

If It's Tuesday, This Must Be Belgium?

*"And you may find yourself living in a shotgun shack
And you may find yourself in another part of the world
And you may find yourself behind the wheel of a large automobile
And you may find yourself in a beautiful house, with a beautiful wife
And you may ask yourself, "Well, how did I get here?"
" – Talking Heads
Title from a song of the same name by Bojoura*

I recently moved less than a mile from my former address, but that makes enough difference to some observations (e.g. artificial satellites, asteroid occultations) that I have applied for a new location ID. The former spot, which I called TULSA1 was [COSPAR](#) 8336. This got me reminiscing about all my observing sites over the years.

My first observing site was the backyard of my parents' home in east Tulsa. It was still dark along Garnett Road then in the early 80s, and I was able to do quite a lot with my Green Stamps telescope. But it was always too tempting to hop the fence and go over to my friend's house where we sat and listened to Dark Side of the Moon all night. His mom worked the swing shift, so it was just my friend, his little brother and I till midnight. I didn't always get all my observing done, and it was embarrassing if I slunk home, and it had gotten cloudy.

"I got friends in low places..." [Garth Brooks] - best when sung by 50 drunk teens at a dam.

When I could drive, I started going out to Jewell Lake at the water treatment plant. I didn't like going there due to the odor and soon moved on to the end of 81st Street where it leads to a lock and dam on the Verdigris river. This ended up being a favorite spot for at least a decade. Not only was it much darker and less smelly, but the high school kids would also go there to party and so I always had some company either partying about the win or drinking their loss away.



I tried a spot over the river in Hulbert but got a speeding ticket one time on my birthday. Another time, a deer scared the crap out of me another night. It got right behind me, and I never noticed until I looked up from the eyepiece and it was close enough to pet. I jumped in the air and screamed like a little girl. I took these as signs, and after that I went back to the Verdigris.

For quite some time, I had to observe from home which was right across the street from Skelly Stadium. This led to fun times such as showing the TU football fans Shoemaker Levy 9 hitting Jupiter. It also led to the second telescope I had gone missing, when I popped into the house for just a minute and came back out to nothing. Scopes 1 and 3 also disappeared from that house on Garnett, but 17 years apart. I used the insurance from the first loss to pay for my first wedding. The third scope “flew away” while I was moving to marry again. There must be something about weddings.



Note – not the actual location

The new house was downtown, and I had to hide behind dumpsters to get any chance of observing with a bright freeway interchange a block away. Luckily, I had rejoined the Astronomy Club of Tulsa and by then it had the observatory built near Mounds. Finally, dark skies to observe in! For a while, we had a very nice deal with a ranch near Foraker OK, with a bunkhouse and an airstrip to set up on. I went there with club members and even went on trips alone for a few days. Unfortunately, on a trip I didn't attend, a member broke the rules, and we lost the ability to use the site.

I had enjoyed the ranch but dreaded going to star parties. Eventually I took a chance and went to Okie Tex Star Party in Western Oklahoma and have gone ever since. Then, on to star parties in Australia at two different locations. All three are Bortle 2 skies, and I'm still enjoying returning to them when I can.

Along the way, I have observed, at least with binoculars, in several hotel parking lots, national parks and sometimes just at the side of the road. I was lucky enough to be assigned to an area near Chaco Canyon in New Mexico and would visit it to observe under its pristine skies when I was there to work. I also managed to observe on other work trips, such as Rotterdam and Kuala Lumpur Malaysia. I was in Rotterdam in June and July so there wasn't much night to work with. Malaysia was my first taste of southern skies, but it was cloudy most of the time or there were fires in Sumatra that made the sky smoky. I certainly know how that works, living in Oklahoma.

So, what's the point of all this? Just to list of all the strange places I've seen stars? In a way that is the point. Even if you travel or are stuck in the middle of the city, there's always a place to shield yourself from the light, or perhaps a nearby spot that will give you somewhat dark skies. But no matter where you are, if the sky is clear and you can find a dumpster to hide behind, you may be able to absorb more starlight than you think. You must be careful though; hiding behind a dumpster can lead to trouble. Once, when I lived in Houston and couldn't go out to the Fort Bend Astronomy Club site, I was looking through my scope behind a dumpster in the apartment complex when a guy started yelling at me. He thought I was using the telescope to peep on his wife, I guess. I would have liked to explain to him that she would be upside down and nearly impossible to focus on, but it seemed like a better idea to just gather my things and get in my apartment.

"Wherever you go, there you are" – Buckaroo Bonzai

PS: I was able to see Venus at both sunset on the 21st and sunrise on the 22nd. An amazing sight, visible when Venus passes through inferior conjunction, as described in an earlier article [Moon Hides Mars Venus Rides Pegasus](#). Hoping to see it tomorrow when it is "in" Pegasus. My scribbles below show the scenes. It reads 8x [my 8 x 40 binoculars], just after sunset. The crescent was so small I could barely make out horns at the edges. The next dawn, it was easier in still air. I was even able to make it out, just barely, as a "non-star" with naked eye.

On another note, the last quarter Moon was in the south, as low as it gets, at nearly -30° declination. This is because we are at the point in the Moon's orbit that brings its farthest slant versus the ecliptic (6 degrees) as it appears in the stars of Sagittarius, the most southern of the zodiacal constellations. The effect is larger the more northern your location. Another thing I've noticed in my travels; your latitude can make quite a difference in your stargazing. There is always something to look at!



