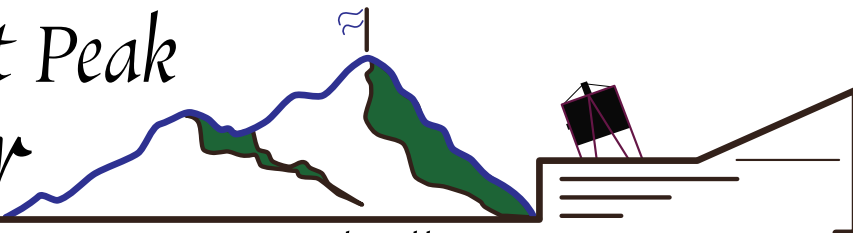


The Fremont Peak Observer

— Bringing Astronomy to the Public —



Vol 37 No. 1

COVID Update 2020

President's Message



Pat Donnelly

I have just finished re-reading my previous President's Message from January 2020. My how things have changed since I wrote those words. Last January we were full of hope for the year. In addition to having an almost new observatory, 2020 offered to us some exceptional astronomical sights to view. Jupiter and Saturn would dominate the evening skies, and later in the season Mars would provide the best views of itself until 2034. All of that has changed with the COVID-19 virus outbreak. We miss these astronomical delights the night skies offer this year. The construction work on the observatory was halted, and after consultation with the parks (DPR) people the FPOA public programs for 2020 were cancelled. Even today, as of August 1st, most people still shelter in place and travel only when necessary. To show you how much life has changed, consider the irony that one cannot enter a bank without a mask. Hopefully, 2021 will be a better year.

In spite of the loss of all 2020 public programs, the situation at the peak has improved recently. The state (DPR) has allowed limited use of the observing pads. This relaxation of restrictions comes with conditions. Included in the conditions that must be followed are maintaining maximum distance from others observers at all times, wearing of masks in proximity to others, disinfecting surfaces touched, and only three

2020 Programs +

2020 Programs are cancelled due to COVID visitor restrictions within Fremont Peak State Park in accordance with the San Benito County Health Department. The park is currently open to local visitors from 8am-8pm with limited parking and reserved campsites.

(3) observers are allowed on any one night regardless of the requested location. So far even with these COVID-19 rules the program appears to be working. On the construction front the DPR has granted limited access for construction work to Rob Hawley, Eric Egland, and me. We are also required to adhere to a set of COVID-19 rules. Our first minor workday has been completed with all of the identified tasks for this day completed.

With respect to the status of the construction work I can report that most of the construction work has been completed. There are only three (3) tasks of some significance remaining. Included in this list is the reinstallation of the sill in the observing room, the addition of the south shutter axle cover and bench, and the painting of the observing room walls. With any luck the sill work will be completed by August 8, and both major and minor tasks finished before the rain starts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced the FPOA Board to take an unusual step. The board is now conducting the board meetings via ZOOM. So far, the experiment has been a success. At our first board meeting all of the board members were present, and at the second there was one guest present. It appears that the board will have to continue video meetings well into 2021. If anyone wishes to attend a video board meeting, please contact Rob Hawley.

Hopefully, you have spent some time observing Comet NEOWISE. It is not often that a naked eye comet appears in the sky. Through my 8 x 56 binoculars I could see a tail about 5° long. In late May, Mercury and Venus were quite close to each other in the evening twilight, and Mercury was an easy naked eye object. Venus was also spectacular in the morning sky. The morning I went out to observe Comet NEOWISE, Venus was less than a degree from Aldebaran. The same morning Jupiter and Saturn were setting in the southwestern skies, and the moon was to the right and quite close to a brilliant orange-red Mars. It was quite a morning. Remember that in December Jupiter and Saturn will be less than a degree apart. As of this publishing date, the comet is still visible in the western sky at astro twilight. As of August 7th, it was about 1/3 of the way from Arcturus to Denebola. It's rapidly dimming back to a fuzzy spot and remains a binocular or telescope object in the late summer sky.

As a final note I am very much looking forward to 2021. I want to be able to use the Challenger telescope again. Jupiter and Saturn will still be near each other, and Venus will become an evening star next summer. There is one thing I will not be looking forward to – the little black bugs that swarm around us at the peak. They will have to wait until 2021 to irritate me again.

Renovation



Eric Eglund

With the onset of observing, we were allowed back to the site and continue our work on the building in a limited volunteer party of three people max. We've just finished installing the new south sill that supplements the current observing desk with a standing desk, wider than the old sill, for opening star atlases and electronic devices while observing with the Challenger telescope. The sill tilts slightly into the room, improving viewing angle.



Pat and Eric installing the sill



The old south sill with the shutter sticking up behind

Observing this year



We're pleased to get back observer access after a long COVID delay. We've been granted early access for our observer members with at least 48 hours notice by email, and agreement to follow some very smart and sensible requirements developed based on state, parks, and San Benito County public health directives.

"COVID-19 Social Distancing Protocol for FPOA Observer Pads" is available on our website at [COVID-19 Protocol](#).

COVID Summary



- Arrive before 8pm, depart before 8am
- Face masks, hand hygiene
- Maximize distance between observers (one pad at least)
- We can bring one additional non-family member
- Please, no public viewing or talks that encourage formation of a tight group
- The building is currently closed

Support



FPOA normally gets its income from memberships. We suffered a membership decline from construction closure to observers last fall, and the COVID pandemic exacerbated the delay. We've extended memberships to compensate our dedicated observers, but as a result, we're also forgoing our income for another year.

Some members renewed or sent donations, but, at this point, we're tapping our savings to pay DPR rent, insurance, and utilities. Please consider ongoing support and support our work during this down time at [Support FPOA](#).

COVID restrictions won't be forever, and we'll be ready to serve our observers in better shape than we've been in during the last decade.

Membership Renewal



Memberships in FPOA are now for 12 months, ending on Dec 31st. For annual members, Observer is now a distinct membership type, and not added. Please use the web enrollment forms on the membership page to join or renew.

Members [may pay with PayPal](#) or mail a check to the address below:

FPOA Membership
c/o Rob Hawley
1233 Hillcrest Dr.
San Jose, CA 95120

Editor's Corner



After many years of dedicated service, our editor Ron Dammann has stepped down. We thank him for all that he does.

My name is Eric Eglund and after a couple years volunteering and helping renovate the observatory, I volunteered as editor and no one has explicitly objected yet. I have background editing geoscience journal articles and abstracts with some media and design experience.

Our goal here is continued coverage of FPOA relevant news for observers and members including observing events, facility news, and public outreach.

Observing Reservations



To make an observing pad reservation, please send the following information to:

schedule at fpoa.net

- Member name
- Reservation date
- Estimated arrival time
- Duration of stay
- Number in party (2020 1 guest limit, contact FPOA to bring more than 1 immediate family member)
- Vehicle description and license plate
- Specific observing site request (pad)

Fremont Peak Observatory Association

Box 1376, San Juan Bautista, CA 95045

Phone Number: (831) 623-2465

General info	<i>info at fpoa.net</i>
Schedule	<i>schedule at fpoa.net</i>
Membership	<i>membership at fpoa.net</i>
Editor	<i>editor at fpoa.net</i>
Treasurer	<i>treasurer at fpoa.net</i>

Website:	www.fpoa.net
Facebook:	fpoa.observatory
Twitter:	fpoa_info

Officers and Directors 2020

President	Pat Donnelly
Vice President	Chris Angelos
Secretary	Eric Eglund
Treasurer	Rob Hawley
Board	Greg Bosler Ron Dammann Loren Dynneson Ryan Clark

Instruments and: Schedule	Ron Dammann
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Membership and: Distribution	Rob Hawley
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Website	Rob Hawley
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Directors Emeritus	Kevin Medlock Denni Medlock
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Dates and Delivery

Members, The Observer is now sent by email and posted on our website at FPOA Observer online. Please send email updates to *membership at fpoa.net*.

The *Fremont Peak Observer* is published four times a year (Winter, Spring, Summer, Fall). Articles from members are encouraged and should be emailed to *editor at fpoa.net* by Feb. 1, May 1, Aug. 1 and Nov 1 in plain text or Word format.