

On the evening of 31 March, 1998, I drove to Fremont Peak State Park, near San Juan Bautista, California, and shortly after midnight successfully attained a long sought-after observational goal of amateur astronomy; namely, visual detection of the 2.7 degree Kelvin black-body radiation left over from the Big Bang. Exceptionally clear sky in post-frontal weather conditions, coupled with dense fog obscuring the lights of cities and towns in the surrounding lowland, made the feat possible, though the sky was not as dark as I have seen from this site in years gone by.

I sat in the parking lot with a mask over my eyes for four hours of dark adaptation in preparation for the feat, meanwhile consuming five quarts of home-made bilberry jam further to sensitize my retinas. I raised the collar of my jacket over my head before starting to observe, and restricted my visual field by means of a binocular unit-magnification collimating device and light shield, carefully made from two toilet-paper tubes, duct tape, and a bottle of black ink. The radiation was really not that difficult to detect -- I suspect I could show it to any experienced observer with a little coaching. It would be a cinch with binoculars. Unfortunately, I had forgotten to bring my new pair of premium-grade low-frequency bandpass light-pollution filters, so I could only log the asymmetry in the fireball as "suspected". Perhaps next time -- but alas, suitable opportunities to report such an observation come but one day each year...