

The FREMONT PEAK **OBSERVER**

Volume Thirteen

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Editor - Denni Medlock

HELLO 1996!

Tenth Anniversary of FPO Sets Stage For Busy Program Schedule

Comets, Conferences & Facility Up Grades Are Highlighted

Universe '96 Star Party

1996 is not only the FPOA's 10th anniversary but a busy year astronomically as well. On June 22 the FPOA will host the conference star party for Universe '96, a national astronomical conference co-sponsored by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific (ASP), American Association of Lunar and Planetary Observers (ALPO) and several amateur astronomical societies. While a Monday afternoon tour of Lick is scheduled, Fremont Peak will be the site of the conference's official Saturday night star party. Over 2000 participants are expected to attend the conference at the San José Convention Center so we are preparing for the possibility of high numbers coming up to view through the 30". FPOA will also be running an information booth at the conference.

Peak Attractions This Summer: Comet Hale-Bopp

If it performs to its predictions Comet Hale-Bopp will brighten to become the best comet in twenty years. The comet's closest approach to Earth will occur on April 1, 1997 but it might reach naked eye brightness this summer. If it *does*, media attention on this event should be outstanding, giving the observatory at Fremont Peak a plethora of attention. Expect crowds!

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New Flooring and Carpet Planned

What would your living room carpet look like if tens of thousands of visitors walked through over a period of ten years? Yup...that bad.

Actually, the carpet in the observing room has held up amazingly well, and except for the Rick Morales Solar Furnace demonstration burns, doesn't look like it has gone through the trenches. (Yes, we intend to cut those out and have them framed.)

But it has and plans now call for it being replaced before the start of the public program season in April. We would also like to replace the plywood flooring underneath at the same time. During the installation of the 30''s mounting the wheels of the hydraulic lift broke through near the pier and it has always been a "soft" spot.

Bids are being solicited for the cost of this maintenance which won't be cheap even if we can get some or all of the labor or materials donated, possibly between \$2,000 and \$3,000.

Donations for the new flooring and carpet will be greatly appreciated and can be sent to FPOA, P.O. 787, San Juan Bautista, CA 95045. Please indicate that they are for "flooring."

1996 - Do It Better!

1996 will mark the FPOA's tenth year of operating the observatory at Fremont Peak. Over those ten years the association has seen tens of thousands of visitors of all ages, occupations and origins attend the FPOA's programs at

the Peak. The 30" Challenger telescope has provided awe-inspiring views to these people on a thousand of nights. Dozens of newspaper and magazine articles have been written about this mountaintop resource. A television commercial featuring the observatory was shown state-wide for over a year.

What makes the Fremont Peak Observatory and the astronomical program offered there so unique? Why do you, the FPOA members, continue to offer your fullest support? These questions were confronted in a two day 'brain storming' session which FPOA Board members and officers attended in December and January in lieu of the regular board meetings for those months. Several other questions were addressed: How can we serve the public and our members better? Where do we want to be at the FPOA's 20th anniversary?

Perhaps the answers to the first two questions are as numerous and different as there are FPOA members. Only you know why you volunteer your time, money and energy into the program. But added together all of these individual contributions have forged a public astronomical program unique, not only to the California State Parks alone, but in what is offered to the general public nation-wide.

The answer to the third question - "how can we serve the public and our members better?" - was answered by the collimated statement, "Do what we do now, only do it better."

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All of us would agree that there are ways to "tune-up" the program at the observatory. Here are some of the items the board has been discussing for attention in 1996:

- full scale solar program for day visitors (see page 5 for details)
- a real gift store (page 5 under Solar)
- better communications with members and public through timely newsletters, a first class brochure and an internet address. (page 6)
- standardized speaker notes and slide shows for those who are nervous about volunteering to do a program or don't have the time to set up your own specialized show.
- an astronomical community outreach program supported by FPOA.
- physically upgrade the facility to withstand the next ten years.

League Members Help Head Off Parks Budget Cut

(The following is an excerpt from the League of California State Park Non-Profit Organizations Sept., 1995, Newsletter)

Parks once more got a last-minute reprieve from a drastic budget cut when the transfer of \$19.4 million from the bottle recycling fund was reinstated in the final budget deliberations.

League members responding to President Mary Ellen Young's call to help head off the budget cut could congratulate themselves for helping in the rescue - and for demonstrating the importance of the associations and the League in providing grass roots support for the State Park System. The budget reinstatement came with a warning that this was truly to be the last time Parks

will be rescued... From now on, the Department (of Parks) was told, Parks must adjust to the funding available.

And this means some drastic downsizing of the State Park System will be unavoidable. Those who hope to sustain the Park System at the current level... are now searching for a better system of funding...

And it will be up to park lovers like ourselves to develop public support for these efforts.

Support Your State Parks!

by Bob Black

We all know about the pressures on the California State Budget. State parks are an easy target for cuts and have suffered severe cuts in the past. Fremont Peak State Park had already suffered under budget crunches. With each budget cut, park administration had no alternative but to cut the budgets of individual parks. I feel that Fremont Peak security, already inadequate, would be in even greater jeopardy with further staff cuts, and that would not be good for the observatory.

The budget is being put together now, so now is the time to let those in power know your feelings. The people to write are:

Pete Wilson, Governor
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
Sacramento, CA 95814
Voice: (916) 445-2841
Voice: (415) 703-2218
FAX (916) 445-4633
FAX (415) 703-2803

Your State Senator and your Assemblyman (phone book under Government)

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cc: (To let him know you support him)
Donald W. Murphy, Director
Department of Parks and Recreation
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001
Voice: (916) 653-8380
FAX (916) 653-3903

bcc: (would be useful to us)
FPOA
PO Box 787
San Juan Bautista, CA 95045
FAX (408) 623-4612

A simple letter, hand written or typed (preferably not Xeroxed) is most effective. Fax or phone call are OK....

Just say, in your own words, what your wishes are. Some ideas: how important parks are to you, how much Fremont Peak State Park and FPOA (a State park non-profit cooperating association) serve the public, what an asset the observatory is to the park (at no cost to the State), how important continuous staffing is to park security, etc.

Quotable Quote:

"We have expanded the boundaries of the park to include the universe."

Overheard at the FPOA's August, 1986
observatory dedication

FPO To Receive IBM Computer

IBM, through its funds for community services, has awarded the FPOA a PC 300 series (6571), model K3B, with 4MB memory and a 270 MB hard disk.

This computer will become dedicated to running the setting circles and software programs on the 30" telescope, a project long in planning and need.

Gears For 30" Clock Drive Installed

*(The following is an entry in the FPOA
Observatory Log Book)*

"11/25/95 Arrived at 1:30 pm
to replace drive and service
scope.

Rob Toebe and Kevin Medlock"

Thus ends the saga of what users were calling "the world's largest Dobsonian telescope." (Technically, that was really incorrect. The 30", even without a clock drive, was still on an equatorial mount, and the Swayze brothers from Portland hold the record for Dobsons with a 40".) However, nobody's going to argue that when the 30"'s drive gear and worm were mashed sometime this summer (the vinyl tubing covering the gear was allowed to drift into the worm) the pursuing lack of clock drive made life a little difficult for those running the public programs. No matter how low of power you put on an object 30" is still a narrow field of view. It can get annoying to both operated and public crowd when one has to climb up the ladder after each person to recenter the object before it drifts away.

Mike Maloon reports what must have been the most frustrating night of any observer's life. On Sept. 15 he had a small group of friends and work associates up to observe and encountered sub-arc second seeing and dark skies, a phenomena for which Fremont Peak excels at during the Fall months. There Saturn was, steady as a rock, able to handle a 13 mm eyepiece and, alas, no drive! Dilemma. What to do? Put in a lower power eyepiece and let your friends observe while you try to keep the scope centered? Or, chuck it all, say the heck with it, throw in a

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13mm and watch Saturn zooooom through the field with only yourself to go "ohh" and "aaw" at the once-in-a-year sight? What would you have done?

First person to use the 30" since the gears were replaced was Landon Noll and he reports the telescope is running smoothly, much to the relief of all those Winter deep-sky observers.

Facility Maintenance High Priority For 1996

Besides replacing the observing room flooring and installing new carpeting the observatory is in need of its annual maintenance. The storm that ripped through Northern California on December 12 hit Fremont Peak with recorded winds of 98 mph. Fortunately, it was not raining at the time and the only damaged sustained by the observatory were spots of shingles peeled from the roll-off roof. No water damage was reported.

However, the observatory requires a certain amount of annual repair and the FPOA is planning on holding a work party near the end of January in hopes that the yearly January "warm-up" will occur on schedule and allow us to reshingle those spots.

Most other maintenance will wait till Spring but they include:

- replacing the nails on the decks with screws
- painting both rooms
- rebuild shutters (It's been ten years of rain and wind!)
- general cleanup

Keep an eye on the *Observer* for work party dates. These days are usually followed by a FPOA-sponsored BBQ and observing that night.

FPOA To Expand Public Program To Daytime

The FPOA has been in procession of an excellent solar telescope now for several years but has yet to establish a scheduled solar program at the park. At the December meeting of the FPOA Board it was decided that one of the ways in which the association can expand its involvement at the park was to operate a daytime program. A large number of park visitors only use the facilities at the park during the day and never get a chance to view through the 30".

The new program will be two fold: one is to expand the already established passive program, that is, put in place more exhibits which can be read and interpreted without a volunteer at hand, and two, to have a volunteer operating the solar telescope. The solar program would be run separately from the nighttime one. Those who volunteer to be there on a Saturday during daylight hours would not be responsible for the evening program.

The FPOA's passive solar program started many years ago with the installation of Charlie Carlson's vertical sundial now in place on the observatory's south wall. We also have a traditional sundial and post waiting to be installed. An interpretive sign still needs to be made for it. Another suggestion unanimously accepted was the idea of a "planet walk." This would start at the Park's new Visitor's Center (the old ranger's house at the upper parking lot) and end at the observatory. With the relative

distances between the inner planets being so close the Visitor's Center is the ideal locale to have the beginning point and interpretive signage for the participant. It will naturally draw people up to the observatory and its other features.

The FPOA Board will be finalizing the parameters of this day time program within the next few months. If you are

interested in volunteering, please contact President Donn Mukensnoble at (510) 462-4602.

FPO News On The Net

FPOA member Mark Wagner has volunteered to place FPOA news on the a net homepage. It can be reached at <http://www.vahul.net/resource/fpeak>

Mark can also be reached at (408)356-1072.

The following letter was received by the editor but addressed to the FPOA membership.

Sept. 2, 1995

To: The FPOA Membership

It's been a long time since I've written, so I thought I'd update you on what's going on up here in Idaho. I noticed in a recent Observer newsletter that I'm the only out of state member, and I have my gold life membership plaque proudly displayed in my observatory. In my last report, I was building the 12 by 12 rolloff (that was back in 1991). Of course, it's finished and in 1993 I added an old 286 computer with runs "Megastar", and then last year I sold my 14.5 inch and built a 20 inch f4 which does duty in the observatory, plus in the field since it's an Obsession style Dob.

Having the observatory in just a dream come true. When we were building the house on the hill for the Challenger 30 inch back in 1987, I longed for my own....after four years, I still stand in there some nights and just smile in satisfaction. The dim glow of the computer screen, a few red lights from battery chargers, shortwave radio, power center, etc....it all looks and feels like I could be on Mauna Kea next to the Keck twins.

So, imagine my pleasant surprise just a couple nights ago when I heard about the Fremont Peak 30 inch telescope on my radio! I was tuned in to Art Bell's "Coast to Coast AM" show out of Pahrump, Nev. (a tiny town between Death Valley and Las Vegas) and Art read a fax from Mike who was reporting observations of Comet Hale-Bopp and then mentioned the public programs that the FPOA runs on the 30 inch at Fremont Peak near San Juan Bautista! I was on the ladder at the time searching for the Asteroid 704 Interamnia...I turned around, stared at the radio and said YES! radio coverage of our project from Hawaii to the Virgin Islands!

Speaking of Hale-Bopp...WOW...mag 10 already from 400 million miles away. I vividly remember seeing Comet Halley painted on the sky just on the other side of the Teapot back in March 1986 (naked eye) and this sighting of this very bright comet is thrilling too because I really feel it will be the Comet of the Millennium.

I first saw Hale-Bopp about 2 weeks ago with my 10 inch Cave Astrola, the one

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named Cor Caroli. Remember? My 20 inch is called "Half Meter."

Our organization here is the Boise Astronomical Assoc. We have about 90 members and emphasize public education by taking our scopes to the public schools, by teaching school teachers in a program called, "I Teach," and by speaking to students directly in their classes. I have done this three times and it's really fun...I give away frisbees and 50 cent pieces that I use to demonstrate what galaxies look like.

From the newsletter it sounds like you guys are still doing a great job down there with public education. I see the digital setting circles are finally! there after what? six years? Well, better late than never. I still find every object the old way, star hopping. My log now shows 2,3346 deeps sky finds including 1,785 Herschel objects. I've spent the last 3 years working with a group in Florida to document all the Herschels...(about 2,350 that actually exist and are at the reported place). The Rose City Astronomers in Portland are developing a second block of 400 Herschels beyond the list now compiled in the book "Observe the Herschels". At my present rate of about 450 a year, I should finish the whole big list late next year. My next project? the entire NGC list!

Occasionally, I see in Sky and Tel that the 72 inch is still progressing along...good luck to all involved in that.

Clear skies,

Charlie Carlson
11530 Wildrose Court
Boise, Id 83713

(Thanks, Charlie, and come and see us sometime.)

- Denni)

Board Meeting Schedule Set For 1996

The following is a list of FPOA Board Meetings scheduled for 1996. All meetings are open to the general membership and interested public. As of this time all meetings are scheduled to be held in the meeting room at the observatory but are subject to change, especially near the end of the year when weather forces us off the Peak and into San José. Meetings are generally held at 3:00 PM, but it is always best to call Rick Morales at (408) 623-4081 to verify. The

program schedule will be published in the next newsletter.

February 17	March 16
April 20	May 18
June 15	July 13
August 10 (Star B-Q)	Sept. 14
October 12	Nov. 9
December 7	

Recent Donations

The FPOA would like to thank the following people for their recent donations:

Jack Zeiders	\$1,000 (flooring)
Landon Noll	\$300 (general)
Mike Maloon	\$100 (flooring)

The Fremont Peak Observer is published quarterly by the Fremont Peak Observatory Association, a non-profit cooperative association with the California Department of Parks and Recreation. Membership is open to all interested individuals. Inquiries regarding Corporate Memberships are welcome.

Officers for 1996 are:

President

Donn Mukensnabe
3779 Oakbrook Court
Pleasanton, CA 94588
(510) 462-4602

Board Members:

Denni Medlock, Newsletter editor
6670 Sobrante Road
Oakland, CA 94611
(510) 339-9224

Pat Donnelly
500 Corte Cabinil
Morgan Hill, CA
95037
(408) 778-2741

Secretary

Chris Angelos
607 Townsend Drive
Aptos, CA 95003
(408) 688-3562

Bob Black, Membership chairman
585 Dartmouth Avenue
San Carlos, CA 94070
(415) 592-2166

Doug Padrick
517 Lone Tree Rd
Holister, CA
95023
(408) 637-6936

Treasurer

John Stewart
3345 Santa Clara, #1
El Cerrito, CA 94530
(510) 527-7036

Rob Toebe
2550 Hilborn Road, #245
Fairfield, CA 94533
(707) 426-2935

ATTENTION

ALL FPOA MEMBERSHIPS ARE DUE AND PAYABLE JANUARY, 1996

Application For Membership in the Fremont Peak Observatory Association

Name _____

Phone: _____

Street: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP: _____

Do you want to be listed in the FPOA Directory? (Y/N) ____ The Directory is distributed to FPOA members only

Please enroll me as a member in the FREMONT PEAK OBSERVATORY ASSOCIATION under the following category:

____ General \$20.00 year

____ Student \$10.00 year

____ Life \$350 one-time fee (10% discount for applicants over 60)

Is this a renewal? (Y/N) _____

Your tax deductible check may be made out to FPOA. Mail with application to:
FPOA, P.O. Box 787, San Juan Bautista, CA 95045