

## THE TALLGRASS EVENT

Bryant Hertel



Back in April, Janelle announced on the Members Yahoo Group that Eric Patterson from the Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve was asking for our help in putting on a night sky program on August 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>. The time slot was to be from 9 until 11 pm and under what Astronomers dream of, DARK SKIES!!! (With one exception, a near full moon)

Initially I was uncertain if I would be able to participate. However, as the time grew closer, my schedule became certain and I was able to lend a hand and eyes to the endeavor. Originally, Bill, Gary and Brian volunteered to head up the expedition to the middle of nowhere. As it turned out, Bill had to leave for Washington state to see a friend who was ill.

As the dates grew closer, Brian and I both kept an eagle eye on the weather situation...more so Brian, as that is what he does for the Air Guard. Unfortunately, Mother Nature in her infinite wisdom blotted out the first night with near complete cloud coverage. However, on August 12<sup>th</sup>, she smiled graciously on us and the skies cleared. The drive to Tallgrass was well worth it. The Flint Hills were lush and green thanks to the recent rains.

When we arrived at Tallgrass Prairie, Brian and I were greeted by Eric Patterson, the preserves' Lead Park Ranger. Also there was a member of the astronomy group from Manhattan. Unfortunately I cannot recall his name. Gary arrived shortly after we did, and we loaded our gear onto one of the buses and took a bumpy yet beautiful ride through the Flint Hills to the highest point around, approximately 1490 feet in elevation. Just a fantastic view!

We set up and waited for the visitors to arrive - two buses carrying 33 people, quite a nice turnout, considering the loss of one night. I had set up Brian's 5 inch Maksutov on Jupiter, and nearby was our nemesis, the moon! While beautiful, the 3/4 moon made it quite easy to read a book (or telescope manual) on the hilltop.

The one thing that really caught people's attention that night was the show put on by the Perseid Meteor shower. It was really great to hear the people there ooh and ahhh as the meteors burned up entering the atmosphere, producing at times a spectacular and colorful light show. There were even several bolides observed, a couple by yours truly.

As the evening progressed, people took turns looking through the telescopes, asking questions and just in general enjoying the night sky. I highly recommend that the next time Tallgrass Prairie National Preserve asks for us to come out and lend a hand, do so. It is well worth the time and effort. Even if you don't come out as a volunteer, please consider the minimal cost of \$5 and come enjoy the stars under truly dark skies.

