



# The FREMONT PEAK **OBSERVER**

Editor: Donn Mukensnoble

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## **Sixteenth Star-B-Que Set**

Our annual Star-B-Que is on August 10<sup>th</sup> this year, and the fireworks this time will be provided by the Perseid meteors in a moonless sky. Join us at the peak for an astronomically-themed day of fun and a night of great viewing.

This year a variety of activities are planned along with the traditional burgers & dogs BBQ hosted by the FPOA and AANC. Three current FPOA board members are up for re-election; a general meeting will be held. The astro-trivia contest returns, along with the Gastronomical Dessert competition. After dinner, there will be a raffle of astronomical items (along with a few surprises).

Annual awards will be presented by the AANC and FPOA, a twilight talk by distinguished guest speaker Dr. Alex Filippenko on "Einstein's Greatest Blunder", followed by viewing through the 30" Challenger telescope. Try to glimpse the crescent moon in the west as well as Venus; the splendor of the summer Milky Way will fill the skies. Outer planets Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto take the stage as a preamble to the meteors. Much later, Saturn appears to grace the dawn, along with a fleeting view of the Orion Nebula.

## **Pardon the Dust** by Rick Morales

Members will be seeing some long-awaited facility improvements to Fremont Peak State Park occurring in the coming summer months. First, as you enter the park you will find some new pavement at the entrance and a large turn around area for people who arrive on the mountain too late to get through the new gate after closing hours. Yep, you read it correctly. A gate.

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## **President's Message** by Pat Donnelly

On May 10, 2002, I gave a presentation on the sun to each of the eighth grade science classes at the San Justo Middle School in Hollister. For each class there was a brief lecture on the sun and its characteristics, a video about a total solar eclipse, and hands-on viewing of the sun through an 8" SCT and H-Alpha views with the solaris. The day was a wonderful success, and I have been unofficially asked to return next year again.

After spending the day at the school the same students were invited up to the peak for planet watching. We had about 50 people, and everyone seemed happy with the viewing, in spite of some of the worst May weather I have ever experienced.

The reason for relating this is now to give all of you some ideas how we can broaden the purpose of the FPOA. As you probably know the FPOA was founded in order to promote public education in astronomy. By going to the schools we are, in effect, taking the FPOA on the road. By going to the schools we promote both astronomy and ourselves. Please consider doing something similar. Also, if anyone has other ideas what we could do to promote astronomy, please let any board member know.

Well it's May 17 as I type this page, and I feel a little down today. Last night was probably the last time to spot all five (5) planets in the evening sky. I almost did not find Mercury in my binoculars. The last three weeks were wonderful, and I hope all of you showed someone else the planets. At the observatory we had plenty of guests, who wanted

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## Introduction from C.L. Price

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A few words about myself. I have been with the Department for around 22 years. I started my career as a seasonal lifeguard working on the beaches of southern California. I worked for seven years in the Ventura beaches from 1991-1997. I then transferred up to Santa Cruz and became a State Park Ranger and Supervising Ranger. I worked most of the Santa Cruz beaches and also had the pleasure to work the 10,000 acre "Forest of Nisene Marks" state park.

In Nov. 2001, I was promoted to the position of sector Superintendent for the Gavilan sector of the Monterey District. I report to Lynn Rhodes, who has the responsibility of overseeing all State Parks within the Monterey District, including Fremont Peak State Park

If you notice the entrance to Fremont Park you will see some improvements to the entrance area that will make getting in and out of the park easier when we have large crowds viewing astronomical events. As you may know the work on the area around the observatory will be taking place this summer. Our hope is to not create a huge impact on the nights that we have scheduled events. With the current state of the budget, we are quite fortunate to have the opportunity to make improvements to the area.

Have a safe summer,

C. L. Price  
Superintendent I  
Gavilan Sector

## Finding FPOA on the Net

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Web Site: <http://www.fpoa.net>  
E-mail List: [members@fpoa.net](mailto:members@fpoa.net)  
Member Information Site:  
<http://members.fpoa.net>  
Userid: xxxx  
Password: xxxx

## Where's My New FPOA Membership Card?

by Bob Black, Vice President

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It seems like all good things eventually come to an untimely end. And that's the way it is with the new FPOA membership cards.

Once upon a time there seemed to be a good reason for having a membership card to present to the park ranger. Conscientious Bob Black, the membership chair, dutifully (and painfully - with his limited computer abilities) printed the membership cards for all new and renewing FPOA members. But there was no evidence given to Bob that any ranger asked to see an FPOA membership card.

So good old Bob, lazy as he is, has discontinued the membership card and, instead, periodically gives the park administration a list of current members that will be used to validate status.

If you still have an old FPOA membership card, Bob recommends that you encase it in clear plastic and keep it with your other valuable mementos.

Please note that Life Members will continue to receive a personalized, engraved, brass membership mini-plaque (card) as part of their honors.

## How Do I find out the Gate Combination?

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The gate combination to the Observatory changes on a periodic basis and can be obtained from several sources. First, you could E-mail an FPOA Board Member (listed at the back of this newsletter), and one of us can provide the combo. Note that the combo is normally changed at the beginning of each calendar month.

Also, you could call the state parks in San Juan at 831-623-4526 or 831-623-4881. You could also mail our CAL, C.L. Price at [cprice@parks.ca.gov](mailto:cprice@parks.ca.gov) or call him at 831-623-0610. I believe the ranger on duty is at the park from about 1:00 PM to 10:00 PM on Wednesday through Saturday as well.

*(President's Message, continued)*

to see the planets. I want to thank all of the FPOA members for their help during this busy time.

On July 13, 2002, the FPOA has planned Rob Toebe Night, a very special tribute to a friend who is no longer with us.

Rob, who was both an FPOA Board member and a very avid observer, passed away late last year. We plan to have an FPOA get together to honor Rob. The event will closely follow a typical Rob Toebe observing night. Before dark there will be a "bring your own food" Bar-B-Que. This is to be followed by an all night observing session of galaxies and galactic clusters, just as Rob would have done. If you have any stories about Rob, please bring them. I'm sure all those present will want to hear about Rob. If you cannot attend on July 13, please send to us list of any objects that you want us to observe in honor of Rob. We shall try to find them.

Finally, the state park volunteer training and telescope certification on June 8 at the peak went well. If you are interested in attending future training, please let a board member know.

## Volunteers for Public Programs Sought

The heart of the FPOA's service to Public Astronomy is the weekend programs at Fremont Peak that run on Saturdays throughout the summer and fall.

The first observing Saturday of the month (check the 2002 Schedule for the precise dates) is the Solar Program, presenting the roiling surface and upper atmosphere of the Sun in visible and hydrogen light using our Solaris telescope from the main Fremont Peak lot. Sunspots and prominences are frequently visible. In the evening, visitors can view objects with the 30" and an astronomy-related talk is given starting at 8:00pm.

This year, more volunteers are needed. Please contact Pat Donnelly to sign up for a day or evening and help the FPOA achieve its 16th year of success.

## FPOA Public Schedule 2002

### March

16 Board Meeting

### April

13 Board Meeting, Work Party (10 am)\*  
20 Public Program\* (**Astronomy Day**)

### May

04 Solar, Public Programs  
11 Public Program, Board Meeting  
18 Public Program

### June

01 Solar, Public Programs  
08 Public Program, Board Meeting  
15 Public Program  
29 Public Program

### July

06 Solar, Public Programs  
13 Board Meeting, Public Program (**TMSP**)  
20 Public Program

### August

03 Solar, Public Programs  
10 Public Program, Board Mtg, **Star-B-Que**  
17 Public Program  
31 Public Program

### September

07 Board, **Member Appreciation Night**  
14 Public Program  
28 Public Program

### October

05 Solar, Public Programs \*, Board Meeting  
12 Public Program\*  
26 (Work Party) Public Program\*

### November

09 Board Meeting (offsite, TBD)  
\* - Call FPOA Hotline 831-623-2465  
beforehand to verify program schedule

To volunteer for a public night, you **must** have completed the docent training course. Contact Pat Donnelly at 408-778-2741 to reserve dates; ideally one month but at least two weeks prior to the date desired.

It may or may not actually be closed and locked after dark but the possibility does exist that access to the park may be restricted. What will determine when and if access is restricted depends on staffing of the park. The State Park System is suffering through staff shortages and closing and opening the gate requires the presence of sufficient park staff. In addition to the turn around area and the gate, a new signpost will make a definite statement that you have arrived to Fremont Peak State Park.

At the end of May the Park System will have chosen a contractor to begin construction work around the shop area and the observatory. The extensive improvements will include:

- new paving around the shop buildings
- a fence to screen the residence from the shop and define the fact that it is a residence and not just part of the shop and observing areas
- a subtly lighted, separate pedestrian path to the observatory from the shop
- an extension of the existing gravel road to include a loop around the observatory, which will be supported by a three foot high retaining wall
- a group activity area with wide terraced steps within the loop, suitable for presentations
- eight 10x10 foot telescope pads with ac outlets across the road south of the observatory
- handrails and posts with subtle lighting, which will be controlled by dimmer switches located inside the observatory
- miscellaneous other improvements designed to make the observatory area a more desirable place for astronomers to gather.

Oh, yea. One more small thing. The Park System is going to eliminate four trees from the area. One is a little tiny but old oak. Three are fairly young, big and healthy Coulter Pines near the shop. Yea. You know the ones.

All in all, I am looking forward to the improvements to Fremont Peak State Park. There has been discussion for years regarding things that could be done to make the park a better place for astronomy and the Park System folk have been listening.

Funds have finally been encumbered from Volunteer Enhancement Funds for the project. The project engineer, Joan Carpenter, was assigned the task of getting the project out to bid before the funding went away (a real possibility given recent budget cuts). There was little time for public input.

The FPOA was informed of the project shortly before it went to bid and after the final design was put on paper. We were able to suggest some key refinements. The design of some aspects doesn't please everyone but there will never be a project that will please everyone.

I, for one, think the improvements will benefit the park, the observatory, and all the people who will visit the park and who enjoy astronomy. We may suffer for a short time from the inconvenience of the actual construction process this summer but, in the end, it will be well worth it.

Rick Morales

### Fremont Peak Observatory Association Officers and Directors

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The **Fremont Peak Observer** is published quarterly by the FPOA, a non-profit cooperating association. For more information, contact any Board Member or write to FPOA, P.O.Box 1376, San Juan Bautista, CA 95045