

How to Photograph Star Trails

Capturing star trails is a bit of fun, you will need:

- A dark, starry, starry night well away from city or street lights
- A camera very steadily mounted on a solid tripod
- A reliable fully charged battery or
- A battery pack if you want to capture many hours of star trails.

Focus on infinity and have your lens at its widest aperture. Also set your ISO to its lowest setting. This will reduce "noise" a little.

An exposure over a couple of minutes will give short star trails. The curvature of the trails depends on where you point your camera. If you aim at a celestial pole the stars will trail in circles around the pole. If you aim at the celestial equator the trails will be in straight lines.

In Hervey Bay, the south celestial pole is located about 25 degrees above the horizon looking due south.

Leaving the shutter open for an hour or more will produce spectacular circular trails. The longer the shutter is left open (use bulb on the camera and a timer) the better the trails will be. If it is sufficiently dark, and you have your lens open a long time, you may be lucky enough to capture part of the Milky Way.

There are two snags with long exposures.... any unwanted light in the sky may fog the image or dew may settle on the lens.

If anyone is interested in more information I can provide the article from which I have taken this very small part.

Adapted from "The Photo" with thanks.



Star trails, 5 minutes, f2.8, 20 mm lens at 100 ISO The large white "blob" is the planet MARS when it was close to Earth in 2002

Images Fran Cross



Full moonlight, with star trails 3min 20 sec, f2.8, 20mm lens at 100 ISO