

RAC Transit of Venus Event Report

John Lee Pratt Memorial Park

5 June 2012

By Jerry Hubbell

I thought I would share some thoughts I had about the transit event at Pratt Park.

I arrived around 4 PM at the park and drove around the gravel road to the location on the opposite side of the field from the entrance. I proceeded to start to unload my equipment and the sun was peeking out of the clouds off and on. Previously, when driving on Route 3 towards Fredericksburg it was only partly cloudy the sun was out the whole time until I got to the park.

Anyway I started assembling my equipment, got a very good magnetic alignment for my mount and set my ES 127 ED APO with a Thousand Oaks Type 2+ glass white light solar filter on it. I planned to use my TIS DMK21AU04.AS video camera on this scope along with a Baader Planetarium narrow-band (10 nm) green filter centered on 540 nm on this camera. You can find this filter by searching for Solar Continuum filter on the internet. I also brought my Stellarvue 80mm f/3.75 finder scope and mylar white light filter. I set that finder scope up with my Orion Deep Space Video II video camera.

My original plan had been to initially do some imaging with the main scope during ingress allowing the finder to be the wide field view for everyone to see, and then after getting a few good videos of the ingress, to allow everyone to look through the main scope visually. The clouds put a damper on that plan, so I reverted to plan B which was to only concentrate on getting images with the finder scope while giving all our visitors a visual look through the larger scope during those fleeting moments when the transit was in view.

As the time approached for first contact, the clouds looked as stubborn as ever and it appeared that we were not going to get to see the ingress at all. And then one minute before first contact, the sun began to reveal itself and I busied myself positioning the scope to point the scope directly at the sun (I hadn't been able to see the sun for the previous hour prior to this to get the final pointing done.) It was pretty special that the sun was revealed during those first 2-3 minutes during the ingress. I scrambled to get the pointing completed, focused the main scope, focus the camera on the finder scope and then instruct the visitors how to look through the 32mm eyepiece I had on the main scope. This provided a good wide field view of the sun similar to what the finder scope and camera were providing on my computer screen.

During this time, I managed to get a good view of the ingress and saw Venus looking like a little bite was taken out of the sun's limb. I described this to the reporter from patch.com and drew a little impression of it on his business card:

<http://o2.aolcdn.com/dims-shared/dims3/PATCH/resize/600x450/http://hss-prod.hss.aol.com/hss/storage/patch/592593dd49ac374df73017c5e70031bd>

The view through the main scope was fantastic, seeing Venus there on the edge of the sun's limb and hearing all the exciting remarks from the visitors. I wanted to give everyone the chance to see the transit with their naked eye through the telescope instead of hogging all the fleeting time with my imaging. I am satisfied with the images I got with the finder scope even though they are not the highest quality compared to the others captured by the other club members.

<http://o2.aolcdn.com/dims-shared/dims3/PATCH/resize/600x450/http://hss-prod.hss.aol.com/hss/storage/patch/624d2f3079fd9adc36820d0c4c9fbe9d>

There were basically two other opportunities to visually see the transit during the remaining two hours left before the sun dipped below the trees. In between those times, I was able to chat with all the visitors and it seemed that everyone was very excited to be there during this once-in-a-lifetime event. I was glad to see that there were a lot of kids there. I would tell them to remember this day so that in 105 years when they were 112, 115, or 118 they could say they were there to see the previous occurrence of this twice-in-a-lifetime event, LOL! As you know, this is a twice-in-a-lifetime event if you see the first occurrence of the pair of transits that happen at the start of the cycle only 8 years apart.

I very much enjoyed interacting with the 150-200 visitors we had there that day, and I think we gained a lot of publicity for the club. I would be surprised if we didn't gain a few members over the next few months.

Thanks to everyone that came out and I appreciate everyone's support of this event.

Jerry
8 June 2012