

## Seeing in the Dark

Does this sound familiar? You have made a list of deep sky targets to hunt down and observe on your next outing. That favourite astronomy app has confirmed when constellations will be up so you know which objects to chase first before they set. You have either book marked some pages in your star atlas, or printed some charts to adorn with custom scribbles. These might be star-hop lines or other notes. Maybe you will just scrawl a happy face once found to snap with the phone and share with friends!

All you need now is a forecast with a good chance of clear sky. While waiting I usually fire up Stellarium to pick out some potential hop stars that may be sprinkled about.

When a clear night sky finally arrives the brightest stars begin popping as you set out the equipment in the fading twilight. With one eye on the sky, the other flicks to the planisphere for bearings with those first bright constellations. An alignment of the finder scope and tweak of final collimation help calm those nerves. Finally darkness descends. It's time to start searching amongst the tangled branches of the Milky Way stretching overhead.

Turning to your prepared charts the very dark you've been waiting for is now working against you. Flicking on the red torch quickly presents the typical amateur astronomer conundrum. The red torch by design paints a small soft glowing red circle on a much bigger page. Finding just where on that page your object(s) can be a challenge. It all seemed so easy preparing at home where you could see the whole page. Turning the brightness wheel makes the red light brighter. But you know this can play havoc with the night vision needed to seek out those deep sky targets.

We have all used methods like making the beam a little brighter while tilting the torch to produce an elongated cone of light across the chart. Or holding the red light further away to produce a wider but fainter circle of light. Yes, these methods work to some degree. But there is a much quicker and easier method which I call "TAG and BAG".

Stick some small tactile tags (cut from sticky notes) to your charts. Sticking up from the page all you have to do is run your finger across the chart to locate them. Now you can easily find star-hop lines and those scrawls you've made. It's amazing how quick this makes using a star chart in the dark. Especially when you consider how many times you may bounce back & forth between star chart, finder, and eyepiece before locating the real object in the sky.



*Night-Sky Objects for Southern Observers by Rob Horvat (WSAAG)*

### Other tips are:

- Drawing simple arrows on tag ends helps them stand out under red light conditions.
- Writing the object name or designation on the tag works a treat.
- As you observe each object peel the tag off. Sticking them all together creates a "done" list for the night.
- Tags work great for transient objects like Neptune, minor planets, asteroids, even a passing comet. Draw a representative dot on the end of your sticky tag. Then stick down where you expect it to be that night.
- I have added a 4x magnifying glass with 10x spot to my kit. This comes in handy to split small crowded areas. This also helps preserve my night vision because it saves me having to make my light any brighter.

If you like reading Maps instead of using Apps (like I do), then maybe give this a try!

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