



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 FIVE SOUTHERN NEW MEXICO STATE PARKS

Summer2007

## Ideal location for permanent National Public Observatory found

By Jessica J. Savage  
National Public Observatory

Radium Springs, N. Mex. – Amateur astronomers will establish “green” homesteads on two-acre parcels of secluded ranch land in Southwestern New Mexico when they become part of a select group of owners.

A 42-acre parcel of prime undeveloped land in a pristine, dark sky area has been located by National Public Observatory President John Gilkison.

He was shown available parcels in the vicinity by a realtor during the recent Southern New Mexico Star Party held biannually at City of Rocks State Park. The offered owner-financed parcels are located on Blue Mesa Ranch near Faywood, New Mexico.

Already, the area is known for its beauty and isolation, which translates into amazingly dark skies, evidenced by the nearby located City of Rocks State Park observatory and the NF / Observatory operated by the University of Arkansas and Western New Mexico University.

“It doesn’t get any better than this,” Gilkison said.

The intention and mission of the NPO has always been to have an observatory devoted to public use and enjoyment in a dark setting where real-time astronomy education can take place. By securing a 42-acre parcel, members have an

Continued above right

opportunity to live on site and help run the observatory.

The land and certain select parcels on Blue Mesa Ranch meet criteria established by Gilkison for the observatory. Specifically, the topography of the land is suitable for development in that it’s flat enough to build a house and facilities, yet it also has elevated land surrounding it, shielding residents and visitors from wind and lights of distant rural communities such as Silver City, or Deming.

The southern portion has a clear view of the horizon where most of the astronomical activity takes place each night. Gilkison said he not bothered by relatively low elevations in the northern, western and eastern portions because over the duration of the night everything in the north rises above the horizon as it circles around the pole star Polaris, anything in the east will rise and finally, anything in the west sets and rises again by morning.

While the land is remote, it is also accessible from Highway 61, which is the turn-off from Highway 180 running between Deming and Silver City, to go to City of Rocks S. P. The park and Faywood Hot Springs are four miles from the parcels, and the Post Office at Faywood is two miles away.

Besides the observatory facilities, Gilkison said there will be three or four housing sites, each on two acres of land. By having a few parcels divided into two-acre sites, residents will have the isolation needed for astronomical observations.

Since the land has only been used as ranch land it is in a pristine state and Gilkison said he wants to keep it that way.

“Residents will use renewable forms of energy such as solar and wind,” he said. The nearby Mimbres River keeps the water table at 30 feet below the surface, and the sandy, cliché soil is ideal for septic tanks.



**The view north to the north 42 acre parcel on the Blue Mesa Ranch. The parcel would include the south flank of the mesa (shown) and the bench in front of said mesa**

## Ideal location for permanent National Public Observatory found

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The parcel was originally offered at \$3,500 to \$4,000 per acre for a total of \$147,000 with a down payment of \$20,000. So the amount financed by the owner would be \$127,000 at an initially offered rate of 8.5 percent for 20 years. Gilkison is seeking a lower interest rate with the owners.

To complete a firm offer requires no more than six willing participants who can put down between \$3,500 and \$5,000 and make monthly payments between \$170 and \$250. Gilkison said so far he and his wife Lana are willing participants along with one other participant. At least two more are needed to proceed, but this offer can only be extended to four more participants. Participants will receive a two-acre parcel they can homestead and will be involved in the running of the observatory.

To learn more about this exciting opportunity and contribute to the National Public Observatory's goal of establishing a permanent observatory contact John Gilkison at 505-527-8386 or [jkilkiso@wildblue.net](mailto:jkilkiso@wildblue.net) or at [astronpo@wildblue.net](mailto:astronpo@wildblue.net).

E-mail to the NPO from Robert Rodenbush

Dear John, it was a pleasure meeting you at the SNMSP. This was my first star party in truly dark skies and I was at first overwhelmed by the star filled skies in NM, but John you came to my rescue. I must say you were more helpful in guiding me through the heavens than all the books and star charts I have read in the past. Thank you very much and I will return to NM for another feast for my eyes next year. Robert

Robert Rodebush of Carpentersville, Illinois shows his 10 inch Schmidt Newtonian at the Spring SNMSP. Robert was very enthusiastic about the dark skies at our spring event.



**The Moon and Venus have a close conjunction (within one degree ) on Saturday May 19th, 2006, shot with a Panasonic ZT3 digital camera At 10 X Optical zoom.**

## The Skies were clear for the Spring Southern New Mexico Star Party

By John Gilkison

The weather cooperated for the Spring 2007 Southern New Mexico Star Party with four out of five days being clear. We had beautiful skies for a very under attended event, with only five participants including the NPO President John Gilkison attending.

David Sanders of Flagstaff Arizona brought his 15 inch Dobsonian which we explored the Spring Realm of Galaxies with. Robert's 10 inch Schmidt Newtonian done very well at locating galaxies too. Gary Frishkorn Dayton, Maryland brought six inch Newtonian binoculars which required a portable tent observatory to use. Gary set up this up at his own camp site.

NPO President John Gilkison explored the potential of his new Astro Tech 80 mm APO refractor telescope on a go/to mount. This small portable refractor could be run up to 50 or 60 power per inch of aperture showing beautiful diffraction limited images.

We met Steve Machol who is from Silver City at the Spring SNMSP and recruited Steve to do public programs at the City of Rocks Observatory. The position has been unfilled since Matt Wilson of Hurley, NM left to take a new job in trucking. Steve will start in the Fall.

The Fall Southern New Mexico Star Party is only scheduled to run over a weekend from Friday September 7th, to Monday September 10th. See the Fall NPO Stars-n-Parks schedule on page 3. Since there were so many other star party's scheduled we decided to try this!

## 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**

Saturday June 9, 2007 Caballo LSP, SS 8:07 PM, PS 9:20 PM, PE 10:50 PM, Bootes, Libra, and Lupis on the meridian, Sagittarius and Scorpius rising, Jupiter 27 degrees up Saturn 17 degrees high by programs end, Bobby Franzoy presenting.

**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 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 the Fall Newsletter which will be published in September of 2007. At that time we will have better astronomical information to assist in scheduling the following year.

An Earthshine Moon as seen from the Spring Southern New Mexico Star Party using an 80 mm APO telescope. The internal reflections are in the digital camera lens.



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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!*