



## **A new era begins for Fremont Peak Observatory**

**by Morris Jones**

Since its inception in 1985 Fremont Peak Observatory Association has operated under a contract with California State Parks as a “cooperating association.” That is about to change.

The last cooperating association contract between FPOA and State Parks expired several years ago, and talks have been ongoing since then to forge a new agreement.

During these negotiations, the state decided that it would be a better fit for astronomy services at Fremont Peak to be operated by a concessionaire rather than a cooperating association. State Parks would then issue a “Request for Interest” (RFI) for organizations who wished to be awarded the concession.

Without knowing exactly what the state would request in its RFI, the possibility loomed that FPOA might in fact lose the contract to a competing bid! As a non-profit organization dedicated to free public education in astronomy, FPOA could offer nothing to the state in the way of revenue. Indeed, FPOA’s lease agreement with Kevin Medlock for the 30-inch telescope stipulates that no one may be charged money to look through the eyepiece.

But much like the surprise landscaping improvements done by Parks this past year (see elsewhere in this issue), the RFI for an astronomy concession at Fremont Peak issued by the state in January appeared to

be an easy hurdle for FPOA to cross.

Terms of the RFI include the requirement to provide a telescope for the observatory of 30-inch aperture or larger, and payment to the state of 10% of operation revenue in excess of \$10,000 annually. The RFI also requires the concessionaire to post a performance bond and provide liability insurance for operations.

The selection of a concessionaire for astronomy programs at Fremont Peak will not be finalized until May 1 at the earliest, and there will be many details to work out after that, but it looks good for an excellent continued relationship between FPOA and State Parks. The FPOA response to the RFI has been submitted, and indeed is the only response. (The

complete RFI and the FPOA response are available on the member section of the web site: <http://members.fpoa.net/rfi/>)

What sorts of things might be different as a concessionaire instead of a cooperating association?

***Observatory work party  
Saturday April 5! Come  
help get the observa-  
tory ready for summer.***

One major difference revolves around liability insurance. Under the previous contract, public programs at the observatory were supervised by State Parks using trained state park volunteers, and thus covered by the State of California for liability claims. This meant that FPOA program volunteers had to attend training provided by State Parks, and scheduling of volunteers was officially the responsibility of the park.

As a concessionaire, responsibility for program volunteers reverts to FPOA. That means FPOA will conduct its own training and qualification process for program volunteers, and be responsible for schedul-

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## A new era ...

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ing. It also means that FPOA insurance, already in place, will cover liability for the action of volunteers and visitors to the observatory.

Most other operations at Fremont Peak Observatory would be conducted just as before. The same excellent schedule of Saturday public programs would be in place, and several new solar programs might be added to meet a requirement for more daytime programs at the observatory.

With a new relationship being forged, and improvements to the area behind the ranger house and around the observatory for the benefit of amateur astronomers, the future of FPOA and public astronomy at Fremont Peak looks very bright indeed.

## 30-inch telescope gets new shine

This spring Kevin Medlock's telescope mirror left Fremont Peak for the first time in many years to be bathed in vacuum and new aluminum.

Our prized mirror shared a vacuum chamber with Chabot Space & Science Center's new 36-inch telescope mirror. Aluminizing service was graciously provided by Lick Observatory on Mt. Hamilton. Many thanks to Bill Brown and the crew at Lick Observatory for their time and good humor in difficult conditions.

Denni Medlock notes that the accompanying crew from Chabot/FPOA had to stand in seven degree weather in an unheated bay for eleven hours helping the Lick coating crew! The great perks were being able to eat in the warm astronomers' dining hall and stand under the 120-inch. It was actually warmer on



*Kevin Medlock reinstalls the 30-inch mirror. Photo by Morris Jones.*

the floor of the 120-inch than in the coating bay just below!

After several careful rides up and down many Bay Area hills, the newly aluminized mirror was reinstalled in the Challenger telescope on March 1, looking resplendent in its new coat.

Members and volunteers are cautioned to be careful, as always, with the surface of this fine mirror. Be watchful for members of the public who might be a little too interested in fondling the shiny surface — especially smaller family members.

Never perform any cleaning or other maintenance to the mirror. Cleaning requires extra-special care to protect the aluminum surface. As always, make notes in the telescope log book of any anomalies.

## A special present from State Parks to amateur astronomers at Fremont Peak

**by Bob Black**

Wow!

What's new at Fremont Peak State Park? We have some great improvements that extend from the ranger's residence to the observatory.

The road has been resurfaced with a better quality "DG" (decomposed granite), re-graded to reduce puddling, and now has a turnaround that goes around the observatory.

There is a pedestrian path on the north side of the road, with low-level safety lighting. We have new telescope pads south of the observatory, complete with 115-volt AC outlets and low-level safety lighting; they are paved with a special compound that should be firm, even if wet.

To the west of the observatory is a new patio that can be used for constellation viewing or overflow telescopes. The steps to the road turnaround can be used as an amphitheater for outdoor public presentations.

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*Fremont Peak Observatory as seen from the peak, with new multi-purpose area on the west side, and level telescope pads on the south. Photo by Mike Koop.*

## **A present from Parks ...**

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Best of all, for many amateur astronomers, is that the exotic pines that were close to the workshop are gone.

Thanks to those of the Monterey District of Parks who worked to get the funding, then directed those funds to this project. Special thanks to Joan Carpenter, the district civil engineer who developed the plan. Let's celebrate!

## **Great observing site reopens**

**by Morris Jones**

In a change from previous years, all members of the amateur astronomy community are welcome to observe in the newly renovated area behind the ranger residence.

This area was a favorite observing location for many years before the growth of several young pine trees significantly limited the horizon.

One of the improvements made by State Parks this past year was the removal of three large pine trees around this area. The trees were replaced by planting new trees in a different area of the park.

In addition, the level observing pads on the south and west sides of the observatory are available on a first-come basis to amateur astronomers. (That policy may be different under the new contract between the state and a new concessionaire, according to Ranger C.L. Price.)

The area behind the ranger residence is restricted to vehicle traffic, behind a locked gate. Ranger Price is happy to give the gate combination to amateur astronomers who want to observe in the area, as long as a few safety concerns are met.

“There might be a maximum number of astronomers that would safely fit in the area around the shop. It's important to keep a twenty-foot wide roadway clear to allow access to the observatory building for emergency vehicles, such as a fire truck,” said Price.

Also, on FPOA public program nights, astronomers who set up next to the observatory will be expected to participate in the public program during the early evening hours by offering views through their telescope to park visitors.

For access to this area of the park, contact the resident ranger and Gavilan Sector Superintendent, C.L. Price, at (831) 623-0610, or by email at [cprice@parks.ca.gov](mailto:cprice@parks.ca.gov).

## **News from State Parks**

**by C.L. Price, Gavilan Sector  
Superintendent**

As everyone is probably aware the State is in the midst of a huge budget problem. State Parks has been asked to tighten our belts along with all other government agencies. We are currently being asked to trim 15 million dollars from our operating budget. This is the current amount request by the governor, but may be adjusted before a final budget is in place for the next fiscal year. We have been funded for a campground rehabilitation project that will make all the campsites more user friendly and more accessible. The current project dates are May 20 through August 20. During that time we will be off the reservation system. The available campsites will be on a first come first serve basis. We hope to have at least one of the campground loops open during all periods of construction. The camping fees will go up to \$10.00 per site during the peak season. (Summer months)

The project around the observatory is now complete and the feedback has been positive. The interpretive

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## New from State Parks

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concession contract should be in place within a few months. This contract will be a formal agreement which will benefit all parties involved.

As a final note, the department is undergoing a reorganization of all 26 districts. In some cases districts will be combined with administrative offices being consolidated in an effort to maximize savings and reduce office space rental costs. The plan is currently being worked on and must be approved by the various department heads before being implemented. The goal is to make as many of the reductions with the least amount of impact to the field staff that serves the public.

Have a good spring.

## Observatory and volunteer training

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Part of the fun of being a member of FPOA is conducting public programs at the observatory. As a trained volunteer who assists in at least one public program each year, you have the privilege of reserving the telescope on non-public nights (for proficiency exercise).

There are two training programs required to conduct a public program at Fremont Peak Observatory — the volunteer training provided by the park district, and telescope and observatory operation training provided by FPOA.

While the contract with State Parks is still under negotiation, FPOA operates as a cooperating association. As such, FPOA members who conduct public programs at the observatory are officially state park volunteers.

To become a state park volunteer, you have to attend training provided by the park district. At present the park has no training sessions scheduled. Previously trained FPOA member-volunteers are automatically current for 2003. Members who are not trained park

volunteers can still assist an official volunteer at FPOA public programs.

The other training required is for telescope and observatory operation. Ron Dammann, our Director of Instruments, is collecting names of members who are interested in being trained to operate the observatory, and a training session will be scheduled later this year.

So if you're a new member ready to jump into the fray, or a long-time member looking for a refresher, let Ron know you want to join a training day, and you'll be notified of the schedule. Contact Ron Dammann at [ron.dammann@lmco.com](mailto:ron.dammann@lmco.com) or (408) 255-1863.

## How to reserve the 30-inch Challenger telescope

by Pat Donnelly

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The 30-inch Challenger telescope is available for use on any non-public program night by FPOA members. The telescope is reserved on a first come basis. For an FPOA member to reserve the telescope the following prerequisites must be met:

The requestor shall be a paid up or life member of good standing in the FPOA.

The requestor shall have participated in a public program as a registered Fremont Peak State Park (FPSP) volunteer during the current or previous calendar year.

The requestor shall be currently certified on the 30-inch telescope and be an FPSP volunteer in good standing.

Reservations can be made at any time up to 48 hours before the requested evening. Reservations may be accepted with less than a 48-hour notice, provided there is time to notify the park district of the use of the observatory. Reservations are made by contacting the reservations coordinator, Patrick Donnelly, by phone (408) 778-2741 or email [schedule@fpoa.net](mailto:schedule@fpoa.net). Upon verification of meeting the prerequisites you will be notified of your reservation, and your reservation will be added to the FPOA Calendar on the FPOA web site

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## How to reserve the observatory ...

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(<http://members.fpoa.net/ical.html>). The combination of both the gate and the observatory key box will be given. It is advisable that you arrive before dark if you are not strongly familiar with the observatory opening and closing procedures. The opening and closing procedures are provided in a notebook in the observing room.

If you need to cancel your reservation or if you have questions, contact the reservations coordinator or any FPOA board member. However, please note that reservations can only be accepted by the reservations coordinator.

## Membership Notes

by Bob Black

### Annual Members

It's that time again! Yes, it's time to renew your FPOA membership if you are a year-to-year member. You will find a renewal application form and return envelope enclosed if your membership has expired.

### Everybody

As is described elsewhere in this edition of the Observer, FPOA is about to embark upon a completely different relationship with the Fremont Peak State Park and the Department of Parks and Recreation administration.

There is likely to be a considerable "settling in" period, and your association can use all of the support that you are willing to give. We continue to be committed to provide excellent astronomy programs for park visitors.

We will have greater responsibilities and a greater financial need. But we also will have a greater need for you who can offer your time and talent to keep everything running smoothly during the transition. These are some of the challenges that we face: facility management and maintenance, training, publicity, program development, membership development,

legal support, and a host of others that we will discover as time goes on. This is a great opportunity for FPOA. Do increase your commitment!

## From the Logbook

11/18/02 Ron Dammann and Pat Donnelley

Opened 20:00 PST. Viewed nearly full moon early while waiting for the Leonids. Observed Vallis Shroteri near Aristarchus, Saturn, Hyperion, Rhea, Dione, Tethys. M42 with O111 filter. Watched Canopus rise. Leonids peaked between 2:30 - 3:00 a.m. 600 - 700 hourly rate. Closed 4:30 a.m. 48 - 50 degrees and dry.

1/04/03 Pat Donnelley

103 Hera

51 Nemausa

511 DavidA

1 Ceres

82 Alkmene

Closed observatory at 10:13 p.m.

1/11/03 Kevin Medlock, Pat Donnelley, Ron Dammann, Bob Black, Paul Bradshaw, Mike Koop, Jack Murphy and Denni Medlock opened observatory to remove 30" mirror for realuminizing at Lick Observatory in conjunction with coating of the Chabot 36" mirror.

## FPOA on the internet

### Home page:

<http://www.fpoa.net>

### Members information page:

<http://members.fpoa.net>

Username: xxxx

Password: xxxx

### Observatory reservation and event calendar:

<http://members.fpoa.net/ical.html>

### Members email list signup:

<http://www.fpoa.net/mailman/listinfo/fpoa-members>

## Observatory Schedule, 2003

### Saturday evening public programs:

April 26  
May 3, 10, 24, 31  
June 7, 21, 28  
July 5, 19, 26  
August 2, 16, 23, 30  
September 6, 20, 27  
October 4, 18, 25

For all evening programs, a slide talk is offered in the observatory classroom at 8 p.m. or after sunset, whichever is later. Weather permitting, the 30-inch Challenger telescope will be open for public viewing after the slide program until at least 11 p.m.

### Solar (daytime) public programs:

May 3  
June 7  
July 5  
August 2  
September 6  
October 4

Solar observing programs are offered outside the observatory from noon until about 3 p.m., weather permitting. Special solar telescopes will be set up to show sunspots in white light, and solar prominences at the hydrogen-alpha wavelength with special filters.

### Board of Directors meetings:

April 5  
May 3  
May 31  
June 28  
June 26  
August 23  
September 27  
October 25

### Special events:

Star-B-Q, July 26  
Member appreciation night, August 23  
Spring work party, April 5

## Submit an article for the next Fremont Peak Observer

The Fremont Peak Observer is published four times a year by the Fremont Peak Observatory Association, on or near the first of February, April, July, and October.

The submission deadline for each issue is the 15th of the preceding month, i.e., January 15, March 15, June 15, and September 15.

Please submit all articles in plain text format (no word processor files please!) by email to editor@fpoa.net.

*FPOA sends its best wishes and thanks to Ernie Piini for years of service to the Board of Directors, and to Donn Mukensnoble as editor of Observer.*

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