

## THE MIS-ADVENTURES OF A VERY AMATEUR ASTRONOMER

THE 14<sup>th</sup> OF JULY HAS PARTICULAR SIGNIFICANCE FOR MANY PEOPLE; THE FRENCH FOR EXAMPLE CELEBRATE BASTILLE DAY. DAVID HAYE AND AMIR KHAN ON THE OTHER HAND WILL REMEMBER THE DAY FOR COMPLETELY OPPOSING REASONS. MY MEMORIES HOWEVER WILL BE LONG LASTING FOR JUST 15 MINUTES IN THE EARLY HOURS OF THE 15<sup>th</sup>.

THE OCCULTATION OF JUPITER AND THE MOON, (THE MOON BEING THE ONE IN FRONT I HOPE) WOULD AFFORD ME A SECOND OPPORTUNITY TO DO SOME SPECIFIC OBSERVING. (THE FIRST, BEING THE ILL FATED EFFORT TO WITNESS THE TRANSIT OF VENUS). SO, ALL WEEK I HAD BEEN PREPARING, SETTING UP MY CAMERA PIGGY BACKED ON MY TELESCOPE, GETTING THE BALANCE RIGHT, MAKING SURE THAT WHAT I SAW THROUGH THE SCOPE WAS WHAT I WOULD BE IMAGING ETC. THE ONLY PROBLEM WAS OUR GREAT BRITISH WEATHER, I COULDN'T GET ANY LIGHT SETTINGS FROM THE MOON AS I WISHED BECAUSE THE ONLY TIME SHE APPEARED I WAS AT WORK.

THE 14<sup>th</sup> ARRIVED, THE DAY ITSELF WAS SO -SO BUT THE LADY WEATHER PERSON ON RADIO DERBY SAID WE WERE IN FOR A CLEAR NIGHT...YIPDEE!!

ALAS AND ALACK, WHEN I CHECKED MY EMAILS THE VIEWING SESSION HAD BEEN CALLED OFF DUE TO CLOUD COVER, UNDAUNTED I CHECKED THE INTERNET, CLEAR SKIES FROM 11<sup>pm</sup> ONWARDS SO PREPARATIONS CONTINUED.

LOADING THE COLLOSUS OF RHODES INTO THE CAR, (THAT'S MY NEW NAME FOR THE CASE I'VE MADE FOR MY TELESCOPE. IT'S GOT A LITTLE OUT OF HAND; IT'S SO BIG NOW THAT I CAN'T ACTUALLY FIT IT ALL INTO MY CAR. I CAN ONLY USE THE BASE AS A CRADLE AND THEN IT'S SO HEAVY AND CUMBERSOME I HAVE TO UNLOAD IT BEFORE I PUT IT INTO THE CAR AND THEN PUT EVERYTHING BACK IN AGAIN. I THINK A SLIGHT CHANGE IN THE DIMENSIONS IS NECESSARY, EITHER THAT OR I COULD FIT WHEELS AND AN ENGINE AND RIDE IT TO WHEREVER I MIGHT BE GOING). OK, GOT EVERYTHING, CAMERA, FLASK OF COFFEE, CUPS, (INCASE ANYONE ELSE HAD DECIDED TO CHANCE IT), A FEW SARNIES, LAPTOP AND WEBCAM. 10<sup>pm</sup> OFF WE GO. TWO MILES DOWN THE ROAD, FORGOTTEN MY COAT, OH WELL HOPEFULLY IT'LL BE A WARM EVENING. TWO MORE MILES, DAMN! NO RED TORCH. NEVER MIND NOT TURNING BACK NOW. (THIS IS WHERE SHOPPING AT SAINSBURY'S IS AN ADVANTAGE...ORANGE BAGS YOU SEE, NOT BRILLIANT, BUT BETTER THAN NOWT).

AS I DROVE DOWN THE A52 TOWARDS BRAILSFORD I COULD SEE THE SKIES AHEAD CLEARING,, JUST A BIT HANGING OVER THE HORIZON, THINGS WERE LOOKING UP.

WHEN I ARRIVED I DROVE MY CAR STRAIGHT UP TO THE OBSERVATORY. (THE FIELD WAS STILL OCCUPIED AND I WASN'T SURE OF (a), HOW FRIENDLY THEY ARE AND (b), WHERE THEY'D ACTUALLY BEEN IF YOU GET MY DRIFT)

I SPENT THE NEXT HOUR SETTING EVERYTHING UP, PROPERLY POLAR ALIGNING THE SCOPE, (3 TIMES, ONCE TOO CLOSE TO THE DOME, SECOND COULDN'T GET TO THE EYEDIECE, SO THIRD THE GOLDILOCKS ZONE) MAKING SURE EVERYTHING WAS READY. MY INTENTION WAS TO USE MY WEBCAM THROUGH THE TELESCOPE EYEDIECE AND VIDEO THE EVENT WHILST TAKING A SERIES OF STILL SHOTS WITH MY CAMERA PIGGY-BACKED ON TOP AND USE THE MAGIC OF REGISTAX OR SOMETHING SIMILAR TO GET SOME DECENT IMAGES. I THEN CHECKED WITH STELLARIUM THE TIME OF ARRIVAL AND SET MY ALARM TO GIVE ME A 10 MINUTE WARNING.

THIS WAS WHEN MY LAPTOP DIED.

NEVER MIND, JUST MAKE A FEW LAST CHECKS, SO I TURNED THE SCOPE ONTO CASSEOPIA TO TAKE A COUPLE OF SHOTS, CHECK THE ALIGNMENT.

THAT'S WHEN THE CLOUDS BEGAN TO ROLL IN. NEVER MIND, STILL AN HOUR AND A HALF TO GO.

I HAD A DRINK OF COFFEE AND ATE MY SANDWICHES, CHECKED, STILL CLOUDY, HAD ANOTHER COFFEE, WENT FOR A WALK OUTSIDE. I SAW A PLANE, ITS LIGHTS BURNING BRIGHT THROUGH A SLIGHT GAP IN THE CLOUD. (AT LEAST I THINK IT WAS A PLANE, OR AM I THE FIRST PERSON IN HISTORY TO MISTAKE A U.F.O. FOR A PLANE, AND NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND). HAD ANOTHER COFFEE, MY ALARM SOUNDED SO I TURNED THE SCOPE ONTO THE SADDLE IN THE HILLS WHERE I EXPECTED THE MOON TO APPEAR AND WAITED, AND WAITED, STILL THE CLOUDS REFUSED TO MOVE, THE HORIZON BEGAN TO GLOW AS THE MOON ROSE BEHIND THE CURTAIN.

ONCE AGAIN WOULD I BE THWARTED BY CLOUD? ...BUT WAIT...IS THAT A STAR I SEE? YES THERE WAS CAPELLA, PEEKING OUT, AND YET MORE, THE CLOUD WAS SLOWLY, TANTILISINGLY BREAKING UP, BUT STILL NO MOON OR JUPITER, AND THEN, JUST BEFORE 3<sup>am</sup> THE CLOUD CLOSED IN AGAIN, BEATEN ONCE MORE I BEGAN TO PACK AWAY, RESIGNING MYSELF TO DEFEAT I TOOK MY CAMERA OFF THE TELESCOPE AND TOOK IT TO THE CAR...ONLY TO FIND THAT WHEN I RETURNED, THERE...SHINING IN ALL HER GLORY, THE CRESCENT MOON AND RIGHT AT THE TIP, A PEARL THAT WAS JUPITER. I ALMOST FELL DOWN THE STAIRS FETCHING MY CAMERA...NO TIME TO REMOUNT IT, I WOULD HAVE TO REEL OFF A FEW SNAPS HOLDING IT, NOT IDEAL AND I DIDN'T HAVE TIME TO FIDDLE WITH ANY SETTINGS, IT WAS JUST, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, ALTER THE SHUTTER SPEED, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, ALTER THE APERTURE AND SO ON. I TOOK MY FIRST SHOT AT 3 MINUTES PAST 3 AND BY 17 MINUTES PAST THE CLOUD RETURNED AND IT WAS ALL OVER.

I PACKED THE REST OF MY THINGS AWAY, CLOSED UP THE DOME AND SET OFF HOME AGAIN, SEMI PLEASED. THINGS HADN'T QUITE GONE TO PLAN, BUT I HAD AT LEAST CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF AN ASTONOMICAL EVENT THAT MAY TAKE A WHILE TO COME AROUND AGAIN.

DRIVING HOME I JUST WISHED...I HADN'T FINISHED THE COFFEE OFF.

I HOPE YOU ENJOY MY ACCOUNT OF THE EVENING AND IT MADE YOU TITTER JUST A LITTLE...

BRIAN

BRIAN'S PICTURES OF THE EVENT MAY BE SEEN [HERE](#).