



## Camp Duckadang AstroFest 1999

August 9<sup>th</sup> 1999 arrived with the promise of clear skies and cool nights for this year's Astrofest

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com.au/dest/aust/brisbane.htm> .Most of the attendees arrived on Friday to set up and get ready for weekends viewing and daytime sleeping, which is how these apparently nocturnal amateur astronomers, need to be.

**Seti-Research** was asked if we wanted to be involved this year and we decided that we would be able to contribute a little by taking along a radio telescope for them to look at just in case it got cloudy. True to form, the trip to the beautiful Duckadang Valley was through the biggest electrical storm I had seen for many years. With my trusty dish, beautifully prepared by Hans Laroo, and a "ute" full of radio gear, extension leads, co-ax cable, computers and a 21-inch monitor, I battled the storm and high winds with hail and thunder up through the **Brisbane Valley** to the AstroFest site.



When I arrived there, I drove into the field and immediately remembered that I should turn off my car lights just in case some people were doing astro-photography as the sky looked a little clearer up here. The night started out pretty good with the storm clouds passing to the south of the site and although there was a little moisture in the air, the conditions were not too bad. Apart from the usual astronomical objects visible in the sky, we were treated to an amazing green/yellow **meteorite fireball**

[http://www.stud.unit.no/~ltheen/meteor/meteor\\_rev.html](http://www.stud.unit.no/~ltheen/meteor/meteor_rev.html) that left a trail of glowing plasma behind. Pretty exiting stuff!

It took me about an hour to get the Radio telescope setup under the BBQ annex and a very interested crowd appeared from the various places at the camp while I gave a talk about radio astronomy and SETI. The talk and discussion lasted about an hour and afterward the night continued on until dawn when all the nocturnal creatures went to bed.



Saturday was rather quiet with everyone still sleeping until later in the day. I was joined by Neil Boucher late Saturday and we set up the gear again for some more demonstrations of the system. Saturday night was very cold but that did not deter these intrepid Astronomers. The scene was quite amazing. There were telescopes everywhere. I estimate that there were at least sixty (60), telescopes set up and all operators were extremely competent at training their computers on their favorite part of the sky. The days of manually aiming the "scope"

are finished. Most observers now use extremely sophisticated tracking systems <http://155.148.20.50/paopage/Pages/BrtEye.htm> that allow them to find any part of the sky when ever they choose.

Neil and I stayed up having a few warming toddies and enjoyed the night viewing session, but boy, it sure was cold. We stayed on site and shared a room with Rob McNaught [http://www.atnf.csiro.au/asa\\_www/info\\_sheets/leonids.html](http://www.atnf.csiro.au/asa_www/info_sheets/leonids.html) who is part of the Near Earth Asteroid Tracking program. Rob gave a very interesting talk during the day on Sunday about the discovery

of the predictability of the Leonid Meteor stream intensity. A very interesting and well presented talk.

Other events worth mentioning are the daytime activities such as the counter weight throwing competition other interesting contests arranged by the organizing committee.



The high light of the weekend was the grand BBQ. It was held under the annex and everyone joined in. there was food and drink for all. Prizes were awarded to the most deserving and true to the spirit of the Brisbane's "Ekka" every child received a prize. <http://www.ekka.com.au/> Many sponsors support this great event [www.yorkoptical.com](http://www.yorkoptical.com) , and there were so many prizes that nearly everyone received something.

My hat is off to the organizers of a truly enjoyable weekend. Also to those amazing astronomers who provided such a great show for the many visitors and friends.