

Stargazing Etiquette

CANIS MAJOR

*The great Overdog
That heavenly beast
With a star in one eye
Gives a leap in the east.
He dances upright
All the way to the west
And never once drops
On his forefeet to rest.
I'm a poor underdog,
But to-night I will bark
With the great Overdog
That romps through the dark.*

-Robert Frost



Introduction

The joy and wonder of stargazing has been enjoyed since the dawn of time. For centuries, people have stood in awe and wonder of the night and its glorious show. In recent times, as the hobby of amateur astronomy has become more popular and people have gathered to share information and view at star parties, the need for etiquette and viewing rules cannot be underestimated. Joining a local astronomy or observing group is the perfect place to learn more about the night sky, telescopes and other parts of the hobby. Many people considering the purchase or building of a telescope find that a club or star party is a great place to see, share and learn. Walking around the observing field will show you almost everything imaginable!!

We hope that the following pages will provide some helpful ideas to star detectives new and old to the hobby. Most importantly, always ask questions and spend time learning the night sky. Then, sit back, and enjoy the show!!

Stargazing Checklist

A major goal of a star party is to maintain a dark, pleasant observing environment for all. While this is by no means a complete list, most seasoned stargazing veterans would agree that common sense and respect are paramount to an enjoyable viewing experience for all. Simply put, be considerate. Don't forget to **obtain a permit or permission to observe in the viewing area** as well as refraining from using white lights like flashlights and car headlights. More items are listed below:

NOTE: PRESERVE YOUR NIGHT VISION AND THE NIGHT
ELIMINATING ALL SOURCES OF WHITE LIGHTS AT ALL
LIGHTS AND OTHER LIGHTING THAT ILLUMINATES FROM
UPON ENTERING AND EXITING AFTER DARKNESS, USE YOUR



VISION OF OTHERS BY
TIMES! COVER DOME
YOUR AUTOMOBILE.
PARKING LIGHTS.



Plan your arrival carefully and BEFORE darkness falls. Eliminate any unnecessary and extraneous sources of white light. Also, be sure to bring extra batteries, tools, tape and other repair supplies.



Use a red or green light made for astronomy only when you need it.



Plan to have your telescope and gear set up before dark. If you use a laptop, be sure it is covered appropriately to preserve your dark-adapted eyes.



Park your car so that when you leave, the headlights point away from the viewing site. Most stargazers use their parking lights upon entering and exiting the site after dark. If you plan to leave early, park and set up near an exit. Drive slowly!!!



Never touch anyone else's equipment or optical devices without permission and/or instructions first. However, don't be afraid to ask to view through someone else's telescope. This is a great opportunity to see different brands and types of scopes.



Be careful of tripods, other telescopes, wires and other apparatus that one may trip and fall over at night.



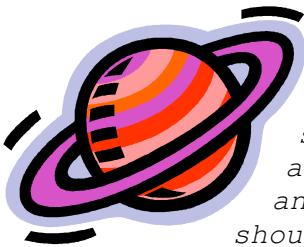
Bring a thermos with a favorite drink and a cooler with snacks to enjoy while observing. Consider bringing additional warm clothing to wear as the temperature falls. For viewing in the spring and summer, a good insect repellent is suggested. If you are planning to observe in the winter, consult with group veterans about appropriate clothing for the site. See other observing hints elsewhere on this CD for suggestions.



Veteran Tips

Stargazing is inherently a deeply personal experience. Some view a stargazing party as more of a social event complete with music, talk, food and drink while others prefer a more low-key approach. Everyone's preference is different and each person has their own view of how things should be done. We strongly suggest the following guidelines be heeded at all stargazing parties big or small.

- Avoid loud, boisterous behavior. For some, stargazing is a quiet, peaceful activity.
- Don't litter; take out what you carry in.
- If you're a visitor or a new member, let someone know so that they can direct you to those who can give you the attention and information you need. Try not to set up too close to another observer. When in doubt, ask.
- Once the observing is underway, feel free to go from scope to scope and speak with everyone. Most people will be more than happy to let you look through their scopes and discuss the stars. Don't feel that you are imposing on people; this is expected at star parties.
- Most regular attendees will "make the rounds" at least once during the night to see what others are looking at and what kind of equipment they are using.
- If you do bring a child make sure you supervise them at all times, including trips to the bathrooms.
- Music, Smoking, Alcohol: Everyone has an opinion about these touchy subjects so the best advice is to respect those around you in regards to smoke (harmful to others and their equipment, i.e. tar and nicotine deposits) or volume level. Be considerate of anyone in the vicinity of you and your scope. Additionally, drinking alcohol at most sites may not be legal, and is dangerous for you, others and equipment. Don't embarrass yourself or endanger others by becoming inebriated at a star-party.
- Be nice and offer your assistance to anyone who might need help loading gear into his or her vehicle.
- Red and green lasers have become popular tools for pointing out celestial objects. Heed all warnings to safeguard your eyes and the eyes of others, and use them away from astrophotographers and aircraft.
- And finally... enjoy the night sky and the wonderful people who chase the stars!



More Light Proofing Tips

One of the most fundamental rules at a star party is to avoid all bright lights, and to avoid even dim light if possible. To see the stellar wonders requires one's eyes to be fully dark-adapted. Dome lights in cars should be switched off or covered, and any flashlight used in setting up, or reading charts, etc., should be small and covered with red plastic or paint. The eye's dark adaptation is least affected by red and green lights. More information is listed below:

The preservation of darkness on site is essential to a successful star gazing session. Early in the evening, your car's parking and back up lights are not really a problem but later, if you are going to move your vehicle such as to make a windbreak or when leaving, they can be a detriment to photographers and viewers alike. Use common sense and be sure to tell anyone around you that you are leaving.

Simply put, by warning everybody of your departure they can protect their eyes from the light. Also, as stated above, DRIVE CAREFULLY and watch out for people and equipment.

Darken your vehicle

Before setting out to a star party, look for light sources on your vehicle. Automakers have this thing that light is good so while this may hold for traffic safety, it's terrible for astronomy. Possible sources of light include: dome light, trunk lights, glove compartment lights, reverse lights, headlights.

Turn off, cover or remove all offending lights. Additionally, the scourge of astronomy has been the infiltration of DRL'S or daytime running lights. As you may know, they are low power headlights that are on all the time to ensure that automobiles are visible in all driving conditions.

Discuss possible methods of turning these off temporarily with your mechanic.

Many people affix colored tape, towels or paper on the offending lights before arriving at the site. This obscures them enough so that they are not a problem. Reverse lights will also bother others so try to set up in such a way that you don't have to back up when leaving the site. You may need to be creative in covering these lights since disabling them requires automobile electrical knowledge.

Remember, when attending a star party, do your part to preserve the darkness!! A little planning during the day will reap rewards at night.

This information has been obtained and condensed from the following sources: AOS members Harvey Miller, SJAA (San Jose Astronomical Association), Space.com, SAC (Saguaro Astronomy Club: Phoenix, AZ), and Tom Clark (Editor of Amateur Astronomy magazine). Editing and formatting by AOS members Chris D'orio, Michael Pontacolone, Rob Witt and Vadim Paley.

Observing Safely

Few of us are lucky enough to own countryside, so we have to use parks, areas, or other public property as sites, and because these areas are means that anyone can access them. This concern, especially if it is 2 a.m. and alone with thousands of dollars worth of

There is one important rule for putting yourself in a dangerous

- **Never go observing alone!**



property in the conservation observing public, it can be a you are all equipment.

avoiding situation:

Always act with personal safety in mind and do not worry about the equipment; if stolen or damaged, it can always be replaced.

If the only accessible site is a public park or conservation area, check it out well in advance before you actually go observing, to see what kind of nighttime activity goes on.

Observing with other amateurs in a club setting is always safer and more fun. Additionally, **never leave anyone alone without checking with them first.**

Should you ever feel threatened, leave; get in your vehicle, lock the doors and call 911. Police often patrol public parks and conservation area parking lots.

Always carry a cellular telephone and let your family know exactly where you're going and when you will be back. It's important to give your family a detailed map of how to get to your observing site and do your best to arrive home on time!

Make sure you have an emergency kit in your vehicle and do not forget a bright white flashlight or spotlight for any non-observing related activities at the site!

*Credits and summarization from: "Safe Dark Sky Observing"
By Paul Markov, April 2001.*