

Night Photography Information

I now use stationary, dimmable light panels to illuminate the foreground.

Before using light panels for star photography I would use a technique called “Time Compressed Imagery”. This allowed me to capture clean, noise free, foreground detail with stars in the sky. This procedure is outlined below.

Time Compressed Imagery

This process occurs over a 1.5 to 2.5 hour period.

Find a composition:

Before dusk, find a composition that includes foreground you wish to capture with a starry sky. After placing the camera on the tripod ensure the tripod is really stable; the camera should not move for the next 1.5 – 2.5 hours.

Issues to consider: What aperture and focal distance should be used to obtain the required depth-of-field at dusk? How about later, when at the widest aperture the outline of the sky-ground interface and stars still need to be sharp? If the focus distance can be set once and refocusing later for the stars is not required, the post processing should be much easier.

Capture the foreground at dusk:

The camera settings to record around dusk for the foreground (non sky) are the usual landscape settings. I recommend capturing several bracketed series through dusk. Be careful with flashlight use during this process, check with other, nearby photographers before shining a light. If wearing a head lamp, do not look at others when it is on, it will blind them.

Wait and periodically shoot:

Now wait for a few minutes then shoot another bracketed series, to ensure there are enough various exposures to aid in blending during post processing. There can't be too many, but there can be too few. When the longest exposure in the bracketed series is 30 seconds it is time to start adjusting aperture (until depth-of-field becomes a problem, in the close foreground) and then ISO. Continue to capture more bracketed series.

First stars:

When the first few stars become visible, capture a few more images, manually adjusting shutter speed ISO and aperture for various sky exposures. These images may be of use blending the ground-sky transition during processing. Periodically make photographs as more and more stars become visible.

Final Photographs (assuming very little moon light):

About 1.25 to 2.5 hours after sunset, when it is dark and there is no hint of sunset in the sky, make several photographs to capture the stars.

Typical starting point for settings:

No filters

ISO = 1600 to 3200

Aperture = f/2.8

Shutter speed = Follow rule of 400.