

Transit of Mercury, Monday May 9th 2016.

By Claire Spencer

The first I heard of the transit was the week before May 9th via the DDAS Facebook page informing us that they would be at Alvaston Park with telescopes for the event.

I had set up my 7x50 binoculars on a tripod the night before, hoping to get a view of the transit by projection, but the sun was too high in the sky as seen from my flat come the time, so I headed off on my trusty bike along the riverside path all the way to Alvaston Park.

There were a few people there when I arrived, including star of Radio Derby, Anthony Southwell, and our new chairman, Libby Ray . Mike Dumelow was also there, as was David Selfe, Rob Seymour and a couple of other members.

There were also some tasty telescopes pointing to our nearest star, all suitably protected with filters. Mercury was very easy to spot, and couldn't possibly be confused with a sunspot, having a perfectly disc like appearance. There was also a large sunspot group nearby for comparison. Mike Dumelow was attempting to project an image of the sun onto a piece of white card. This worked quite well, and showed a lot of detail, save for the fact that the wind was shaking the whole telescope around, making it very difficult to photograph the resulting image. We decided to up sticks and head around the corner by the cafe where it was more sheltered. This was a lot more successful, both in terms of getting a reasonable image, and also in showing what was going on to the passing public.

I tried holding my compact camera up to the eyepiece of a couple of the telescopes in order to get a reasonable photo. The best was obtained by using Libby's 8" Dobsonian (see below), as well as an image from Mike's projection screen, and another from the society's solar scope. This scope came into its own that afternoon, as prominences, granulation and other features could easily be seen as well as the transit.



The transit photographed through Libby Ray's 8-inch Dobsonian.

Quite a few people came by to look at the event, and I think went away suitably impressed. All in all it was a tremendously successful event, with lovely weather throughout. The icing on the cake was later in the afternoon, a circumzenithal arc was seen along with a pair of sundogs, probably heralding the onset of the rain that arrived the following day.



The circumzenithal arc

Many thanks to all at Derby Astronomical Society for making such a wonderful day possible with the array of members scopes, as well as information in the media, which made me sit up and take note.

Claire Spencer.