

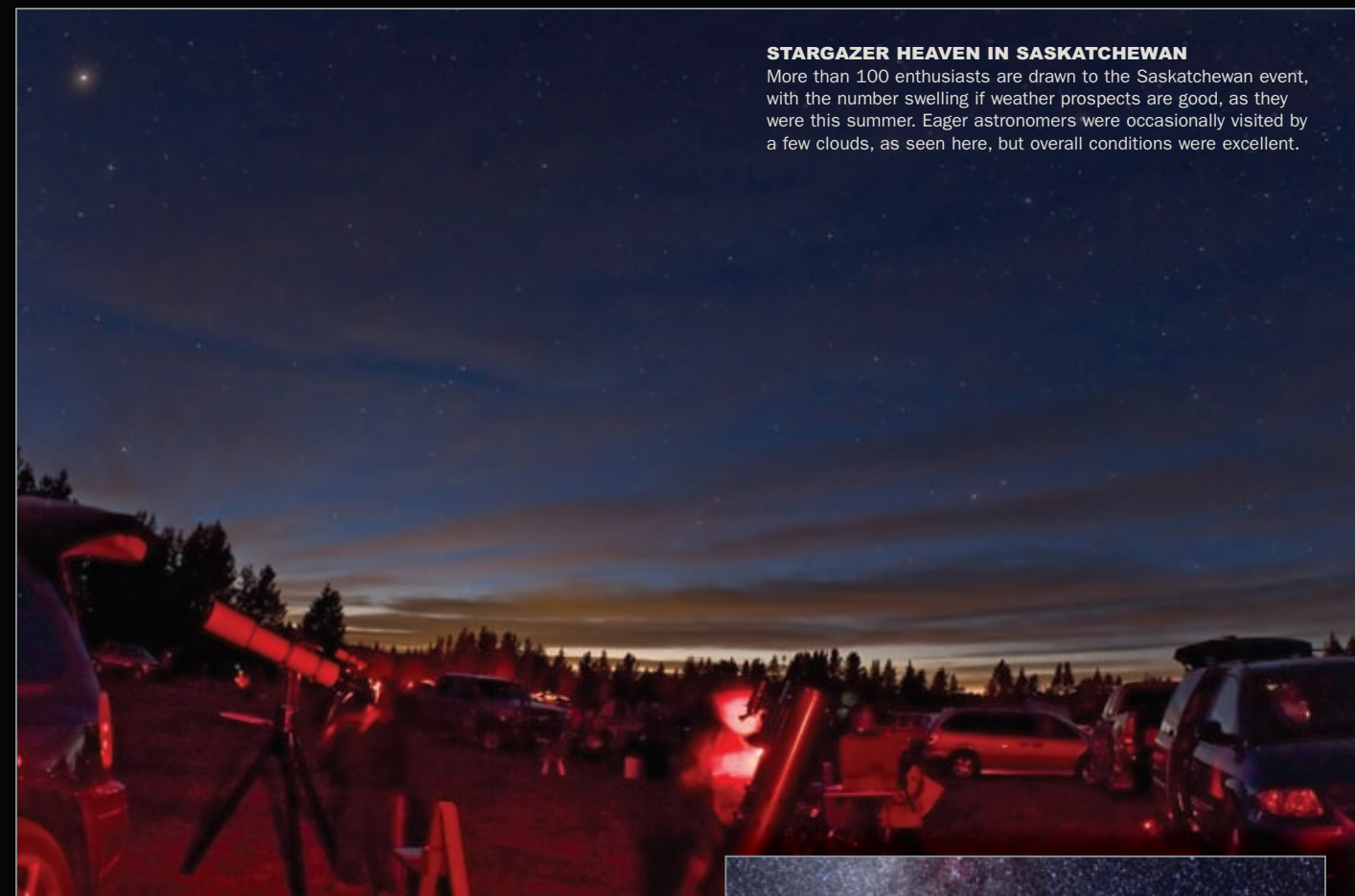
UNDER THE (CLEAR) BIG SKY: SASKATCHEWAN SUMMER STAR PARTY

Spectacular starry skies have made this annual star party a premier destination for backyard astronomers from across North America | PHOTOS BY ALAN DYER



THIS IS AS GOOD AS IT GETS

Each August, Cypress Hills Interprovincial Park in southwestern Saskatchewan is the home of the Saskatchewan Summer Star Party. The event is one of the world's darkest astronomy gatherings, with pristine skies, dry air and excellent clarity owing to the park's 1,300-metre elevation. The visibility of the Milky Way right down to the horizon is a sure sign that this is stargazing nirvana. Inset photo shows a brilliant flare from an Iridium satellite appearing above the Andromeda Galaxy.



STARGAZER HEAVEN IN SASKATCHEWAN

More than 100 enthusiasts are drawn to the Saskatchewan event, with the number swelling if weather prospects are good, as they were this summer. Eager astronomers were occasionally visited by a few clouds, as seen here, but overall conditions were excellent.

OPENING UP THE 'EYE-POD' ▼

Serious equipment is everywhere on the campground, as evidenced by a SkyShed Pod observatory amid the telescopes. Portable enough to be moved to an ideal site like this, the Pod has become a popular accessory for telescope owners. The star party is a red-lights-only zone to protect dark-adapted eyes and to prevent the beam of an unfiltered flashlight from accidentally ruining a long-exposure astrophoto.

BACKBONE OF THE NIGHT ►

If there are any doubts about the sky conditions at the Saskatchewan Summer Star Party, this picture by SkyNews associate editor Alan Dyer should dispel them. The intensity of the Milky Way star fields in Cygnus (top), through Vulpecula (middle) and Aquila (bottom) is breathtaking. Numerous observers report detecting seventh-magnitude stars with unaided eyes. Binocular inspection of the Milky Way is nothing short of staggering.

