



THE FIELD OF VIEW (F.O.V.)  
National Public Observatory Newsletter  
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STARS-N-PARKS PROGRAMS IN FIVE SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO STATE PARKS

Spring 2008

**A Total Lunar Eclipse Party at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park**

By John Gilkison  
National Public Observatory

Knowing we had the last total lunar eclipse to happen in the early evening (until 2010 ) for North America on February 20th, 2008, we decided the NPO should attempt a public program. I contacted the park in late January 2008 about the possibility of the National Public Observatory doing the program there. The park manager was enthusiastic, so we scheduled it.

We set up the prerequisite publicity and crossed our fingers for clear weather. The park is about eight miles from Jeff Jenkins house who does our programs at Leasburg Dam State Park, so I asked him to help. With February 20th being a Wednesday night I had to take off work to do the program because I work the evening shift at NMSU Central Utility Plant during the week.

The day in question looked good with clear weather during the day. I loaded up my 6 inch SN Telescope with the goal in mind of being able to capture some full disk par-focal images of the totally eclipsed moon with my digital camera and a 40 mm eyepiece specifically designed for this work.

Continued on the right



A thirty second time exposure of the Moon through cloud cover 2/20/08

A Full Moon just entering the umbra of the Earth's shadow rose over the Organ Mountains just before the start of the program. Unfortunately a cold weather front was moving through the Las Cruces, New Mexico area bringing cloud cover with it.

By the time we got to the park and set up the moon had risen behind a cloud bank above the mountains, and there it remained for the rest of the program. Jeff set up his 8 inch SCT, I set up my 6 inch SN, and my 80 mm binoculars on a parallelogram mount. We did have sucker holes which allowed us to show a few objects to the dozen or so people who had braved the weather to attend our show. We did manage to afford patrons some views of the eclipse using the magic of telescope light gathering power to peer through the clouds when they were at their thinnest. I even managed to take one 30 second time exposure of the moon through clouds (see above) but we all can agree Matt's photo at left, without cloud cover, is far more aesthetically pleasing.



**Matt Wilson's Total Lunar Eclipse photograph taken with his Nikon D-70 SLR at the prime focus of his 80 mm Stellavue APO from Hurley, New Mexico in clear skies.**

## NPO finishes mounting City of Rocks S. P. Observatory Stella Cam imaging telescope

by John Gilkison

On February 2, 2008 I traveled to City of Rocks State Park to install the mounting rings we had procured for mating the 5 inch SCT imaging telescope to the observatory's 14 inch Meade SCT. Since the observatory's inception we have needed a imaging telescope of the proper focal length for the Stella Cam, which can display deep sky objects in real time. What was needed was something around 400mm but as fast as F/3.3 to work best with the Stella Cam. Such lenses are hard to come by, but by utilizing an F/3.3 Compressor with the five inch F/10 Celestron SCT was a great compromise.

I had to travel back to the park on March 1st to install some more counter weights which are fixed to a rail on the bottom side of the telescope. In this way the tube remains in balance which removes unnecessary stresses from the telescopes altitude motors.

During our first public program using the new rig on February 2, 2008 we showed Orion Nebula, Andromeda Galaxy, M-46 with the planetary that appears in front of the cluster, and the double cluster. The image scale of the imaging telescope just matches the main telescope's low power 32 mm eyepiece. This makes the centering of objects easy, because if the object is centered in the eyepiece it is also centered on the screen. The adjusting screws on the imaging telescopes mounting rings make this possible. We look forward to many more fascinating programs using this wonderful new technology.

Picture of the City of Rocks State Parks monitor displaying a 412 mm focal length Stella Cam view of Orion Nebula.



**The City of Rocks S.P. Observatory 14 inch SCT with a 5 inch SCT dedicated Stella Cam imaging telescope piggy backed on top. The B & W 13 inch display monitor is seen at the lower left.**

**The Southern New Mexico Star Party is scheduled for April 30, to May 3rd 2008 at City of Rocks State Park.**

by John Gilkison

In order to take advantage of the wonderful spring weather and a well presented summer Milky Way we have decided to schedule the SNMSP to run from April 30, to May 3rd 2008 at City of Rocks State Park. We know it could conflict with the better known Texas Star Party, but we don't think it really matters.

We seriously doubt anyone planning on attending the TSP would be attending the SNMSP anyway. More to the point, persons who are considering attending a star party, and who can not attend the TSP because it is full up, because of distance, or expense, should consider the home grown NPO Star Party the Southern New Mexico Star Party.

You can find a registration form on our website [www.astro-npo.org](http://www.astro-npo.org) or contact us by e-mail at [astronop@wildblue.net](mailto:astronop@wildblue.net) and we will send you one as an attachment. You could even write us at NPO, P.O. Box 19, Radium Springs, NM 88054 and we would send you one. It doesn't get anymore old fashioned than that. Our phone number is 575-527-8386 if you want to speed things up.

## National Public Observatory Stars-N-Parks schedule from March 2008 through June 2008

**SP = State Park SS = Sunset, PS = Program Start, PE = Program End  
Stars-n-Parks Programming ends in June, resumes in August**

**Wednesday March 5, 2008 Special Event Moon Occults Venus 13:09 hrs 31 degrees up.**

1: Saturday March 8, Rock Hound SP, SS 6:10 PM PS 7:20 PM PE 8:50 PM, Saturn in Leo, Mars, Winter Milky Way well presented, the Moon is 2.2% illuminated, Sally Allen presenting.

2: Saturday March 8, Caballo Lake SP, SS 6:10 PM PS 7:00 PM PE 8:50 PM, Saturn in Leo, Mars, Winter Milky Way well presented, the Moon is 2.2% illuminated, Bobby Franzoy.

**Daylight Savings Time begins 2:00 AM on March 9, 2008, set clocks ahead one hour.**

3: Saturday March 29, Leasburg Dam SP, SS 7:25 PM PS 8:35 PM PE 10:05 PM, Saturn well presented, the Spring Sky is rising, Jeff Jenkins presenting.

4: Saturday April 5, City of Rocks SP, SS 7:30 PM PS 8:40 PM PE 10:10 PM, Saturn well presented, the Spring Sky is rising, Matt Wilson presenting.

5: Saturday April 26, Leasburg Dam SP, SS 7:44 PM PS 8:55 PM PE 10:25 PM, Saturn well presented, the Spring Sky showing well, Jeff Jenkins presenting.

6: Saturday April 26, Rock Hound SP, SS 7:44 PM PS 8:55 PM PE 10:25 PM, Saturn well presented, the Spring Sky showing well, Sally Allen presenting.

**Southern New Mexico Star Party starts at noon on Wednesday April 30, 2008 ends at noon on Sunday May 4, 2008 at City of Rocks State Park.**

7: Wednesday April 30, City of Rocks SP, SS 7:47 PM PS 8:57 PM PE 10:25 PM, Saturn well presented, The Spring Sky showing well, John Gilkison presenting.

8: Saturday May 3, City of Rocks SP, SS 7:50 PM PS 9:00 PM PE 10:30 PM, Saturn well presented, The Spring Sky showing well, Matt Wilson presenting.

9: Saturday May 24, Leasburg Dam SP, SS 8:05 PM PS 9:15 PM PE 10:45 PM, Saturn well presented, The Spring Sky showing well, John Gilkison presenting.

10: Saturday May 31, City of Rocks SP, SS 8:09 PM PS 9:20 PM PE 10:50 PM, Saturn well presented, The Spring Sky showing well, Matt Wilson presenting.

11: Saturday June 7, Caballo Lake SP, SS 8:13 PM PS 9:00 PM PE 10:55 PM, Moon is 24% illuminated, Jupiter is 13 degrees up by the end of the program, Bobby Franzoy presenting.

Stars-n-Parks programming ends for the Spring / Summer resuming again in August 2008 for the Fall season

Matt Wilson on the left and NPO President John Gilkison pose with the CoR SP Observatory's newly mounted 5 inch SCT imaging telescope on 2/02/08.



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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.*

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