

## Star party report – September 4, 2010 at Caledon Natural Area

Submitted by Glenn Holliday [holliday@acm.org](mailto:holliday@acm.org)

We had a large, very successful star party at Caledon on Saturday the 4th. The sky was very clear, and though the atmosphere gave some pronounced twinkling, we also hit some moments of unusually good seeing. Mike produced an outstanding view of the Veil Nebula.

I think our total attendance was 33 people and 13 telescopes. We still had some people arriving after some had left, so that many were not on the field all at the same time. Boy Scout Troop 1717 from Stafford joined us with their own observing plan and telescopes. The party group included several families out for the first time, some long time astronomers new to the area seeking out the local club, and some folks whom haven't gotten out to a star party for a while. Chatting and listening to people, it sounded like everybody was having as much fun as I was. And I much enjoyed just visiting with everybody.

This time of year, the end of summer, we saw the summer constellations disappearing in the west, and a few of us were there late enough to see the winter constellations appearing in the east. The Summer Triangle was the first asterism visible in the darkening sky, and later became more difficult to pick out because the sky gave us so much detail of the Milky Way. At Caledon in September we have a great view of the entire constellation Scorpius in the south. We got to see it spend some hours lying down on its side and setting in the west. At sunset we saw Venus, Spica, Mars, and Saturn for a short time in the west before they fell behind the tree line. Jupiter rose mid-evening. The early view featured lots of atmospheric turbulence, but in Joe and Sherry's telescope I was able to make out hints of several bands.

There were so many telescopes on the field that I think the entire sky was covered at any given moment. We got chances to see dozens of beautiful targets. I did a little comparing the view in my own telescope to the same target in other scopes of different types. I heard several people discovering targets for the first time.

A number of times a guest handed me a laser pointer and asked me to use it to point out what I was talking about. I guess those things have come down in price to the point where I really gotta get one!

Thanks to everybody for a great star party.

Addendum submitted by Michael Masters [grayfox65@cox.net](mailto:grayfox65@cox.net)

Glenn, Thanks much for an excellent star party report. Let me add my thanks also to the many RAC members who came out and helped make this one of the most successful star parties in recent memory: Glenn Holliday, Joe and Sherry Francis, Bart and Linda Billard, Rob Friedl and son, Don Clark, Glenn Faini, Brenda Conway, Ranny Heflin as well as yours truly. If I've forgotten anyone, please chime in!

Far from depressing attendance as some had feared, the holiday weekend, combined with a gorgeously clear sky, brought people out in droves, one family group from as far away as Ohio -- in attendance with a DC relative and astrophysics student they were visiting this weekend. After an Internet search, they chose us for their holiday weekend entertainment!

This was the clearest night I can remember at Caledon in many years. In my 16" reflector, there often were so many field stars surrounding open clusters that it was difficult to pick out the actual central concentration of the cluster. This was particularly true of the Double Cluster, which formed an amazing sight at low power. The Dumbell Nebula was so bright that it filled in almost a complete disk. And, as Glenn related, the Veil Nebula was truly spectacular. An OIII filter revealed an intricately detailed filigreed structure of wispy arcs and curls, revealing why this vast supernova remnant was given the name Veil Nebula. And although seeing in the early evening was less than ideal, by about midnight the atmosphere had steadied down so that outstanding views of globular clusters were possible at high powers. Earlier in the evening, even 155X revealed some unsteadiness, but later M15 at 220X was well resolved, seemingly three dimensional, a lovely view.

All in all, it was a marvelous evening, especially rewarding after a full year of very few opportunities due to many months of cloudy Saturday nights and marginal skies. Thanks again to all.