



Stockport Observatory- Saturday 2nd August 2014

LED BY JOHN & JANE

With the promise of a very cold, clear and starry night, 14 vehicles gathered adjacent to the Gawler Industrial area on the Roseworthy Road at 7 pm for a 7.15 pm start. A few brave souls left their warm vehicles to mingle whilst waiting for everyone to arrive.

Led by Jane and John we all set off at 7.15 pm and headed for Stockport which took approx. 25 minutes or so. On arriving at the Observatory it was clearly evident that it was going to be a very busy night and it was a case of "everyman for himself" as we attempted to find somewhere to park given the number of vehicles already there.

We assembled at the entrance to the Observatory where we met up with Lyn and Max Leske and also John Gardner and proceeded inside. We were given tickets and told that we would be called up by number to look through the big telescope which no longer operated due to a malfunction of the dome and which is in the process of being replaced by a new structure. However, the smaller dome was still operating and we could look through that one. It was very dark and hard to see in the gloom but we all managed to get around without tripping anyone else up.

A cheeky few of us, realising that the smaller dome seemed empty of people (and getting ahead of the numbering system) clambered up the stairs to look through the telescope as instructed by the operator. He stressed that we were not to touch the telescope and only use eyes to gaze at the stars. We all took turns and then were encouraged to ask any questions of him rather than go away forever wondering! We learned that the Observatory is privately owned and that the replacement structure for the large dome was going to cost in the region of \$100,000 of which \$50,000 was obtained as a grant from the SA government leaving the outstanding \$50,000 to be raised from fund raising efforts. Normally, the cost of entry to the Observatory is \$15 per adult but as this was science week, we were allowed in free of charge. I couldn't help wondering just how much could have been raised that night if everyone had paid to go in??

From the smaller dome we wandered through the Observatory where individuals had set up privately owned telescopes with each one focused on a different part of the sky. One was focused on Saturn and it was amazing to see the planet's rings quite clearly. Another focused on the quarter moon and the brightness was quite startling when looking through the telescope but, once your eyes got used to it, craters were clearly evident on the surface of the moon some of which, we were told, were 100 km across!!! Apparently to focus on a full moon is almost blinding as it is so bright.





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When we look at the southern night sky with the naked eye we can see literally millions of stars, however, this pales into insignificance when sighted through a telescope where a virtual "starburst" (a galactic cluster) of millions of stars is clearly visible in one small part of the sky. It just proves that what is evident to the naked eye is nothing compared to what is actually out there in the night sky.

There were welcome cups of tea and coffee available to help ward off the cold as well as the odd snag or two! Many people were happy to partake of these in order to keep out of any cool breeze. Chris even offered to cook the snags if he could stand next to the BBQ.

After we had all had our fill of the night sky, we headed towards John and Astrid Gardner's home for supper. The warmth inside the house was very pleasurable after the cold night and John and Astrid made us all very welcome with a veritable feast of Moroccan spiced lamb rolls, a selection of little cakes and biscuits - all very delicious with a warming cuppa. Lots of happy chat and camaraderie ensued before we all took our leave and left Astrid and John in peace. Thank you both for your kind hospitality.

Pete and I thoroughly enjoyed our time at the Observatory and would like to thank John and Jane for arranging the trip for us. It was great and there's someone here who just might put a telescope on their Christmas wish list!!!!

[Sandra & Pete]

