

Champagne & Cake!

June 6th 2012 saw the final transit of Venus until 2117, and this one was the second of the pair that Venusian transits occur in – the previous one being in 2004. Back then, the weather was fantastic and I managed to take some images of it. This occurrence, though, was going to be different.

Firstly, the end of the transit would be occurring at sunrise and secondly, the weather forecast was predicted to be not favourable. So to try and get the best chance of seeing anything, a sea horizon was needed to capture the sun as soon as it rose to give the best chance of seeing the sun for the longest possible time before the transit ended. However, the weather on 6th June 2012 would play its part in trying to thwart efforts to view the transit.

So, I packed my things and at 10.30pm on 5th June, I set off to the seaside with cameras, the LX90, food, computers etc. I drove through the night to get to my chosen location arriving at about 2.30am. The location? Selsey!

And there was cloud; horizon to horizon cloud! So I slept for an hour in the car and was woken by a couple of people walking along the sea wall by the lifeboat station. One I recognised! Damien Peach, in my view probably the best planetary imager there ever has been.

Further down the sea wall, another group of people were congregating to try and view the transit so I moved the car down there and set up the LX90, with my Canon 20D attached to the back and pointed it in the general direction of where the sun would rise. Due to there being no stars when I arrived, I was unable to do any alignments with the scope and so it was going to be a handheld telescope; the dec & az locks were released and I would point the telescope in the general direction at the required time with one hand, and fire the camera with a wireless remote control with the other. So that was the plan!!!

Anyway, back to the group who had congregated. Firstly there was Patrick Moore. He was under blankets keeping warm, having been brought over to the other side of Selsey by his friends & carers. There was also John Culshaw (the comedian/impressionist) who is a keen amateur astronomer, Paul Abel (Sky at Night presenter), Ninian Boyle FRAS (a regular contributor to the Sky At Night magazine). And many other locals who turned out for the event.





So we were all prepared and it was now time to start the waiting game. Wait, Wait and Wait..... for the clouds to show any sign of parting!!!!

And then there was a brightening of the clouds. Was the sun trying to peak through? I took a couple of photos of the sky at the time and then headed back to the telescope to see what would appear.



Back at the telescope, it was too dark to use the solar filter and so it was a filterless operation. Fortunately the cloud cover provided just enough filtration to “sort of” line the scope up by looking through the camera viewfinder. Don’t tell Patrick I didn’t use a filter!!!

And after the 8” was “handheld” in position, I ran off about 5 pictures of the sun, balancing the OTA with one hand, looking through the viewfinder and clicking the remote with the other hand! And I was rewarded with the quickest of glimpses of the transit. The bit of the sun that appeared through the clouds, was the bit that Venus was transiting at the time!!!





I had succeeded in getting images of both the pair of transits in the sequence (2004 & 2012!) The gap in the clouds when I took the shots lasted for about 20secs and that was all I got – but it was enough for me. I believe, although I am prepared to be proved wrong, but I think I was the only one who managed to image the transit in our group. In fact, John Culshaw decided to take a picture of the picture that was on my camera on the back of the telescope!!



Once the transit end-time had passed we all went back to Patrick's house for CHAMPAGNE & CAKE!!!! Arrangements had been made for a cake to commemorate the transit to be made, and John Culshaw succeeded in opening a bottle of champagne without the cork flying all over the dining room and causing untold damage to the artefacts in there!!!





After the champagne and cake, Paul Abel very kindly gave me a quick guided tour of two of Patrick's observatories. Firstly his famous 15" Fullerscopes Newtonian



(I wonder what Paul was saying or thinking in this picture!!)

And then onto the Cooke Refractor...



And so at about 07:30am, I headed off back up north with a quick stop down by the sea to take a load more photos of the seascape for my own album ...



..... and then home.

What an expedition it had been. A 500mile round trip, lack of sleep, wonder at the images obtained and sipping champagne at Patricks house at 7 in the morning (very surreal!). Transits of Venus are “once in a lifetime” events. The whole experience of observing/imaging this one with the added bonus of being amongst such esteemed and respected astronomers made this a once in a millennium experience for me.

Thanks must go to Paul Abel who hosted the event on the seafront & at Patricks, thanks to Patrick for having us back to his for champagne & cake.

The Societies LX90 has had a public outing again, and this one was special!!!

Chris Newsome (7th June 2012)

An article on the transit mentioning Chris and the DDAS appears on the [Sky At Night Magazine](#) web page.