

It's All About the Moon!

AN INTERVIEW WITH A NEW CLUB MEMBER INTERESTED IN LUNAR PHOTOGRAPHY

The Moonstruck Astronomy Club, a member of the Astronomical League, is active at On Top of the World, a 55+ community in Ocala, Florida. The club holds monthly meetings for the 72 men and women who are members of the club to discuss topics in astronomy and to feature presentations by guest speakers and club members about telescopes, observing, and the heavens. When the weather allows, the club hosts evening observation sessions for its members, some of whom bring their own telescopes to share views with others. The club also maintains a small “telescope lending library” from which members may “check out” a scope for weeks or months to use on their own.

This article is an interview conducted by Moonstruck Astronomy Club reporter Jim Shuman with new club member Dean Rehphol about his initiation into lunar photography.

Jim: How did your interest in the Moon begin, Dean?

Dean: While visiting our eight-year-old grandson in Minnesota, my wife and I gave him a used 90 mm Bushnell refracting telescope. And on Tuesday August 31, 2021, for the first time in my life, I viewed our Moon through a telescope. I was moonstruck! The hair on my arms and neck came to attention! My first thought was, “I’ve never seen such a magnificent thing in the Universe!” I knew I wanted to see more of it!

Jim: How did you land on a Dobsonian?

Dean: After seeing the Moon for the first time through a telescope, I immediately spent hours and weeks watching YouTube videos such as “Viewing Our Moon,” “Best Beginner Telescopes,” and “How to Photograph the Moon.” I also searched the Internet to find dealers, prices, and availability of various telescopes I felt could best serve my needs and budget. I decided that an 8-inch Dobsonian reflector would be a great place to start for a novice. But to my disappointment, I soon found out that ALL the 8-inch Dobsonians were out of stock everywhere, and no one had any idea when they would be restocked.



Dean Rehphol with the 8-inch Dobsonian

It was sad because that was the model I had decided I needed.

Jim: So, what did you do?

Dean: Shortly after that, I realized for the first time that the 55+ community where we had lived for nine years (On Top of the World in Ocala, Florida) has an astronomy club with a website (moonstruckastronomyclub.org). We flew home from Minnesota on October 12, 2021, just in time for me to attend the next club meeting on October 14. I was so excited to be there; I didn’t attend as a “visitor” but just paid my yearly membership fee as I came in the door and joined up as a member immediately!

During that meeting the club officers mentioned that they had six “loaner” telescopes and one was an 8-inch Sky-Watcher Dobsonian reflector! My hand shot up into the air. “I’ll take that one!” (Talk about an answer to prayer! I didn’t even know that they had a telescope lending library!) The next morning, one of the club officers dropped the telescope off at my house, gave me a quick overview, and answered my many questions. Later, I built a wood and foam cradle that supports the tube section of the scope for transport in my Kia Soul or on my golf cart.

Jim: How did you do at your first evening observation with the club?

Dean: That first time out after dark on a club observing event was really something! Here I was trying to impersonate an amateur astronomer and I didn’t have any background or experience other than YouTube! But the club members assisted me with the Dobsonian, and soon I owned the Moon. I quickly realized that it was easy to manipulate the telescope, and the Moon was amazing and super beautiful. I was hooked! The scope worked great, although I had difficulty taking photos through the eyepiece with my hand-held smartphone.

Jim: Then what...?

Dean: In the following days, I built a wooden stand to get my Dobsonian up off the ground, purchased a Celestron NexYZ smartphone adapter for my Pixel 3a smartphone, and started taking photos of my beloved Moon. Most of my observation time and Moon photography is done close to my home and during the day. (Yes, that’s right. I said “day!”) I would load up my golf cart, drive two blocks to an open grassy area in the community, and set up the Dobsonian – which has no problem capturing a clear image of the bright Moon on a sunny day. My neighbors, community vendors, and service people, whether walking



Crescent Moon by Dean Rehphol – taken with Pixel 3a cell phone and an 8-inch Dobsonian

or driving by, would stop and ask, “What are you looking at during the day?” I would invite

them to see my Moon! Then I would stand back and eagerly await their amazed reactions. At that point, I would tell them about my Moon, my loaner telescope, and the date and time of our next Moonstruck Astronomy Club meeting! This was getting really good, and my photographs were much better now that I had the adapter for my smartphone.

Jim: That’s great, Dean! How do you go about getting really good photos of the Moon?

Dean: I now use the Astrospheric app to find the best days and nights for viewing



Quarter Moon by Dean Rehphol – taken with Pixel 3a cell phone and an 8-inch Dobsonian

(not too many here in Florida), and I use the Moon Locator app to find out when, where, and what the Moon phase will be on any given day. I prefer to get photos where the terminator creates more shadows on the crescent or quarter Moon – it’s more dramatic.

Jim: Any final words?

Dean: Many astronomers may think that my Moon is a hindrance to their deep-sky observations, but to me it is the frosting on my sky cake, my first solar love, and one of the greatest creations in the Universe! I have really loved the experience of photographing the Moon with the club’s loaner Dobsonian reflector! ★



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