



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!!

Volume I, Issue XVI

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

Fall 2003

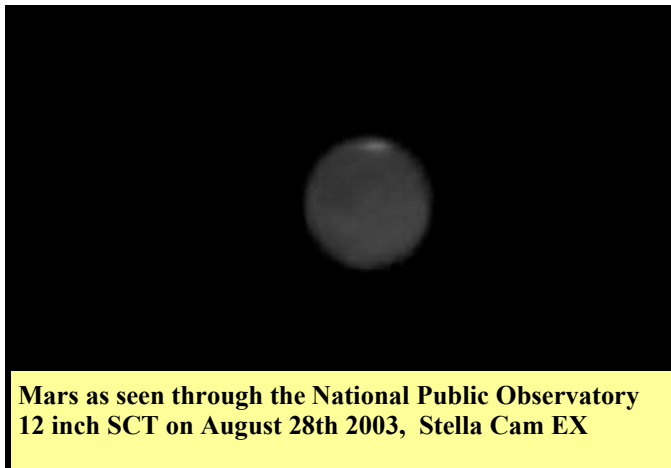
Fall 2003 offerings equal NPO mission in action:

by Jessica Savage

The Stars-N-Parks astronomy outreach program and other National Public Observatory activities planned for the 2003-04 Stars-N-Parks fall and spring season offer members and others new state park locations, a four-day star party, a go/to telescope class and the production of a 2004 NPO Astronomy Calendar.

A spectacular Mars approach and opposition provided the impetus to celebrate and kick-off the season with a highly-attended opening party at Leasburg Dam State Park on August 23. More than 100 people attended the program which began at 9 p.m. with a green-laser pointer sky tour lead by NPO member Jeff Jenkins. Observers eager to see what all the Mars fuss was about continued arriving well after 10 p.m., prompting NPO President John Gilkison to conduct a second sky tour for late arrivals to the program that lasted until midnight. NPO member Joey Hecker, Gilkison and Jenkins said they had never seen so many people at a Stars-N-Parks program.

It's big well publicized celestial events like this that bring the people out, Gilkison said.



Mars as seen through the National Public Observatory
12 inch SCT on August 28th 2003, Stella Cam EX

Attendees were encouraged to wait until after 10 p.m. to observe Mars for a better view. "While this is one of the best oppositions of Mars possible, the planet will only climb 42 degrees off the southern horizon as seen from Las Cruces, said NPO President John Gilkison. "Anyone attempting to observe Mars earlier in the evening, such as around 10 p.m., will see the planet at only about 20 degrees off the horizon where the atmosphere is thicker and degrades the telescope image.

The southern polar ice cap and markings on the planet's surface were visible in telescope views. Dozens of people waited in lines to glimpse the rare approach and see the red planet named for Roman God of War.

Another late night Mars observing program was held August 30 at Caballo Dam State Park, which is one of two new park locations on the 2003-04 schedule. A monthly program will continue at Leasburg S. P. and on a rotating schedule at Caballo S. P., Oliver Lee S. P., Pancho Villa S. P., Rock Hound S. P., and City of Rocks S. P.

Caballo is replacing Elephant Butte S. P. on the schedule in hopes that it will be a better dark sky location, although one more program will be held there in November. A hazy-sky effect has been present for the Elephant Butte S. P. programs and prevented observers from seeing the finer deep sky objects such as galaxies. The effect, which may be caused by the humidity and temperature changes near the lake after sunset, seems to lift later in the night when the program is scheduled to end. The lake near Caballo S. P. is much smaller, which Gilkison said may eliminate the problem so Sierra County residents can continue to have the Stars-N-Parks program at a convenient location.

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All of the parks are within a 100-mile radius of the NPO headquarters in Radium Springs, Gilkison said. Adding Oliver Lee S. P. near Alamogordo broadens our area of coverage to include five counties in the Southwestern New Mexico area.

Having five other state parks besides Leasburg allows the NPO to conduct the Stars-N-Parks program at a different location for each of the five months in the fall season and the five months in the spring season, which concludes in May. The five counties are Doña Ana, Otero, Sierra, Luna and Grant County.

We're taking astronomy to not only where dark skies are but to where people are, Gilkison said. We can't expect people in Columbus for example to come over here to our program in Las Cruces. City of Rocks S. P. continues to be the host site for the Southern New Mexico Star Party, held bi-annually each year for NPO members and other interested amateur and beginner astronomers who enjoy the fellowship of a four-day star party and camping experience. The Fall 2003 party will be held from Wednesday, September 24 to Sunday, September 28 2003.

City of Rocks S. P. offers star gazers an exceptionally good observing site in a beautiful, pristine desert setting, Gilkison said. State park personnel have been pleased with NPO programs and accommodating to star party attendees at City of Rocks S. P. and the other parks, Gilkison said. Attendees of the SNMSP can register for just one day of the four-day party or any combination of days up to four for their convenience. Mars will be up earlier and continue to dominate the night sky during the star party and so well worth observing, Gilkison said. A Stars-N-Parks program free to the public will be held Saturday, September 27 during the star party for interested Silver City and surrounding area residents. Also, a special Stars-N-Parks Total Lunar Eclipse program will be held beginning at sundown on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2003 at City of Rocks S. P.

NEW MEMBERSHIPS IN THE NATIONAL PUBLIC OBSERVATORY

Tom & Eileen Nieman from Murphey, TX

Fall 2003 Continued

City of Rocks S. P. is also an ideal and conveniently located venue for Tucson and other Southern Arizona residents who want to escape the city lights and heat of the Sonoran Desert for a few days to enjoy the dark skies and cooler nights of the Chihuahuan Desert. To register see the registration form located in this newsletter.

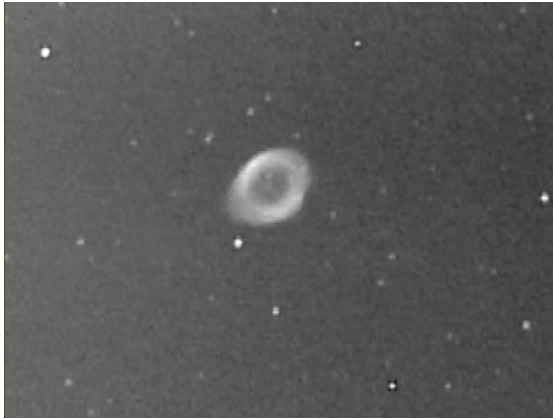
The Stars-N-Parks program attempts to go where the people are, while many amateur astronomers attempt to upgrade their viewing capabilities with go/to telescopes, yet lack the sophistication to use the computerized tools to their full capacity.

People always want me to help them with go/to telescopes, Gilkison said, So I decided to go ahead and have a class to see if there's an interest for this in a classroom setting.

Offered through the Doña Ana Branch Community College Community Education program, the class will not only orient students to their go/to telescopes but also to astronomy basics.

People need to know what the computer in the telescope is trying to do, Gilkison said. It's not enough to know just the technical aspects of operating the telescope. When you tell the telescope to go to an object you might not know if you were successful if you aren't knowledgeable about the sky and coordinate system.

Telescope owners need to develop basic observing skills before operating a telescope, so the class will also cover time and geographic coordinates, and alignment on major stars. A four-inch Meade ETX-10SEC Maksutov go/to telescope, suited for planetary observing, will be used for demonstration in the class. Students are encouraged to either bring their go/to telescopes to the classroom and lab, or use the class as an aid in the consideration of purchasing a scope. NPO member Jeff Jenkins will assist Gilkison in teaching the class which will be held from 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. on Saturdays from October 4 through October 25 in DABCC room 107. Contact DABCC Community Education Programs to register and pay the \$47 fee.



The Ring Nebula (M-57) seen with the Stella Cam and the 12 inch at F/3.3.

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Once armed with the knowledge to operate your go/to telescope and locate celestial objects, you'll need the 2004 NPO calendar, featuring black and white images obtained with the Stella Cam Ex video imaging camera, to plan your 2004 observing schedule. Significant astronomical events such as Moon phases, transits, oppositions, eclipses and meteor showers, as well as all NPO-sponsored events will be dutifully noted on the handsome calendar. Look for an announcement to purchase the calendar between mid and late October 2003. Gilkison said he is excited and will be busy with the diverse offerings on the NPO 2003 fall schedule. We're just growing all the time, he said.

National Public Observatory Stars-N-Parks Schedule for all Southern New Mexico State Parks from September to December of 2003. For Information call John or Lana Gilkison at 505-527-8386

SUMMER BREAK, FALL 2003 STARS-N-PARKS PROGRAMING RESUMES

Saturday September 20, 2003 Leasburg Dam State Park SS 7:02 PM, Sky Tour starts 8:10 PM, Telescope Tour 8:40 PM, Uranus, Neptune, Mars, and Andromeda Galaxy, ends at 9:40 PM.

Wednesday September 24, 2002 to Sunday Sept. 28, 2002 The Southern New Mexico Star Party.

Saturday September 27, 2003 City of Rocks State Park. SS 6:52 PM, Sky Tour starts 8:00 PM, Telescope Tour 8:30 PM, Moon, Uranus

Saturday October 18, 2003 Leasburg Dam State Park-SS 6:26 PM, Sky Tour starts 7:30 PM, Telescope Tour 8:00 PM, Uranus, Neptune, Mars, and Andromeda Galaxy, ends at 9:00 PM.

Saturday October 25, 2003 Rockhound State Park- SS 6:18 PM, Sky Tour 7:20 PM, Telescope Tour 7:50 PM, Uranus, Neptune, and Mars, Fall Sky Observed, program ends at 8:50 PM

(Note: Standard Time begins at 2:00 AM October 27th 2003)

Saturday Total Lunar Eclipse November 8, 2003 City of Rock State Park-SS 5:05 PM, Totality begins at 6:07 PM, Sky Tour and Telescope Tour begin at 6:30 PM, Program ends at 8:00PM.

Saturday November 15, 2003 Leasburg Dam State Park-SS 5:01 PM, Sky Tour 6:00 PM, Telescope Tour 6:30 PM, Mars, Venus, Uranus, Neptune, Fall/Winter Sky featured, end 7:30 PM.

Saturday November 22, 2003 Elephant Butte Lake State Park- SS 4:57 PM, Sky Tour 6:00 PM, Telescope Tour 6:30 PM, Venus, Mars, Uranus, Neptune observed. Fall /Winter Sky, ends 7:30 PM.

Website for NPO/Stars-N-Parks Program http://www.UpStateAstro.org/stars/CSSP_schedule.html

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

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Astronomy clubs < 80 members	\$50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Libraries	\$50	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
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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!