

## **Our Nights out with the Stars**

My son Matthew and I have long had an interest in space and the stars. During the first lockdown in early 2020 we started going in to the garden to watch for meteors and the changes in the moon's phases.

One evening we enjoyed a very clear night sky which coincided with the Perseid Meteor Showers (August each year) and we also enjoyed a few hours watching the Geminid Meteor Showers (December) after these events we decided that star gazing was for us.

That said, it did appear to be a very daunting prospect, but we did a huge amount of online reading, we selected equipment based on reviews and manufacturer's brochures. Our spend on equipment was very high and we made sure we had everything we were told we would need to start watching the sky.

We made our equipment selections, paid our money and sadly the issues of Lockdown made for a long wait of the equipment to be delivered. When it all finally arrived, we really struggled to understand the setting up and how to start using the equipment. Our first evening out we drove 20 miles into a dark area for a clear view of the night sky. That evening all we saw was how difficult it was to set up the equipment away from a well-lit area. It took us three set-ups attempts before we could see our first star, sadly while we were very happy that we could finally see something, we had no idea what we were looking at.

So, what mistakes did we make and how did we overcome the issues.

### **Our first mistake**

We thought the more expensive the equipment the more we would see.

This was not the case, price and specifications are not a good way to decide what you need.

### **Our second mistake**

We didn't ask anyone who was not trying to sell us the equipment for advice.

Ask someone who has and uses the equipment you are interested in before you decide to buy it

### **Our third mistake**

We didn't decide before our purchases which area of stargazing were we really interested in doing.

Different types of stargazing need different equipment, deep space views of galaxies and watching the moon are much more than worlds apart. so different equipment may be needed.

So how did we overcome the issues and the above mistakes, to be honest **we didn't**.

It was only after we joined the East Riding Astronomy Club that we were even able to identify the mistakes, attending the meetings and joining in some of the equipment discussions at the meetings, the members give us a lot of their time and the advice given has

enabled us to make full use of our equipment and greatly expanded our enjoyment of the wonders of the universe.

If we had to do it all again, our very first purchase would be our membership of the ERA club. If we had done that first, I suspect we could have saved a lot of money on equipment, but more than that we would have had access to equipment held by the club and used by the members on viewing nights. We found the members openly share their views of the heavens, they will tell you both the pluses and the issues of their equipment, so you can get a real feel of which equipment you need and what is best suited to you. Also there is a lot of used equipment available for sale as members upgrade from one level of knowledge to the next, or their interest in another

Since joining the ERA, we have enjoyed our equipment a lot.

1. We have been taught by members how to set it up and use our equipment,
2. We can now program the computerised GOTO system,
3. We can find a specific target star or planet and
4. Club information sheets means we are now able to pre-plan **Our night out with the stars**

