who wants one (at my expense). If you feel that Foymount is too far, and if you feel that an extra .3 to .8 mag is not enough, than stay with your computer screen and view the night skies through a computer. A difference of .5 mag. is like adding a few inches to your telescope.

## 7) OAOG activities in September 1999...

This month, we are planing a possible return to Foymount (located west of Renfrew) for another weekend of all-night observing near the new moon. Foymount is located at 1835 feet altitude and offers very dark skies, often with good seeing for all kinds of observing. If you would be interested in joining us, please contact Rock Mallin (adave@cyberus.ca) or Pierre Martin (dob14.5@sympatico.ca), and we will keep you up to date with more details.

With the planets (and the moon) becoming easier to see in the evening sky, we will be holding a number of sidewalk observing sessions for the public. These events will be held at various locations from within the city (shopping center parking lots, cinema, ect.). If you would be interested in helping us out for one of these evenings, please let us know.

## 8) Web site updates...

Here are the latest updates to our web site. These updates should be mostly complete within a few days. To visit our site, go to : <<http://members.home.net/observers-group/>>

- The Upcoming Sky Events page is updated for September and October. Also, the original table layout has been restored.

- In many pages (especially articles and reports), long paragraphs of centered text were rather difficult to read. This is now improved by aligning these paragraphs on the left side.
- From the Meteors Section, layout for “Intro to Meteor Observing” is improved (including a new graphic). The “Active Showers for 1999” also has an updated layout.
- Latest meteor data from Pierre Martin (Aug 12/13). You will notice a new improved page with tables to properly align all the numbers. I have also provided some information to explain what the all the data and values represent.
- Don’t forget to regularly visit the “Where and When our next sessions will be”. We often update this page quickly, sometimes just a few hours before an observing session!

## 9) Our next meeting: Friday September 3...

You are invited to join us at our informal meetings, if you wish to meet us and share ideas!

The OAG holds its monthly meetings on every first Friday of each month. Our next get-together will be on September 3, at 6:00 PM. Location is at Burger King on St-Laurent Blvd, near the Museum of Science & Technology. Our meetings are very informal. We simply gather to chat and discuss our past/upcoming activities. We then head off to the RASC meeting held at 8:00 PM at the Museum’s auditorium. The RASC have their meeting open to the public as well. Everyone is welcome. Please send us a note if you need more information.

Hope to see you out there! Clear skies to all for September!

## 10) Contact information...

Ottawa Astronomy & Observers Group :  
 e-mail :observers-group@home.com, Phone : (613)-741-1612 Mon - Sat 10:00am - 9:00pm Sun 12:00pm -5:00pm

Other Contacts Within The Group...

Jason Mainville : e-mail : jmainville@home.com, Phone : Mon - Sat 10:00am - 9:00pm

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