



Promoting Public Education in Astronomy

The Fremont Peak Observer

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1988 Star-B-Que

The annual Star-B-Q and general meeting was held August 13th. By special order, President Frank Dibbell arranged for beautiful weather during the day, and just enough fog creeping up the valleys in the evening to maintain a level of suspense about the night's viewing.

Early arrivals were treated to the raucous sounds of a somewhat fictitious re-enactment of John Fremont addressing his troops, by a group that makes an annual trip to the peak for this purpose. The group, known as E Clampus Vitas (or the clampers) describe themselves as either a drinking historical club, or a historical drinking club. They are known for installing plaques at historical scenes, and donations to historical groups. They left en masse in the early afternoon to either invade Mexico or a local tavern, whichever came first.

As the tables were being arranged, a potential tradition was started: the great picnic table race. As the two groups shuffled, bumped, and panted into the parking area with their respective tables, the first race was declared a dead heat. All of the participants appeared dead from the heat.

As the time approached to start the fires, a minor chink was discovered in the otherwise fine arrangements: no tomatoes, onions, or lettuce! In the spirit of a democratically run organization, a group of ten adults plus assorted children gathered around Skip Whitworth to make the crucial decision - how many of each should he buy? The numbers were chosen and Skip departed in a little white car, perhaps with a few extra jerks as he accustomed himself to his borrowed steed. Deb did seem a little anxious...

By the time the food was ready, at least 60 people were gathered for the feast. The cooks worked hard (drinks in hand) to stay ahead of the line. Although the hamburgers were great, it was the vast array of desserts that held my attention. It was a pleasant sight to watch the

children sneak back for just one more piece of fudge. This reporter quickly realized that he would be less conspicuous if he sent one of his daughters to get extra helpings for himself. I wonder if that's why all the kids seem to get so many helpings of dessert?

As the appetites were finally satisfied, the picnic was almost marred when one of the cooks threatened to poison the local wildlife. John Stewart was heard to yell, "There are extra hamburgers here, and if you don't eat them, I'm going to feed them to the raccoons!". Fortunately, those present rallied once more to the serving table, and the raccoons were spared this fate.

All in all, a great feast. Congratulations to Charlie Carlson, Frank Dibbell, and all the others who worked to make it happen.

Board of Directors Election

Elections for the board of directors were held during the afternoon of the Star-B-Q. Two board positions were up for election. Bob Fingerhut and Donn Mukensnabe were elected to fill the seats.

Bob will begin his second term on the board. He is a founding member of the association. This is Donn's first time as a board member, but he has been active in the association for some time.

Bob Schalck did not run for re-election. He deserves our thanks for the three years he put in as a board member. He also is one of the founders of the FPOA.

Membership Chair Needed

The association is in need of a new membership chairperson. Frank Dibbell has done double duty for some time now. The prospective chairperson needs a MacIntosh computer, and spare time especially at the end of the year. Call Frank days at 408/746-6493.

Mars presentation at Star-B-Q

After the potluck was cleared away at our annual Star-B-Q, and the sky was getting dark, Chris McKay from NASA gave a talk on plans to send missions to Mars. An estimated 120 people attended his presentation.

He showed an extensive collection of slides illustrating proposed solutions to the problems of travel to Mars and living on the planet. The favored plan utilizes a three part rotating space vehicle that would cycle repeatedly from the orbit of Mars to the orbit of Venus, passing close to Earth and Mars every other orbit to allow connections to be made.

The presentation was brought back to earth, so to speak, when Chris was asked when all this was likely to happen. His response ranged into a number of budgetary areas, but could be summarized as "not soon". He left us with the suggestion that we let our governmental representatives know how we felt.

After the presentation, most of the group moved up the hill to the telescope. Saturn, rather than Mars was the favorite object, only because Mars was still below the horizon.

On a personal note, my daughters attended Chris's talk, and I was not sure how interested they were until two days later when an issue of the children's magazine "3-2-1 Contact" arrived at our house featuring an extensive article on Mars and copies of many of the slides we had seen at the peak. Both my daughters read it cover to cover and made it clear they had been paying close attention indeed during the presentation at the peak. Perhaps there is hope for future support for space exploration.

Volunteer Awards

The California Department of Parks and Recreation has named eleven members of the FPOA to receive the State Volunteer Awards. These awards are given to individuals who have given their time, both in quantity and quality, to support the park system.

The members receiving the awards were: Kevin and Denni Medlock, John Stewart, Frank Dibbell, John Gleason, Bob Fingerhut, Don Stone, Carter Roberts, Skip Whitworth, Charlie Carlson, and Donn Mukensnoble.

These names are familiar to us all from their work getting the observatory built and our public programs started. They were each presented with a pin at a ceremony at the recent Star-B-Q.

A General Plan for the Park

The California Department of Parks and Recreation is considering the development of a General Plan for Fremont Peak State Park. This process is usually lengthy, and involves input from the public and from volunteer organizations associated with the park.

Kay Schmidt-Robinson, from the Department of Parks and Recreation, attended the July 9th meeting of the FPOA board of directors to explain the planning process, and to discuss ways in which the Observatory Association can best provide input to the plan. The department is exploring innovative ways to bring volunteer groups into the process. A committee was formed to work with the Kay. Denni Medlock, Dave Ambrose, and Pete Jacobsen will serve on the committee.

Having a General Plan is a crucial step in the future development of the park. Any significant improvement, such as a deck for the observatory, permanent placement of additional telescopes, or consideration of light barriers have little chance of moving forward without a General Plan. The observatory itself is a considerable stretching of department guidelines, however appropriate it is to the park.

The development of a general plan, once begun, typically takes 18 months to complete. The first step in the process is the development of a "resource inventory" for the park, including natural, cultural, aesthetic, and recreational features. One of the areas in which the association may be able to help is with this resource inventory.

Once the resources of the park are clearly defined, three other elements of the plan are written, covering Land Use, Facilities, and Operations. The finished plan defines the acceptable, desirable directions in which the park will move in the future.

Regardless of the role that the FPOA will take in the development of the General Plan, many individual members of the FPOA are in an ideal position to offer input to the planning process. Many of us use all of the parks facilities: Camping with our families, hiking, and observing the wildlife, as well as enjoying the clear night sky. The newsletter will continue to report the progress of the General Plan, and see to it that members are aware of opportunities to share their thoughts.

Mars Watch '88

The Planetary Society has organized many Mars Watch activities around the country during the month of September. As you know, Mars is at its closest approach to Earth for 17 years, and this fact has been well publicized.

On September 17th, the Planetary Society, the Astronomical Association of Northern California, and the FPOA are jointly presenting a Mars Gazing Evening at Fremont Peak. The Planetary Society has mailed announcements of this event, together with a map, to all of its members.

There are 7000 members of the Planetary Society in the greater Bay Area. As Rick has pointed out, if the mailer plus the map attract only one percent of those with a few family members or friends, we will have one of the busiest evenings ever at the observatory. If you can help with the program, please call Rick. If you can set up your own scope for public viewing, that too will be greatly appreciated.

This will be a great opportunity to provide the public education we are chartered to deliver, and to show off our excellent observatory and telescope. We may just pick up some new members as well!

In addition to the September 17th program, we have public nights scheduled for October 1st and 15th. If you are available to help with those programs, please call Rick at 408/ 623-4255.

From the Log

When the 30" telescope was finally put into public duty in April of 1987, a log book was placed in the observing room for those using the telescope. Although the FPOA only requires users to write down a few things, it became obvious, right from the start, that the log book was being used as sort of an "open diary".

The log book accounts are often humorous, sometimes meaningful, but always a rich history of what has occurred, and been seen (in more ways than through the eyepiece!) at the observatory. Even the style, terms, and abbreviations used in the log entries conveys a feeling for the place. Unfortunately, we cannot replicate the coffee spills and cookie crumbs here in the newsletter.

Here are just a few samples from the early months. We will "catch up" in the next few issues and make "From the Log" a regular feature.

More from the Log...

March 27, 1987

Windy, clear skies transpar = 7+ seeing = 8
---- (THE NIGHT OF THE GALAXIES) -----

Kevin Medlock, Bob Fingerhut, Jim Eiselt, Mike Ryan, Charley Carlson

- M42 dneb Beautiful !! (Naturally!!)

- 4494 gal Fuzzy splotch!!

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- 2392 pneb planetary nebula in Gemini, bright central star, 2 rings in nebula

(J. Eiselt - SPACE SPEED!!)

(K. Medlock - NEAT!!)

- (Coma Cluster - A SEARCH AND DESTROY AREA!!)

- M99, 4450, 4350, M100, 4298, M85, 4394, 4293

April 5, 1987

Skip Whitworth opened at 2030 hr. Slight wind, fog in valley. 1st quarter moon, trans = 7, seeing = 5

- M42 nice in the 50mm, better in the 20mm Nag.

- M81 and 82, outstanding with the 20mm Nag. M101 slightly washed out

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At 2345 started Galaxy hopping in Virgo and Coma. NGC 4668, 4666, 4635 make a nice group about 1 deg. NE of gamma Virgo. It took about 30 minutes, but found 3C 273. Using the 50mm took in a very nice group around M60 with NGC 4647, 4638. Move a little NE and M58 comes in. All I can say is BREATHTAKING!

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Last object of the evening is the Ring using the 20mm Nag with the UHC filter. Very nice. I then switched to the 6.8 mm ortho with the 2.4X Barlow looking inside the Ring. Only found just the Central Star. RATS!!! Closed at 0315.

April 27, 1987

Opened approx. 19:45 by Marcus Pun. Temp 65 deg. Wind N 5-10 mph. Cirrostratus near horizon. low haze. Fog covering valley west of site.

Orion Nebula too low on horizon to make out more than Trapezium, however nebulosity quite distinct. (The flowers around here smell "heavenly"). Saw cute little mouse around North Pier.

Took one minute exposures prime focus ASA 100 of Orion and Ring Nebula. Didn't bring clock so timing not accurate. Note: NEED CLOCK....eventually. Had a good time. Temperature stayed in the mid sixties until the clouds came and it got windy. Est. time out 3 AM.

More from the Log...

May 1, 1987

Tom Clancy, a teacher at a Christian School in Salinas, brought students and parents to the observatory. Almost 50 people. High fog, a fairly bright moon, and lots of people contributed to our viewing only the moon which was soon lost in the fog. Just seeing the scope and learning how it worked seemed to satisfy their curiosity. They'll come back but in smaller numbers. --Rick Morales

May 29, 1987

Opened by D. Muk. 11:00pm. High cirrus, cold in 40's and fairly damp. Latter and observing equipment was down in shed. Some interested folks, showed M57, Saturn, M4 (in lots of haze), finished with M27 which was spectacular with 20mm Nag. Closed around 1am (No Clock). Sky of course then cleared off.

June 28, 1987

Kevin and Denni Medlock w/ 12 observers. Open approx. 6:30pm. Everything ok. M8, M20, M16, 17, 51 (structure galore!). Dumbell most impressive with pink and green in nebula. Ring blown up until Central Star can be seen. 4565 BEST EVER! 4690, Veil (both sides), 7009, M104's dark lane and central core quite incredible. Fog playing tag with observatory. Wind throughout.

July 2, 1987

Opened approx 8:15pm. Kevin and Denni Medlock (Megan and Paul), Dennis Merrill (Alycia). Moon down approx. 12: Night for photography. Fog below; windy. Photographed M51, M33, Stephan's Quintet, M8, M20.

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Seeing improved as we went along. One picture ruined by cat jumping inside 30" during exposure. Closed at 4:30am.

July 3, 1987

Doug Brown, Gabriel Li (visiting from Hong Kong)

20:00 Viewed moon along terminator

20:32 Raccoon came by to remind us it is necessary to close garbage can lid tightly!

21:10 Fog rises and obscures, 53 deg., calm.

22:50 Clear, Lagoon N with lane visible even with quarter moon

24:00 M20 lanes visible, still in moonlight

00:05 Donn Mukensnoble and wedding guests show up

00:40 Exposure of N. American N. Everything is wet.

00:50 More of the wedding party arrive

FOG

CLOSE

Restroom Construction Begins

Work has finally started on the long planned restrooms near the observatory. When finished, they will be the first public flush toilets in the park.

The building will be just north and east of the shop (aka warming room) at the bottom of the final hill up to the observatory. The building design will be similar in appearance to the observatory, with a shingled exterior. Those members who labored on the foundation of the observatory may find amusement in the problems encountered by the construction crew: LARGE ROCKS! There have been three backhoe failures thus far attributed to these rocks.

Rick Morales hopes they will be complete before the September 17th public program, when a potentially large number of Planetary Society members may visit the peak. Rick looks to the day when similar facilities may be built for the campgrounds.

FPOA Officers and Directors

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The FREMONT PEAK OBSERVER is published quarterly and is the official publication of the Fremont Peak Observatory Association. The Association is a tax-exempt, not for profit organization dedicated to providing public education and interpretive services in Astronomy using the resources available at Fremont Peak State Park.

Basic membership in the Association is \$10.00 per year, plus a one-time \$10.00 initiation fee. Membership in the Association runs the calendar year. There is no pro-rationing of dues. For further information, contact any Board Member.