



The FBAC OBSERVER

Visits us on the web at: <http://www.fbac.org>

First TSP

Observations of a Star Party Newbie

By Patty Tristan



We came with much anticipation of clear, dark skies, pulling all-nighter star-hop-till-you-drop in the dry, clean air of West Texas. Husband Tony and I being support crew and chauffeur for our daughter, Alicia; this was our very first TSP. After months of being regaled with tales of past events we were at fever pitch. With a borrowed 10" truss tube generously loaned by Tracy Knauss and trailered in by the Goldbergs set to meet us there, we pointed our aging SUV towards the sunset. Nine hours later, give or take, we pulled into the Prude Ranch and were greeted with a big smile and a, "Welcome to TSP!"

We checked in and got the keys to our room.

Observation #1: Covered housing is good (the reasons for this will become apparent).

The place was buzzing. Our cabin overlooked the Upper Field which was already covered with telescopes of every size and type. We staked down a tarp to mark our spot and headed off to the dinning hall for dinner.

Afterwards, walking back to our cabin, we decided to stop by Pandora's Box, a place we had been told is a hang-out for fellow "Bendonites". There was a bit of activity taking place on the porch.

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Observation #2: Beware Pandora's Box on Sunday early evening.

We were "volunteered" to the black-out crew and spent the next hour or so climbing around in dusty, cramped spaces, taping foil-backed paper over windows facing observing fields. Plenty of time, though, to get back to our claim on the upper field and ready the scope before dark.

The sky was wide-open, and before long Alicia was working diligently on her Shapley-Ames list of 25 galaxies. I sat in a camp chair taking in the view of many stars above and being lulled by the soothing sound of many mingled voices. I caught snatches of conversation. Some terms I didn't always understand but the excitement and pure joy of being in this place, at this time, was palpable.

Late to bed that night, but not too late, gotta pace ourselves for the week that lies ahead.

Our schedule was carefully crafted to allow as much observing time as possible, a minimum of sleep, and just enough time to make it to the dining hall for lunch each day.

But what's that – clouds! The rumble of thunder alerted us to a change in the weather. No worries. We're in the land of clear skies. It never rains all that much out here, right?

Oh, so wrong an assumption as the next several days proved.



Observation #3: Bring rain gear and plenty of warm layers of clothing.

The skies clouded over and refused to budge, and the air took on a pervasive chill that was more reminiscent of a January day in Houston than one would expect of late spring in West Texas.

For four long days we alternated between gloomy cloud-shrouded mountains, and outright nasty lightening and thunder storms. If the sun ever peeked out in that time it was only for a short tease and then right back to the business at hand.

We settled into an unplanned and unintentional routine of sleeping and eating too much. The food in the dining hall is good. It soon became one of the high points of our day. We filled our time, of course. There was a birthday party for George Stradely (91!) and Alex Sancho (3). We took the white-knuckle bus trip to the McDonald Observatory in a wicked thunderstorm. It rained and blew so hard that the dome of the Hobby-Eberly leaked. We drove into Fort Davis to the Rattlers and Reptiles Museum which had a quirky curator by the name of Buzz who was, himself, worth the price of admission. Took pictures in front of The Center for the Obvious (what's that all about?) which was, obviously, never open. There were nightly laser wars. Pillow fights and mud wrestling were scheduled. We sat in on several lectures, one notably enjoyable one by Alan Dyer of Canada on The Great Southern Sky. Who knew the sky in Australia is upside-down?

But that only whetted an appetite that couldn't be satiated as we walked out of the meeting hall and once again under those interminable clouds.

I asked my husband, "What does an astronomer do when it's cloudy?" He said, "Pout."

I didn't see much pouting. Mostly, from my look-out porch above the Upper Field, I witnessed lots of arms crossed, scowling up at the sky, and fidgeting with tarps covering telescopes. Each new day brought a slight diminishment of telescope density on the fields as some gave it up and went chasing after the clear skies that seemed to hover nearby,

according to the weather radar, just out of our reach. Those that stayed, though, seemed downright jolly. Even those in their modest tents on the fields were undaunted by the damp.

Observation #4: Astronomers are a hardy and optimistic folk.

Still we waited...for what, we didn't know. The weather forecast offered no encouragement.

Then suddenly, out of nowhere, Friday night at the close of the Awards and Great Texas Giveaway I it was announced that the skies were clearing. Very quickly everyone scrambled for their places. The sounds of crinkling Mylar filled the air as telescopes, long marinating under tarps, were finally uncovered and put to use. Once more the happy murmur of many voices drifted across the field. Red lights glowed like embers under a star-washed sky.

This turned out to be only a brief reprieve as clouds and storms, yet again, rolled in the next day. During the ATM Review Buster Wilson and Dennis Borgman were upstaged by a hail storm. What sounded like bowling balls on the tin roof turned out to be pea to marble-sized hail stones which soon covered the ground. The deluge that followed turned the Upper Field into a muddy mess. That final night, a few determined individuals observed through a small window, but most just didn't want to wade into it – too wet, too cold, and too humid to bother.

I've heard some say that this was the worst TSP ever (on account of the weather). It was our first so I don't have the past reference to make that judgment. We did have a good time. Alicia completed her list and got a pin. The vendors had some neat stuff, and we enjoyed the company of so many dedicated and talented people drawn together by common interests into some kind of summer-campy/Woodstocky sort of conference happening. We're already talking about next year.

Observation #5: Observing isn't all TSP is about.

It's about meeting old friends and new. It's about big stuff like meeting the famous (in astronomy circles, at least) and infamous. It's about little stuff like keeping your socks dry or standing on one foot on a hill, trying to get your cell phone to work. It's about that spark in someone's eyes as they explain some concept that causes you to see something in an entirely new and different way. And if you see something in your scope which you've never seen before, then that's icing on the cake.

Mostly, it's about being there.





Come join us every Tuesday
night at Denny's Restaurant
for an informal gathering from

6:00 - 8:00, sometimes a little later. We meet

At the Denny's behind Sam's Club off of West

Airport. Grab a bite to eat or maybe just a

drink with one of their wonderful deserts and

enjoy the chit chat.

Asteroid Latimer 35403

Discovered by Keith Rivich & Cynthia Gustava

Dedicated to Truitt Latimer Past President

Of the Houston Museum of Natural Science

Orbital Elements

$E=0.0741449$

$q=2.1700735\text{AU}$

$a=2.3438587\text{AU}$

$Q=2.51764387\text{ AU}$

$P=3.5884$

$i=6.22675\text{ deg}$

$w=359.93288\text{ deg}$

$\text{node}=227.96536\text{ deg}$

$M=16.71482\text{ deg}$

$n=0.274667\text{ deg/d}$

$TP=2006-07-231452087$

FBAC Loaner Scopes



FBAC has several types of telescopes that current members in good standing can check out and use at any time.

We have 2 Meade LX-200 Schmidt Cassegrain scopes. One is an 8", the other a 10". They both are computer driven and come with a 26 mm eyepiece, telrad, finder scope, 1 1/4" star diagonal and a protective Scope Coat.

Then there is the 8" Celestron Schmidt Cassegrain f/10 tracking telescope. It has a 26 & 6.3 mm eyepieces, 1 1/4" star diagonal, 8 x 50 finder scope and a hand paddle.

The last one that we have for night time observing is an 8" f/5.6 dobsonian telescope. It has a 2" rack

and pinion focuser with an 1 1/4" adapter. It comes complete with a 25 & 9 mm eyepiece along with a telrad for finding objects.

Our last scope is a Solaris DayStar telescope for observing the sun. It is an f/30 focal length and come with the DayStar T-Scanner Hydrogen Alpha filter. It has a 2" diagonal and a 40 mm eyepiece.

If you want to check out any of these scopes contact Keith Rivich at 281 468-8491 or at his e-mail address of icgalaxies@cs.com.





Map to Monthly Meeting



Houston Community College Southwest

Fort Bend Astronomy Club meetings are held the third Friday of every month at the Houston Community College southwest campus in Stafford, TX. Club meetings begin promptly at 7:00 PM and are in the #7 lecture hall rooms 102/104. Programs typically feature novice and advanced speakers.



**Join us at
Fuddruckers after our
monthly meeting**

Fort Bend Astronomy Club Membership Form

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

Birthday: _____

.....

- Change my address (current members only)
- Include my contact information in the roster
- I want to get fast breaking news and read what members are up to, add my e-mail to the list server (members only)

Sign me up for:

- Annual Membership \$30.00 _____
- Associate Membership (Additional Family Member) \$5.00 _____
- Student Membership \$15.00 _____
- Sky and Telescope Subscription \$32.95 _____
- Astronomy Subscription \$34.00 _____

Total = \$ _____

Gifts Comes to the George...

And what a wonderful Christmas it is... Thanks to Mr. Gueymard this is the first year we have had Christmas out at the George Observatory.

In November, when a presentation was made to Truett Latimer for an asteroid named after him, he had mentioned that \$25,000 was coming to the George to be spent any way we wanted to. By the end of the night we had pretty much made up our minds what it would be spent on. Truett had stated "spend it quickly". So we did.

The first gift to be bought is the Paramount ME for the C-14. So long CompuStar... This has been on Barbara wish list since 1998. Well the dream has finally come true. The Paramount is a German equatorial mount with 11" right ascension gears. It can handle up to 150 lbs of astronomical gear and comes with Bisque Observatory Software Suite (TheSky6™



Professional Edition, CCDSOFT™, TPoint™ and ProTrack™, Orchestrate™, and Internet Astronomy™ Software Client and Server applications) as well as the Bisque TCS™ dual-axis DC servomotor control system with USB and serial interface, and AutoHome™ start-up). Boy we won't know what to do.

And the gift that most volunteers will appreciate is a new golf cart. In fact it is already out there being put to use. The Park has taken our old golf cart (hope they know what they are getting in to) off our hands. It is white in color and has a 48 volt electric motor. This cart can go much faster (17 mph) than our other one, so be aware of this when you are driving it. It can carry up to 800 lbs of astronomy equipment. K2 there might be

hope for your scope, all you have to do is get it in the back cart! It has a heavy duty front bumper, which our other one eventually lost. It also comes with a low battery indicator on the front dash and an on/off switch under the seat just like our old one and of course a new battery charger. Dennis stated "that when you plug it in you can barely hear it charging. He also stated if it has been sitting too long and started to drain the battery down it will go ahead and recharge itself.



The next gift that arrived was a 35mm Panoptic eyepiece for the the Research telescope along with another gearbox to help with rotation on cold winter nights. Most volunteers won't notice the gearbox, but will appreciate it when they are trying to rotate the dome.

We are also the proud owners of a new 25mw (532nm) green laser pointer to be used out on the deck.



It is a Class IIIB and not a Class IIIA laser which most of us own and comes with a 5 point safety system on it. They are 1.) Aperture shutter; 2.) On/off 2-second delay; 3.) Master key switch; 4.) Output indicator LED; and 5.) Safety interlock dongle. It produces a nice bright green line in the sky.

Last but not least is a new video camera to be used either on the C-14 or in the Research Dome.

So Merry Christmas George!!!

Thanks to the Guild

We now have a 2" Denkmeirer Houston Museum of astronomer to have set of eyepieces. to order a set of apparent field to darkens the sky yields more details weight (1/2 lb.), instantly make the 24mm Panoptic the ideal eyepiece for getting the maximum field for binocular viewers. Can't wait to try this out in the 11" refractor on Saturn!! What a sight that will be.



star diagonal Power X Switch for the Binoculars thanks to the Guild from the Natural Science. This will allow the up to six different magnifications with one So with that in mind the decision was made Tele Vue 24mm Panoptic Eyepieces with a 68° go with the binoculars. The higher power background while the greater magnification on extended objects. Further, its light comfortable 15mm eye relief, and tapered top



Advantage Telescope



- Antique Restoration
- Complete Telescope Maintenance
- SCT tune-up's
- Proven, "Last Word" collimation process

- [Advantage Telescope](#)

PO Box 375 Mont Belvieu, TX 77580-0375
Call: 713-569-7529 Email: stonebloke@gmail.com



Other happenings...

Houston Astronomical Society meets the first Friday of every month at the University of Houston Research Building in room 117. The novice begins at 7:00 PM and the main meeting begins at 8:00 PM.
<http://www.astronomyhouston.org>

Johnson Space Center Astronomical Society meets at 7:30 PM on the second Friday of each month at the Center for Advanced Space Studies (formerly LPI) in the auditorium. It is located at 3600 Bay Area Blvd (at Middlebrook Drive) in Clear Lake City.
<http://www.ghg.net/cbr/jscas/>

North Houston Astronomical Club meets on the fourth Friday of each month at Kingwood College. Their novice meeting starts at 6:30 PM in CLA 221 (Cosmic Center) and the main meeting at 7:30 PM in CLA 225 (Physics Lab).
<http://www.astronomyclub.org>

Astronomical Society of Southeast Texas meets the second Friday of every month at the Odom Academy. Meetings begin at 7:00 PM. The academy is located at 2550 Virginia Street in Beaumont, TX. They are part of the Golden Triangle of Texas.
<http://www.asset-astronomer.org/>

George Observatory is open to the public every Saturday night. The Observatory opens at 3:00 PM and closes at 11:00 PM. They are always looking for volunteers to help out with in one of the domes (East, West and Research) and also to set up scopes on the deck for the public to look through. If you want to help either contact the observatory or the Building Managers for the weekend.
<http://www.hmns.org>

Congratulations Wes & Alicia!



This is one of the programs that Fort Bend Astronomy Club has put together for individuals to go and search the night sky. There is the **Double Star, Planetary, Open, Globular, Galaxy, and Lunar** programs to work on.

Each program has 20 - 25 objects that need to be viewed and logged, then handed into the respective co-ordinator of the program.

Leonard Ferguson-Double Stars

Keith Rivich-Planetary

Tracy Knauss- Galaxies

DJ McCracken-Globular Clusters

Alicia Tristan also received a Planetary Certificate. Congratulations to both of you.

Members from distant places....



Liz & Paul from Bradwell, England



Bob Cornect Dome in Australia

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Our newest members to join the Fort Bend Astronomy Club are as follows:

Neil Ansley
Lee Schmoe
Cherie Schmoe
Laura Schmoe
Diana Schmoe
Ron Sterlekar
Rhonda Vallely
Hugh Vallely

Welcome to our Newest Member:

Sarah Lynn Rivich

Born: November 16, 2006



RARE METEORITE FOUND

By Tracy Knauss

Image by Barbara & Buster Wilson



Scientists have located a rare pallasite meteorite in a Greensburg Kansas wheat field with a new ground penetrating radar technology that some day might be used on Mars.

This dig is the most documented excavation of a meteorite with researchers painstakingly using brushes and hand tools in order to preserve evidence of the impact trail and to date the event of the meteorite strike. Soil samples were tagged and bagged for dating purposes. It was originally thought that the Brenham Meteorite Fall occurred around 20,000 years ago, but with new evidence it puts the date closer to 10,000 years ago. So Native Americans could have seen this fall which puts the meteorite in the Pleistocene epoch soil layer.

The newest finds weighs 154 lbs and measures 18 x 12 x 12. The pallasite meteorites are known for their crystals embedded within the iron meteorite.

Barbara and Buster Wilson joined the scientific expedition team that was put together by the Houston museum of Natural Science.



Members of the Astronomical League

And

International Dark Sky Association



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THE LAUNCH OF STS 117

By Jim Ellis

In planning my family vacation to Florida I looked at www.kennedyspacecenter.com to see if any launches were planned. At the time, there were none scheduled, until a hail storm hit the Cape while shuttle Atlantis was on the pad. With the damage to the external tank they had to roll the shuttle back in and reschedule the launch. When they finally announced that they were looking for a target date of June 8th we extended our vacation for a couple of days to try and see the launch. I had never seen a launch live, so this was a must do.

I went to the Kennedy Space Center website to see how to get tickets. They had two options—one that would take you to the press site (which sells out almost immediately) and the other option which allows you to see it from the visitor's center. We did the visitor's center option as the other had sold out. What you are ordering is a visitor's center ticket and a parking pass to get into the visitor complex the day of the launch. Keep in mind, this viewing area has an obstructed view and you don't see the shuttle until after it clears the trees. You are also six miles from the launch pad.

They send the tickets about 2-3 weeks before the launch once the NASA managers have set the launch date and time. I had a problem in that they finally shipped the tickets the day I left for Florida. Fortunately, my cat watcher was able to get the tickets when they arrived and my in-laws (who joined us in Florida for the launch) were able to bring the tickets to Florida. Whew! (Just in case, I called KSC and they said I could replace them by going to the Space Center the day before.)

Launch day arrived. They have you arrive quite a while before the launch (1:00 p.m. for the launch at 7:36). They don't allow much inside the Visitor Center proper other than folding chairs, but you can have an ice chest as long as you leave it in your car. Do this—the prices are worse than anything we paid at Disney—20 oz. Drinks of any kind (including water) were \$2.75. We spent the day wandering around the visitor complex. Be prepared for long lines at all attractions. The best place with air conditioning to hang out is a small building near the launch experience that does an almost non-stop briefing on the mission. Not as many people go in here until later in the day.

There was also an astronaut autograph show where members of the space program such as Buzz Aldrin, Jim Lovell, and other astronauts and space program related people were. It was \$10 to get into the room where the astronauts were, but the price list for autographs left us with sticker shock (\$175.00 for Buzz Aldrin, \$150.00 for Jim Lovell) so we wandered the exhibit adjacent to the autograph show. I didn't think to go in to take pictures as I didn't know how much they'd try to charge just for a picture! Waiting for my in-laws in the lobby area between the exhibit and the autograph show, who comes out of the autograph show (his autograph was \$30.00) but Gene Kranz of Apollo 13 fame. He graciously came over and took a picture with us.



We sat in the area behind the IMAX theatre where they had chairs set up along with a video screen showing Atlantis and the preparations for launch. They had a presentation by Irwin Allen's widow of one of the robots from *Lost in Space* and a former shuttle pilot who did a Q & A and commentary as we got closer to the launch.



The launch experience is wild because you don't hear the sound of the launch until almost 30 seconds after liftoff. You see the shuttle before the sound arrives. We had a basic idea of direction and when the shuttle cleared the trees the crowd shouted "There it is!" My son described the sound as that of a motorcycle. I took video of the launch and the shuttle has this white plume behind it as it goes up. When it came time for SRB separation I zoomed in and actually caught the tiny blips of the SRBs to the side of the shuttle. I used a Sony video camera with an additional Targus Telephoto lens. The Sony camera also had image stabilization which made a huge difference compared to my father-in-law's video.



The blips on this photo are the SRB's detaching.



I had to get a grinetomy after the launch. That is until the drive back to Orlando. The drive to the space center took us about 1 hour from Orlando, the drive back took 5 hours (yes, FIVE!). There is a drawbridge going out to the Cape and it seemed like every sailboat in the universe was in the Banana River to see the launch. It took us 3 hours to get from the Space Center to the mainland because this drawbridge was up letting all the blasted boats through. Once we finally got through the first toll booth on the Beach Line Expressway things started moving but that was almost 4 hours into the trip.

Would I do it again? Yes, in a heartbeat. What would I do differently? I would come prepared to tailgate and relax in the parking lot for several HOURS after the launch or until they kicked me out of the parking lot, whichever came first. When we got to the US 1 exit (the first one on the mainland) it looked like US 1 was pretty empty. Thus I'd stay north or south of the Cape along the Atlantic side of Florida. Overall, seeing a launch is an amazing experience.