

Lost in Space (Obs.Report)

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- *From:* Willie R. Meghar <NoMail@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
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Observing sessions come in many forms. Some involve the recording of meticulous notes. Others are less formal and more relaxed.

The session just ending was of the latter type. All paper, pencils and atlases were left inside -- intentionally. I simply wanted to enjoy the night sky without any distractions.

Using alt-az mounted 25x100 binoculars I swept through a small section of sky including parts of Perseus and Andromeda (OK, so I wanted to hit the double cluster and M31-32-110) followed by a large section of sky in the southern direction. Horizontal sweeps began low in the sky at tree level. Each succeeding sweep climbed a little higher in altitude.

An advantage to this approach is that the eye sees only star light. Not even a dim red light, typically used for reading charts or taking notes, is turned on.

A disadvantage is that objects seen don't get identified and recorded.

Several familiar objects were swept up along with a multitude of objects that were left unidentified. In addition to the traditional observing targets, several interesting asterisms (such as linear strings of stars) as well as some truly awesome Milky Way fields were swept up.

Sometimes I would hit a Milky Way field that was so bright and evenly illuminated that it would (big exaggeration here) remind me of day light. Other fields consisted of a multitude of bright and dim stars seen against scattered bright Milky Way glows interrupted with a generous serving of dark nebulae. Some of these fields were quite spectacular.

Naked eye limiting magnitude at the zenith was a little better than 6.0; but I didn't bring out any magnitude charts that would have allowed me to arrive at a more precise value. Trees on the horizon appeared as silhouettes that were *much* darker than the background sky -- reminding me of some of the photos from Burnham's Celestial Handbook. Actually, some of the astronomical 'show pieces' looked

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very much as spectacular as their (old) black and white photographs.

Tomorrow night, weather permitting, I'll most likely return to telescopic viewing (including the recording of notes) of objects on my observing list. There's so much to do and life is so short . . .

Willie R. Meghar