



# THE 2024 OZSKY "ALUMNI" STAR SAFARI

SEPTEMBER 30 – OCTOBER 7, 2024

BINDA, NSW, AUSTRALIA

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## OVERVIEW, TRIP PLANNING, BOOKINGS & LOGISTICS

### **A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE OZSKY "ALUMNI" STAR SAFARI**

The OzSky "Alumni" Star Safari is a unique and exclusive, yet very informal, astronomical observing event held near Binda in the Southern Tablelands of NSW, Australia.

The magnificent array of telescopes provided at this event are all courtesy of 3RF (Three Rivers Foundation) and are available for the shared use of all attendees.

The "Alumni" edition of the famous OzSky events was created following numerous requests over the years to offer an OzSky-style event in the latter part of the year and with a much smaller group size.

If you're interested in a more detailed history of the OzSky Star Safaris generally, please feel free to visit the OzSky History page on the OzSky website.

### **OUR MISSION**

The main driving force behind developing these "Alumni" events has been the growing desire from northern hemisphere observers for an opportunity to observe the "other half" of the southern skies.

A secondary, but equally important contributor has been significant interest in a much more laid-back, unstructured, "no frills" event with a stronger "focus" on observing (pun intended!) and less focus on the touristy aspects such as schedules, organised day trips, talks & presentations.

With these OzSky "Alumni" Star Safaris, our mission is to offer you the means to enjoy a relaxed gathering of good friends with some great telescopes under the dark Aussie Southern Spring night skies we have all come to love.

Why do we continue offering these amazing events? Simply because there is way too much eye candy here in the Southern Skies for just us – We want to share it with you all.

### **THE OZSKY "ALUMNI" OBSERVING SITE**

Our "Alumni" observing site (-34° 13' S, 149° 14' E) is located on a 6,310-acre working sheep and cattle station called "Markdale Station", about 40km (25 miles) northwest of Crookwell (population ~2,500) with the nearest town being Binda (population ~200) about 20km (12 miles) away.

As you can imagine, it is a great location for dark skies and has a very good southern horizon. During our first six events at this observing site, our combined SQM readings across the weeks averaged between 21.75 - 21.92 which is truly remarkable given the site's relative proximity to Sydney. Needless to say, we continue to return to this site time and time again!

Our observing field is an old grass tennis court immediately adjacent to our accommodation (see photo below). The perfectly flat and firm ground is ideal for the big telescopes and ladders which are provided for your use during the event.

For those of you who are also bringing your own telescopes, binoculars or camera setups, there is plenty of extra room to set those up either within the confines of the tennis court, or anywhere else surrounding the accommodation if you want a different vantage point or a better view towards the north (I suspect you're not coming here to observe the northern skies though!) - or for that matter, anywhere on the 6,310-acre property!

***Please note: There is no cell-phone coverage at the site. We will all need to rely entirely on Wi-Fi only.***



*Some of the wonderful 3RF telescopes typically available at the OzSky "Alumni" Star Safaris*

## **SUGGESTED ARRIVAL & DEPARTURE DATES**

When travelling to the OzSky "Alumni" Star Safari, it is suggested that you plan to arrive/check in at the observing site on the afternoon of **Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September** 2024 and to depart/check-out from the observing site on the morning of **Monday 7<sup>th</sup> October** 2024.



Given that the observing site is only around 3 - 3½ hours' drive from Sydney Airport, it may be feasible for you to fly into Sydney early on the Monday morning and head directly to the observing site, avoiding the need to spend a night in Sydney beforehand, however arriving a day or two early will of course allow you to acclimatize to the local time zone before heading out to our observing site.

Depending on the availability of your return flights home, you may even be able to depart the observing site on the Monday morning and catch a Monday afternoon or evening flight out of Sydney.

## **TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS**

You'll be needing a car for the week to enable you to get around easily while you're at OzSky "Alumni".

To keep your costs to a minimum, it is suggested that you consider sharing rental cars and splitting the driving and fuel costs with other observers in the group.

If you haven't already done so, now would be a great time to contact other OzSky "Alumni" folks and consider trying to organise sharing of rental cars.

Not only will it result in a significantly lower rental cost for you, but it's also a great way to share the driving and to make new friends along the way.

Feel free to use this private group mailing list ([OzSkyAlumni2024@OzSky.org](mailto:OzSkyAlumni2024@OzSky.org)) to let others in this group know if you have already booked a rental car, are considering booking a rental car, or would like to share with others who have already booked a rental car, as there are likely several other people out there in the group who might prefer to be a passenger, and vice-versa.

The drive from Sydney Airport is very easy and is only about 3 - 3½ hours and you can use these driving directions from [Sydney Airport to Markdale](#).

Assuming everyone is planning on arriving in Sydney on or before the morning of Monday 30<sup>th</sup> September, it is proposed for the sake of convenience that we all meet at the [Coolabah Tree Café at Sutton Forest](#) (watch carefully for the Shell gas station and McDonalds signs), about 90 minutes' drive from Sydney Airport, and then travel together in an optional convoy for the remainder of the trip.

Further details will be sent out closer to the time, so watch this space if you're interested in the optional convoy.

Depending on what time your flight arrives in Sydney (usually around 6:00 - 7:30 am for most US flights) most of us will meet at that roadhouse at about 11:00am for a quick break and to regroup before continuing south towards Goulburn and Crookwell, where we can each stock up on food supplies.

Oh, and just remember... we drive on the LEFT side of the road here in Oz!

For your convenience, I have listed the websites for some of the main rental car companies in Sydney, in alphabetical order (there may also be others):

- [Apex](#)
- [Avis](#)
- [Bayswater](#)
- [Budget](#)
- [EuropCar](#)
- [Hertz](#)
- [SixT](#)
- [Thrifty](#)



Consider sharing a Rental Car with another OzSky colleague.  
It's a great way to share the costs and make new friends!

## **RENTAL VEHICLES AND TOLL ROADS**

Please be aware that some roads in Sydney are toll roads.

Most rental agencies will already have a tolling arrangement in place for all their rental vehicles.

At the time of writing, the car rental agencies listed above (*with the exceptions of Hertz and Thrifty*) already have all their vehicles automatically pre-registered with the major toll provider for toll road travel in NSW.

If you're renting your car from one of these pre-registered agencies, typically you won't need to do anything, but I always suggest you confirm with the rental agency when you collect your car.

Hertz and Thrifty each have their own private toll pass arrangements in place – please check with the relevant rental agency for their up-to-date tolling details if you are using either of those car rental agencies.

If your chosen car rental agency does not have an automatic tolling arrangement in place and they confirm that you do have the option to pay for your own tolls, you can set up a temporary toll pass to cover your rental period for toll roads in New South Wales.

If you are also planning on driving in Victoria or Queensland, you may also need a separate pass if you'll be using those toll roads.

Here are some direct links to the Toll Pass details of the main toll provider (LinkT):

- [NSW Toll Road Passes](#)
- [Victoria Toll Road Passes](#)
- [Queensland Toll Road Passes](#)

When you set up your temporary pass account (*within 72 hours of incurring your first toll*), make sure you enter the correct vehicle registration plate number and the car's state of registration, as well as your rental start and end dates to ensure you are charged correctly for the tolls you incur.

## **OUR SITE & ACCOMMODATION HOSTS**

As this will be our seventh official OzSky "Alumni" event at Markdale Homestead, we have settled in nicely at the new location, however in 2017 the property was sold to new owners.

I believe I may have successfully "trained" our site hosts in the strange, nocturnal ways of us astronomers - especially the importance of darkness, however as it is a working farm, there will be rare occasions when sheep or cattle need to be mustered at a time when we might all be still sleeping – or observing.

Fortunately, however, the folks who live and work on the property usually all retire quite early each night which is very helpful for us.

In light of that (*no pun intended*), I will invite the owners and residents of the property to join us for a few hours one evening towards the end of the week, not only to show them our telescopes and to share our love of the night skies, but in keeping with the traditions of 3RF Australia and the OzSky Star Safaris, offer some public outreach opportunities to the local school kids and residents.

With any luck, we'll all be suffering from "Photon Fatigue" by then, and very likely looking forward to an excuse to show someone else through the telescopes!

## **SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT OZSKY**

Please remember, these OzSky Star Safaris are enhanced by the group of wonderful folks who are present at each event.

If you have any experienced friends or colleagues who might be interested in joining us at the 2024 OzSky "Alumni" Star Safari (*or a future OzSky event*), **please let them know about this unique observing opportunity.**

