

And the fog rolled in...

Tonight/this morning I was ready to sit in my lawn chair and look for shooting stars. The Perseid meteor shower was to hit its maximum two days. The sky promised to be clear. The mosquitoes did not promise to stay away, but I have my bug suit. □ So, I drove the truck out into the field, had my chair sitting in the bed, and I watched the night sky.

I saw a couple of shooting stars, but no storm/shower. Kind of a sprinkle. I had a grand view of the summers stars. The sky was dark enough to see the Milky Way. For an hour I enjoyed kicking back and just watching the sky turn.

Then I noticed some of the horizon stars were not as bright as they had been. Passing clouds I thought, not a big deal. Then I noticed more and more of the stars were just that much harder to see. Dang too many clouds except I stood up and the sky was clear once again. The cloud had formed much lower as fog around my truck. I stood for a while in hopes to see one or two more meteors, but within 15 minutes the fog was at my head. No more star gazing.

I should have guessed with the heavy rain this afternoon, and the warm temperatures today that fog would form easily. I just wish it would have held out for an hour or two. I'm sure I could drive one way or another to get out of my little fog bank, but the bed and work are calling me. Maybe tomorrow will be better.

A time to watch the night

This weekend seems to be a big astronomy shindig. The event is called [Galilean Nights](#). This is in honor of Galileo. Sidewalk astronomers around the world will be out letting people look through their scopes to see the Moon, Jupiter or some other bright evening object.

The site above has a link to find some sidewalk astronomy locations. The closest places to this neck of the woods will be Bowling Green Ohio, Sylvania Ohio and Fort Wayne Indiana. If my youngest agrees, I may be in Fort Wayne.

In case you wondered, a sidewalk astronomer is somebody who sets his/her telescope out on the sidewalk. They hope people will stop and share the evening sky with them.

What telescope should I buy?

After quite some time, I'm getting back to this question. Since the holiday season is approaching and fall is one of my favorite times to get the scopes out... Here are my opinions on telescopes to buy.

If I'm on your list and money is no object here are the scopes I want. ☐

[The Questar 3.5 inch anniversary model](#). This has a lot of sentimental value for me, and if money were no object I would own one.

[Any really large reflector](#). This one is from Orion Telescopes.
[A good sized goto Scope](#) and an observatory to go with it.
[Or maybe a dedicated Solar Scope???](#)

OK, I understand you are not buying one for me, but if you are a first time telescope buyer, you may see those prices and just stop your shopping. Or you will go to Walmart and buy the telescopes they have during the Christmas shopping time with all the pretty pictures on them.

In shopping for a telescope, size matters. You want the biggest scope you can afford and move around. Magnification power however does not matter. I don't care if the telescope at your local super store is 150 power or they say it will magnify 200 times. You'll never use it. Most of the time, even with the best telescope, you can't use it. So are you going to be able to with the \$30 – \$40 scope from the super store?

Even though my first suggestion would be binoculars, I won't go there, you want a telescope... I know this, because I was there once. I still don't have my binoculars...

Second suggestion a 4 to 8 inch reflector on a Dobson mount. The mount is very simple. It moves Up and Down – Left and Right. Very stable and inexpensive. An 8 inch reflector would probably be more of an intermediate scope, but it may be the only telescope you ever need. (want is another matter). The 4 and 6 inch scopes are excellent for beginners.

3rd suggestion a 60 or 70 mm refractor on a good mount. These tend to be more expensive. The mount design makes the cheaper models almost unusable. But they do look like the telescope everybody expects to see. This may be important to you.

4th suggestion... Stay away from computer controlled models for your first scope. You really don't want to have to learn how to use the computer end of the telescope when you are just starting out. That just adds to the frustration.

So here are some actual telescopes that fit my suggestions. I'm using the Orion Telescope company site, because they have nice pictures, many different scopes, and a lot of other good information on their site. I don't own an Orion Scope, and I'm

not suggesting they are the only place to get telescopes. In fact, I will add links for other sites main pages.

Refractors (lenses)

[80mm table top model](#) Nice looking little scope with what looks like a very nice mount. A good solid table will be needed to use this. A used end table from a garage sale would work nicely. A solid picnic table (that nobody is sitting on) would work well too.

[70mm refractor](#) The mount looks nice, but the tripod looks a bit on the flimsy side. This may make an shaky mount. Weight can be hung from the center support to help stabilize it.

Reflectors(mirrors)

[100mm tabletop scope](#) This mount is the same as the first refractor I mentioned. Nice size, looks easy to move around.

[4.5 inch tabletop scope](#) Slightly larger mirror than the one above. I've actually used this scope once. It is an excellent first scope.

[4.5 inch equatorial](#) Same scope as above, but a different mount. Adds to the cost, but you don't need the table.

Some Telescope web pages

[Orion](#)

[Meade Telescopes](#)

[Celestron Telescopes](#)

[Optics Planet](#)

[Anacortes](#)

[Discovery Telescopes](#)

Something I need to do

It has been quite a long time since I took any of my telescopes out to gaze at the night sky. I've had many

excuses, but they were just that, excuses. I think I'm really beginning to miss that hobby of mine.

The first thing I need to do is have a talk with my boss. Some of the best nights of the year are going to be happening in the near future. I need to be able to plan some time off on a quick basis if I know the sky will be clear.

I love early spring, because some of the wonderful winter constellations are visible just after sunset, and if you are up long enough, some of the summer constellations are there in the morning. On top of that, the spring time just starts to have some warmer nights. Not summery warm, but you don't end up fighting the frost bite you do in the winter.

Right now, it doesn't look like clear skies, but [my favorite place to check](#) this sort of thing, is forecasting favorable viewing tonight.

I hope it is clear when I get home tonight, I may take my little scope out to view the heavens above me.

Things I like...

Not quite a list, because my interests are varied, but some of the things I like to do, all G-rated of course. (I have a daughter or two who may read this. Yes, they are all over 16, but they are still my little girls.)

I like insignificant bits of trivial knowledge. The more trivial the better. Knowledge that Diners Club was the first independent credit card (1949) and that is when the middle man started handling our money is interesting. Knowing that it

came about because one of the first partners forgot their wallet at dinner is the cake. Knowing that partner was a man named Frank X. McNamara is the icing. Finding out what his middle name was would be, as they say, priceless.

I like reading. Of all sorts, but I tend to read Science Fiction, Fantasy (Swords/Sorcery), Mysteries, and Trivia on the web. Will read almost any well written book. Great rainy day time filler.

Computers... Yep, I can't get enough of them. I work 8 hours a day on them and then I come home and spend free time on them... You would think I would get tired of the little buggers.

Cooking occasionally. There are times when I really want to whip up a special meal, I just don't like doing it everyday. But, you have to eat...

Time spent with friends. I'm glad to say I have a few people in my life, that don't seem to mind having me around. My wife used to call this "Adult Time". Sometimes, I think we adults act a bit like children, but that is part of the fun.

Softball and Baseball. Baseball is the only sport I ever really followed (I played at one time too). No matter how old I get, if I can still swing a bat and toddle down to first base, I plan on playing softball as often as I can. If I would do it more often, I imagine I wouldn't be as sore the next day...

Theater. In my college years, I never would have thought I would want to get on stage in front of people. Wasn't me at all in my early years. I've had a lot of fun doing my ham-bit on stage.

Science and math. Things that make my logical little brain tick. You've got to keep the gears greased to keep everything running smooth, and that's what the Science and math does for me....

A bit of wood working. I really like destruction the best, but I like using power tools. The smell of cut wood is something too.

And last but certainly not least, I like my family. Every dang one of them. They helped form the person I am today (along with many others I've met along the way) and since I tend to like the person I became, I guess I could thank them once or twice... Nah, it would go to their heads wouldn't it.

A little controversy...

I'm writing this blog specifically for a friend of mine. He will know I'm writing about him shortly. ☐

I decided to write a little about the NASA Apollo missions and those few people who don't believe they really happened. Why I'm writing this is simple. While doing some reading on other things I ran across the 'theories' of the Lunar hoax.

Now just because this would be the biggest hoax ever played on mankind is no reason not to believe those who say we didn't land on the moon. I'm sure there could be instances when vast sums of money could be used to convince people to think something happened, when in fact nothing happened at all.

That of course would be in a perfect world when there is no reason not to believe the agency in question. The late 1960's and early 1970's were not that perfect world. Even at that time people were saying we didn't land on the moon, there were not that many, but always a few.

The biggest problems I have with any hoax on the lunar landings are these. During the height of the Cold War, when

the USSR was just as intent on the space race as the USA, how did we fool them. They landed an unmanned probe in 1959, 10 years before Apollo 11. They must have been able to track space ships to and from the moon. If they didn't track one, and could not track the radio communications between the earth and the moon, why haven't they said so yet. I'm sure at the time they would have loved any excuse to throw this in the face of the USA. And the other thing, why fake so many missions. Faking it once is hard enough. Faking it 9 times is a bit of overkill, and then why fake the failed Apollo 13 mission?

There are many other Web sites that will take on this lunar landing hoax, I just brought it up for a good friend with one wacky idea. Of course, he thinks that my belief in the lunar landings is a wacky idea, so I guess that makes us even. ☐

Pass the pepper please...

The title of this article just got to me. For some reason it just tickled my sense of humor.

...[NASA Sticks a Fork in Mars](#), I hope they remembered the knife and spoon.

Anyway, I do like the work the landers and orbiters are doing on Mars. In the past few years, we've learned a lot about the next planet out. I'll keep on looking for updates on what exactly this probe finds, so I can make a comment or two on that.

Astronomy Book Review...

I have a book for people with little or no background in Astronomy. It is called quite simply "The Stars – A New Way to See Them" by H. A. Rey.

I learned my constellations by the having star charts with lines connecting the various stars in a group (constellations and asterisms) and except for a very few, they looked nothing like what the name given. Then there were other books that put drawn pictures around the stars, but they did nothing to connect the stars in any reasonable fashion. Enter H. A. Rey with his book. He made simple stick figures with the stars that look surprisingly like the names of the constellations. He also uses English names for the constellations so you don't have to know Latin to figure it out. Neat stuff for the beginner.

This book is designed for naked eye viewing. You don't need a telescope or binoculars to use it. As you get comfortable with the stars, he does point out things to look at with either binoculars or a small telescope, but this book is designed more as a major road map, not something that gives you all the little tourist stops.

I will admit that even though I've been into Astronomy for over 30 years, I never really took the time to discover or remember the constellations. I know the major ones, and can use my star chart to find others, but this book will help me to remember ones I don't know at the present time. It will be nice to know my way in the sky without having to consult a map every time I look at something I don't know.

If you struggle with what star is what, I give this book a very strong recommendation.

Something Good from Microsoft!

I ran into a bit of news today that made me take a bit of notice. Microsoft has launched a new site [Worldwide Telescope](#). I'm downloading the software as I write this, so I will give a more in depth look later. The software is supposed to be a virtual telescope with access to images from all over the world and from space. Terrabytes of data are supposed to be available.

For me, a one stop shop of various space images is just what I am looking for. If this even gives half of what the press release states, I will be interested.

I'll keep you posted as I use the software.

So you want a telescope

After finding out I have a telescope, and of my interest in Astronomy, I am often asked "What kind of telescope should I get my (self, kid, spouse, father, fill in the blank). My first thought is to say they can buy mine so I can get a bigger, better, different telescope. But in reality, the best answer is usually to get a good astronomy book.

Unless you are exactly like me, you will need to get a foundation of what is in the sky before you drag out a telescope. Going out on clear nights with just a lawn chair

and your eyes will give you an indication if you actually want a telescope. There are many uncomfortable aspects of sky watching and astronomy. If you add to this lugging and setting up a telescope, you may find you really don't want to do this.

Spring in Ohio is a good time to start with your quest for a telescope. The clear nights are becoming a bit warmer from the winter deep chills, and the bugs aren't out as much. If you can take the few mosquitoes and the slightly chilly nature of the spring nights, you can then look forward to the summer nights. In most cases the summer nights in Ohio are quite comfortable for watching the night sky. If someone could do something about all the mosquitoes. Yes, you will be a target of these blood thirsty little creatures. Then there are the numerous encounters with other wildlife. Skunks will generally not spray, unless you scare them. Stepping on a skunk tends to scare it. Raccoons on the other hand don't fear much. Keep the snacks well sealed, and don't leave your car open. In NW Ohio that is all you generally have to worry about. But I did hear talk of a wandering Black Bear in the area!

Other parts of the country will have their own night time problems. Scorpions, cougars, wolves, bears, poisonous snakes, and the strange people who come out at night in our larger metropolitan areas, are all possible things you could run into trying to look at the night sky. Do you really wonder why I don't automatically tell a person which telescope to buy.

Astronomy and star watching is not for everyone. We are a strange breed. We tend to enjoy being out in the dark (the darker the better), communing with the wild, lugging heavy equipment out for maybe 2-4 hours of finding and studying a specific nebulae or feature on the Moon. Then we will pack up and lug that equipment back in. If you can't spend 1/2 hour after lugging your lawn chair out just to look at the sky, well this hobby isn't really for you. A telescope really won't help.

Ok, you got past the looking at the stars for 1/2 hour, and you enjoyed it. What next? Get a good astronomy book. Take the time to learn what is up there. Before you get a telescope you need to know what you're going to be looking at. Astronomy books and star charts are the road maps to the night sky. You should be able to find at least 1 or 2 constellations before you purchase that scope. Checkout [Sky and Telescope](#) or [Astronomy Magazines](#) at your local library or bookstore. They will have a sky map of the current month.

You say you've done all that and still want a telescope? Now we're talking. Get some good binoculars and come back in a month or two. ☐ No really, I wish someone had told me that at the beginning of my astronomy connection. I still don't have a good pair of binoculars, and my desire for them is growing. 7×50, 8×50 and 10×50 are all good binoculars to start with in astronomy. Oh yes, the first number is the magnification of the binoculars (7 times, 8 times or 10 times) the second number is the size of the front lens in millimeters. The bigger front lens collects more light, and the higher magnification allows you to see more. 2 big notes!! High magnification may seem like a good thing, but too much causes what I call the jitters. It is hard to hold binoculars steady, high magnification makes this much more apparent. And bigger front lenses may also seem like a good idea. Bigger lenses, means the binoculars will weigh more. Heavy binoculars also cause the jitters.

Ok, Ok you got this far? You should get a 7 inch Questar Maksutov. Make sure you get a well built tripod with this since this telescope needs good support. And when you get tired of astronomy let me know, I may have a home for your scope.... That's just a joke folks. When you find out what that telescope costs you may understand. For the real answer, stop back in the future. I work up a list of good beginner scopes.