

Observing Report for August 16 to 18, 2019, Backyard

by Joe Stieber

August 16, 2019, Evening in Backyard

I set up the 88 mm Kowa apo spotting scope in the backyard to observe Jupiter, specifically the Great Red Spot, which was predicted to transit at 9:59 pm EDT. I also wanted to give the Kowa 1.6x eyepiece extender (a Barlow) its first usage. It converts the Kowa 25 to 60x zoom eyepiece to 40 to 96x.

I observed Jupiter (now at 40.5" equatorial diameter) between 9:00 and 9:20 pm. Transparency was good and seeing was average. When I looked initially shortly after 9 pm with 96x, the GRS was evident immediately, a distinct brick-reddish color, even though it was still well off-center towards the eastern limb. There was good detail on the rest of Jupiter, the Northern Equatorial Belt was dark and distinct while the Southern Equatorial Belt was darkish preceding the GRS, not so dark following the GRS. The area between the belts looked dusky, generally darker than the temperature zones and perhaps the polar zones too. A number of lesser horizontal darkish bands were visible on the rest of the disc.

I took a quick look at Saturn in that time period at 96x. It was above the neighbor's roof, so the seeing was a bit inferior to that for Jupiter. Nevertheless, the Cassini Division was clearly evident, and I could see dusky bands on the ball. Previously at 60x, the Cassini Division had eluded me.

I also looked at Graffias (Beta Scorpii), a wide double (magnitude 2.6 + 4.9, 14" separation). Not much of a challenge at 96x, but pretty nonetheless. I looked at Antares, but no luck picking out its close, faint companion. It needs good to excellent seeing and more magnification.

Regardless, I was well pleased with the performance of the 1.6x extender.

August 17, 2019, Evening in Backyard

The "blah" side of Jupiter (no GRS) would be facing us tonight, but Europa's shadow would be crossing the central meridian at 9:55 pm. Transparency was poor. To the unaided eye, Jupiter was visible but not brilliant, Saturn was visible, but dim and I could not see Antares. Seeing was average.

I watched with the Kowa 88 mm and 96x from 9:20 to 9:50 pm when the shadow would be from about a quarter to halfway across the disc. I thought I caught fleeting glimpses of the shadow, but any sightings were too tenuous to claim as positive, so it may just be wishful thinking. It would have been the first Jovian shadow transit for the new scope, but I'll just have to wait for another under better conditions.

August 18, 2019, Evening in Backyard

A Ganymede occultation is predicted to begin about 8:30 pm (37 minutes after sunset) and end about 10:55 pm. In addition, the Great Red Spot is predicted to transit the central meridian about 11:40 pm.

I was set up with the Kowa 88 mm with 96x at 8:20 pm, and Ganymede was already close to Jupiter's western limb. I thought I noticed first contact at 8:23 pm, and by 8:26 pm it looked as if the disc of Ganymede was partially covered by the limb. Ganymede finally disappeared by 8:33 pm, and moments later, Jupiter was covered by a cloud. What had been a mostly clear sky when I stepped out 15 minutes earlier was now mostly cloudy.

While watching Ganymede, I noticed on this non-GRS face of Jupiter that the North Equatorial Belt was dark and distinct, while the South Equatorial Belt looked weak, much as it does on the side with the GRTS. As usual, the space between the NEB and the SEB had a dusky darkening.

Afterwards, I was diverted to domestic chores and a trip to the supermarket, so I never got back out to see Ganymede reappear about 10:55 pm or the GRS transit about 11:40 pm, even though the cloudy sky had cleared.