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

Fall 2007

**Astronomical Society LC works to build an observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park**

By Jessica J. Savage  
National Public Observatory

LAS CRUCES – The number of public outreach astronomy programs held at an area state park could double next year if plans to install an observatory in the park are realized.

Although there are still a lot of *ifs*, members of the Astronomical Society of Las Cruces and officials at Leasburg Dam State Park are preparing the way for a donated telescope to make its home at the park.

The National Public Observatory is playing a supportive role in the efforts and President John Gilkison has been consulted because of his experience as a consultant in the establishment of an observatory at City of Rocks State Park.

Gilkison predicted that attendance at astronomy programs held at the park will double, because both groups will hold monthly programs on separate evenings and the observatory itself will create interest.

“There’s a certain mystique about observatories,” he said.

It all started when the Astronomy Department at New Mexico State University donated a non-functioning 1995 16-inch Meade LX200 telescope to the society, said ASLC member Rich Richins. After many discussions the society

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settled on the nearby state park as the optimum location for the telescope and two committees were formed to implement the next steps: a telescope committee and a building committee.

The society hasn’t yet taken possession of the telescope but when they do club member Chuck Sterling, who also has a Meade LX200, will determine what it will take to get the motor running again, Richins said. He will report to the membership who will then vote on whether to spend club funds on parts or repairs.

Member Jerry Gabes will investigate various designs for a roll-off roof style observatory. The building committee will come up with a design for the observatory, which they know park officials want to be sand-colored to blend in with the existing natural environment. The membership will then vote on whether to fund it, but Richins said they are likely willing to spend a few thousand dollars on the project.

The ASLC has been working with Leasburg Park Manager Stan Ellis on the project. Ellis said he will likely not be at the park as the project develops because he’s been promoted to park superintendent of the new Mesilla Valley Bosque State Park near Las Cruces. He recalled when the NPO began having the Stars-N-Parks programs at the park and said he was excited to have astronomy expand through a permanent observatory and two astronomy groups holding outreach programs. Ellis worked with the society to find the best site in the park to place the observatory. The park already has a power-supplied amphitheater just off the commons area so it seemed a natural fit to have the observatory located just down a path from the amphitheater. Ellis envisioned having park personnel with flashlights directing arrivals from the parking lot to where the programs will be held. Companion programs can be held in amphitheater while

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**Rich Richins on the left and Stan Ellis (on the right) the Park Manager of Leasburg Dam State Park discuss various site possibilities for an observatory in the park on July 31st, 2007.**

## Astronomical Society LC works to build an observatory at Leasburg Dam State Park

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telescope observing is taking place in the observatory.

Another advantage of the site is that it has already been looked at by park archeologists when the amphitheater was planned, Ellis said, and so should easily pass another inspection. Other areas of the park are protected from development.

Richins said he expects the society to have a proposal ready to present to state parks in as little as two months. Officials in Santa Fe will have to approve the proposal and give their go ahead.

“When that’s all done, we’ll go out and dig a hole,” Richins said.

He may have some help with that too because the state can arrange much of the labor resources for building the observatory through park staff and state inmates. Ellis said the observatory may be ready for visitors as early as May 2008.

“This is a win-win for everyone,” Richins said. “Everyone has been wonderful. I have a really good feeling about the project. I think it will be a good venture. It’s a nice addition to Southern New Mexico public outreach.”

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Ashley Gilkison models the Bill Chrisley donated 13 inch F/4.5 Newtonian mirror with a secondary mirror and spider assembly seen to the left. We have ordered a 2 inch focuser for the telescope project anticipated for these optics. We plan on building a standard truss assembly Dobsonian Telescope which should be easy to transport. Only a mirror cell needs to be purchased to complete the project.



**NPO Presenters are pictured at the NPO Dinner held at the Gilkison house on Saturday August 4, 2007. Left to right, Bobby Franzoy, Jeff Jenkins, Sally Allen, and John Gilkison.**

## The NPO receives donation of an 13 inch telescope mirror plus a matching secondary mirror and spider.

By John Gilkison

The NPO received an early Christmas when we heard that Bill Chrisley (a long standing member and board member of the NPO) was offering to donate a 13 inch telescope mirror with a matching secondary, and spider assembly.

We ordered a 2 inch focuser to compliment the telescope we intend to build soon. Unfortunately the focuser from Orion is on back order. Also needed is a proper mirror cell which is a reasonably priced stock item. From past experience NPO President can tell you home made mirror cells will work, but a manufactured mirror cell is preferable.

We happen to have a old donated Alt/Az Dobsonian lower assembly for a 10 inch which could be easily modified to hold a 13 inch. The most important aspect of these conversions is to have large altitude bearings which this unit has.

Planned is a standard lower box with a truss assembly holding the secondary and focuser assembly in a light weight upper end assembly to keep the center of balance low to the ground.

Built properly a 13 inch F/4.5 telescope like this should not be much over five feet long and should be easy to transport in two sections.

## Fall 2007 Star-n-Parks Schedule for the National Public Observatory in Region III

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

### **Friday September 7, 2007 SNMSP begins at noon at City of Rocks State Park.**

Saturday September 8, 2007 City of Rocks SP, SS 7:18 PM, PS 8:30 PM, PE 10:00 PM, Capricorn, Cygnus, and Cepheus on the meridian, Jupiter high for observation, Summer Milky well presented, John Gilkison presenting.

### **Monday September 10, 2007 SNMSP ends at noon at City of Rocks State Park**

Saturday September 15, 2007 Caballo Lake SP, SS 7:18 PM, PS 8:30 PM, PE 10:00 PM, Capricorn, Cygnus, and Cepheus on the meridian, Jupiter high for observation, Summer Milky well presented, Bobby Franzoy presenting.

Saturday October 6, 2007 Leasburg Dam SP, SS 6:41 PM, PS 7:50 PM, PE 9:20 PM, Capricorn, Cygnus, and Cepheus on the meridian, Jupiter high for observation, Summer Milky well presented, Jeff Jenkins presenting.

Saturday October 13, 2007 City of Rocks SP, SS 6:32 PM, PS 7:40 PM, PE 9:10 PM, Capricorn, Cygnus, and Cepheus on the meridian, Jupiter high for observation, the Summer Milky is well presented, Steve Machol presenting.

### **DST ends, Standard Time begins on the first Sunday in November**

Saturday November 3, 2007 Leasburg DSP, SS 6:10 PM, PS 7:20 PM, PE 8:50 PM, Aquarius, Cepheus, and Andromeda on the meridian, Mars rises before

programs end, Jeff Jenkins presenting

Saturday November 10, 2007 City of RSP, SS 5:04 PM, PS 6:15 PM, PE 7:45 PM, Aquarius, Cepheus, and Andromeda on the meridian, Mars rises before programs end, Steve Machol presenting.

Saturday December 1, 2007 Leasburg DSP, SS 4:55 PM, PS 6:05 PM, PE 7:35 PM, Cetus, Pisces, and Andromeda on the meridian, Mars rises before the end of the program, Jeff Jenkins presenting.

Saturday December 8, 2007 City of Rocks SP, SS 4:55 PM, PS 6:05 PM, PE 7:35 PM, Cetus, Pisces, and Andromeda on the meridian, Mars rises before the end of the program, John Gilkison presenting.

A 2008 Stars-n-Parks schedule will be released in September of 2007. Please visit our website [www.astro-npo.org](http://www.astro-npo.org) in late September to see our listing of the 2008 programs.

Ten NPO members and guest have a group picture captured at the NPO Presenter dinner on Saturday August 4, 2007 at the Gilkison house. A good time was had by all.



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