



THE FIELD OF VIEW (F.O.V.) National Public Observatory Newsletter

“Where the Public Meets the Stars”

Astronomy education, dark skies and quality experiences for ALL!!

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STARS-N-PARKS PROGRAMS IN SIX SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO STATE PARKS

SPRING 2004

City of Rocks State Park to become an Astronomy Park

City of Rocks S P to become an Astronomy Park
By Jessica Savage

Las Cruces, N. Mex. -- The City of Rocks State Park has been targeted by state park officials to become one of four designated astronomy parks in the state for a permanent observatory, and they are relying on the National Public Observatory's expertise and Stars-N-Parks programs as they develop their plans for the observatory.

NPO President John Gilkison met with State Park Resource Director Steve Cary, who oversees the NPO's involvement with the parks, in January to discuss details of the planned observatory and offer advice for equipment purchases.

So far, Cary has indicated park officials are willing to construct a roll-off roof building to house a permanent telescope mount. However, Gilkison has an even bigger vision for the park.

“As pleased as we are with these developments, we think a one-of-a-kind public astronomy park is a more desirable goal to give this project the infrastructure and focus it needs,” Gilkison said.

The roll-off metal roof building with metal trusses Gilkison envisions would be 16 feet x 20 feet, with five foot walls where observers would gather to experience programs with a telescope that is between 14 and 30 inches in aperture.

When more people are present than can fit into the observatory, the telescope would be connected to built-into-the-walls flat screen monitors which are displaying real-time video. Other amateurs with telescopes would set up on the concrete pad next to the observatory, facilitating conversation between observers and amateurs.

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The 2004 Spring Southern New Mexico Star Party

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By John Gilkison, NPO President

The National Public Observatory, in conjunction with New Mexico State Parks is scheduled to host it's fourth semi-annual regional star party from April 15 to April 18, 2004 at City of Rocks State Park. A registration form for the event is included with this newsletter.

The three-day star party, held in the Reservation Area at the park, has been shortened by one day because attendance is mainly focused around the weekend. The very popular Stars-N-Parks public nights are well-attended and without help from other observers, we would be overwhelmed by the numbers.

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Ashley Gilkison showing Stella Cam Ex attached to 12" SCT Meade with 7" DVD/monitor.

City of Rocks S P to become an Astronomy Park cont.

“Such a facility is far more reasonable in cost to develop than normally might be thought,” Gilkison said. He estimates the cost to be between \$10,000 and \$50,000 depending on how the observatory is built and the telescope installed.

A public astronomy park would go a long way towards giving the state a reputation as a dark sky location that would draw tourists from all over the country. “The potential to draw much needed state tourism is great,” Gilkison said.

“Some years ago the city of Tucson, Ariz. ran advertising in Sky & Telescope stating astronomy tourism was worth over \$80 million a year to the state,” he said. “Such a facility as I have described could begin to draw tourism to New Mexico instead of letting it go elsewhere.”

Besides the main observatory, an astronomy park should include eight foot by eight foot observing pads at each campsite where campers would set up their own telescopes or rent one from the Visitor’s Center. Tour guides would not only conduct laser pointer-lead sky tours at the observatory but also assist campers at their camp sites with equipment and viewing tips.

A small museum and gift shop in the park’s Visitor’s Center would continue astronomical activities in the day time, Gilkison said, by having astronomical items such as star maps, binoculars, small telescopes and souvenirs, as well as, exhibits and educational displays. Also, a scale model of the Solar System could be constructed that visitors would walk through and get a more realistic perspective of the Earth’s and other planets characteristics and movements. Also, certain telescopes facilitate daytime astronomy observing of the Sun, planets and stars.

The kind of telescopes Gilkison is recommending

to the parks include hydrogen alpha filters for Solar observing because Solar prominences are visible, and computerized Go/To telescopes because once they are set up will “go to” the celestial objects requested by the user.

In the meantime, Gilkison is interested in establishing an NPO presence among amateur astronomers in the Silver City and Deming area who can start an astronomy club and conduct Stars-N-Parks sessions at City of Rocks and Rock Hound State Parks. Once the observatory is established or even before, there will be a regular Stars-N-Parks session at City of Rocks each month, possibly even more frequently. Currently the NPO conducts a Stars-N-Parks session at the park three or four times a year.

The 2004 Spring Southern New Mexico Star Party cont.

The SNMSP is designed to give amateur astronomers a time to share their hobby with fellow enthusiasts well into the night and early morning in a superior dark sky site. Except for the public night Stars-N-Parks program, the star party provides an opportunity for amateurs to get to know each other without distractions or commercialization present at parties with a longer history.

This year the Stella Cam Ex will be reintroduced to the proceedings. The NPO purchased a smaller flat-screen monitor, which is less invasive to the observers dark adaptation and creates a more enjoyable experience. There are plans to acquire a devoted lens to use with the Stella Cam so the 12-inch Meade SCT can be used as a go/to platform. This change, along with the ability to mount the monitor on the left fork arm of the telescope, should open up the process of utilizing the Stella Cam at star parties.

Early registration is appreciated to allow planners to be better organized by having a more realistic estimate of attendance. With only six weeks remaining, please register for the Southern New Mexico Star Party as soon as you can. We are looking forward to seeing you there, whether you're a returning or first-time participant.

MEMBERSHIPS RENEWALS IN THE NATIONAL PUBLIC OBSERVATORY

Carol Fugagli, Nature Conservancy of NM
Larry Lindsey of Las Cruces, NM
Carol Rehder of Las Cruces, NM
Margaret Holohan of Utica, NY

NPO website completely redesigned by new webmaster

By Jessica Savage



Picture of Steve Self the new National Public Observatory Webmaster at his laptop.

When offered the position of National Public Observatory Webmaster, Steve Self realized it was an opportunity to put his name on a worthwhile project and increase his experience in a hobby that had become a passion.

“I love the web stuff,” Self said. “I think of myself as an artist and there’s a creative element to web sites. It’s a chance to use my ideas and put my stamp on it.”

Steve Self and NPO President John Gilkison have known each other for five years because both work at New Mexico State University Central Utility Plant, where Steve is a Steam Fitter and Gilkison is an Co-Gen Operator. When Gilkison mentioned needing a new Information Technology volunteer because the former IT Specialist David Carel needed to focus on other projects, he didn’t know Self had any ability to take up the position, Self said. Computers are a hobby for Steve who is primarily self taught but began taking classes two years ago.

“I have owned a computer since back in the VIC-20 days and have been upgrading ever since,” Self reports on the NPO website. “I now own three computers, two digital cameras, two flatbed scanners and two printers.”

He recently purchased a digital video camera that he will use to make family and NPO videos. The user friendly website has been completely redesigned with a new look and is simple to update. “It’s what we’ve been wanting,” Gilkison said. “It works with current information.”

Although Self says he’s not an avid astronomy observer yet, he said studying astronomy is important. “When the Earth fills up, we’ll have to have some place to go,” he said. He appreciates the NPO mission to bring astronomy to the public.

“John brings the stars close up,” he said. Self is currently taking his fourth web development class that will allow him to develop more sophisticated aspects of the website such as a membership log-in capability. Other plans for the website are to allow new and renewing members to send in their dues through a Pay Pal account. Self said he is looking forward to maintaining and updating the website with improvements and new content. “I love changing things,” he said.



Stella Cam Ex picture frame grab of the planet Jupiter on Friday February 27th 2004.

Annual Membership Application or Renewal:
Please circle one of the following:

	Member	Sponsor	Supporter	Patron	Lifetime
Individual	\$35	\$50	\$100	\$400	\$600
Family	\$50	\$100			
Student or Retiree	\$20	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Astronomy clubs < 80 members	\$50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Libraries	\$50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Corporate & Government	\$100	\$200	\$400	\$1,500	\$2,500

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ABOUT THE NATIONAL PUBLIC OBSERVATORY PROJECT

Tens of thousands of people visit major U.S. research astronomical observatories every year. These research facilities do not advertise, and quite altruistically, set aside monies and time from their limited budgets to accommodate the public. Many people travel great distances for the opportunity to observe through a world-class telescope but due to the high cost of telescope time, this generally is not feasible. Where observatories have been able to set aside a night for public observing, it is often booked up well in advance.

While some upscale observatory/lodge facilities have been developed, none have been established to reach families or individuals looking for an intimate public park/camping experience with the proper telescopes, facilities, and knowledgeable tour guides.

The National Public Observatory, Inc. has been established to provide this kind of facility and we need your help.

Please join the National Public Observatory or make your tax-deductible contribution today!