Journal

Longmont Astronomical Society

April 2002

Sterling Star Party Pictures

Banquet coming up news

Flanders star party with parents and kids

Jim's street light solution, no gun needed

Monthly star map

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Sterling Star Party

The North Sterling Star party was a big success once again. We had over 82 people who camped, with 375 inches in aperture of all the scopes combined. They came from all over the front range, DAS LAS, NCAS, and others to make it a pretty special event. There was so much aperture with Randy (astro systems) bringing out brand new (first light on mirror) 32 inch and my 30 inch along with so many other big scopes I was afraid the light buckets would not leave enough light for the rest of them.

Brian Kimball had really cool new Kendrick’s dome tent, his dome away from home, so to speak. Brian treated us to daylight views of Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn before high noon. I have never done that before, seeing the planets in bright blue sky. Thanks Brian. Brian has best pier with two scopes to put on pier, refractor or 12 inch, maybe refractors do rule???

Astro Systems showed up with Randy and Judy and Allen P. The big crowd helped unload new scope with pleasure. To see a 32 incher for first light is a very special event indeed. Real nice job Randy, starting to give me a fever for more, but wife may leave me soon if I do. The views were of course very awesome. Hey you know Aperture rules, at least most of the time.

Mike and Tristan from Denver showed up. They met me in the Desert of Arizona watching the Comet. So of course I invited them to Sterling for bigger star party, and chance to look thru large aperture to keep them pumped up for more. Hope to see them at next star party also.

This was the 4th year for the LAS Sterling Star Party, with many thanks to those who keep making it a great event, along with Park Ranger Bob Loomis who has kept it going. Next year we will keep out any stray cars and lights from the public that numbered as many as 100 or so people for stellar views from our starry campers. The locals impressed us with their large turn out of people of all ages, not just the kids. We hope we turned them onto something they will always remember and keep coming back for more views in the future.

You all should not watch the weather too much, just take the chance when it looks good and hope for the best. I have had so much negative news on the weather try to use the force Luke, may clear just for us sometimes. All in all I had very enjoyable weekend, with much needed photon fix.
A Quick Fix
for that nasty light by your front sidewalk
by Jim Sapp

Due to Mature trees and a small backyard, I am forced to do my at-home sky watching from my front yard. Unfortunately, my neighborhood is cursed with a sidewalk light/mailbox support/electric meter in front of every house. These light fixtures allow most of their emissions to escape in all directions, resulting in horrible glare throughout the neighborhood and making a dark front yard observing spot almost impossible. Couple these with the neighbor’s motion detector-equipped (road: breeze activated) driveway floodlights and there is no wonder that I do very little observing from town.

In the past, I have reduced the undesirable effects of the light in front of my house by strategically placing strips of black electrical tape on the sides of the fixture facing my yard to block the light from going in that direction. In addition, I would replace the bulb with a dimmer one. Once every couple of years the city utility workers would come around and replace the bulb, and naturally the one in front of my house would disappear soon thereafter. A couple of years ago, a wind storm conspired with an adjacent tree branch to destroy the light fixture. That was a welcome relief. But a couple of weeks ago they came around and replaced the fixture, complete with a bright new bulb.

The first night after this obscene thing reappeared in front of my house, I was blinded by its glare to the point that I couldn’t see anything but the light when facing in its direction. Immediate thoughts of violence filled my mind. But since the city seems intent on having these “cute” little fixtures in front of everyone’s house, I determined to come up with a more permanent solution that would make everyone happy.

The solution is as follows, and takes only twenty minutes, a standard 1/2 pound coffee can, a fender washer, and a 1/4-20 screw to implement.

On the top of the fixture are four little thumb nuts that allow the removal of the fixture’s roof. Once the roof is removed, you will find that the two plastic pieces that make up the roof assembly are held together by a short 1/4 inch screw that comes up from the bottom and threads into the decorative nut on the top. This nut may have a fine thread, which is easily remedied by running a 1/4-20 tap into it once.

Remove the paper wrapping from a 1/2 pound coffee can, and poke a 1/4 inch hole in the center of the bottom of the can. Center the location of the hole well by using a divider or compass to ensure that the can’s bottom will mate squarely to the underside of the four sides of the roof assembly.

Reassemble the unit running a long (I forgot about 3??) 1/4-20 screw through a fender washer (to provide strength to the bottom of the can), then through the inverted coffee can from the inside, then through the two pieces of the roof assembly, and finally into the decorative nut. The roof assembly can then be reinstalled with the four thumb nuts.

The inverted coffee can is long enough to just cover the length of the florescent light bulb to turn the unit into a full cut-off fixture, and wide enough to allow light to escape from the lower 1/3 of the base of the fixture. This keeps the majority of the emitted light confined to about a 20 foot radius on the ground where it belongs. During the daylight hours, without a close inspection you would never notice the can inside the fixture.

Everyone is happy. The cute little fixture is in place, the sidewalk is lighted, the yard is darker, and there is no glare in my eyes - from THAT fixture anyway.
Sterling Star Party 2002

I have so many pictures to share but there is so little room. Here are some of the new 32 inchers from Astro-Sytems, Randy, Allen. Brian's dome tent, Joe's dome tent and more. You should have been there to see it, very cool along with Tim Brown's scope too.
LAS Banquet 27th April

The LAS banquet will be on the 27th of April, Saturday night at the Way Side Inn in Berthoud, Colorado. I hope to see a big turnout. We have guest speaker Tom Melsheimer of the Little Thompson Observatory in Berthoud Colorado. Doors open at 5 pm. Dinners are 15 dollars per person, with cash bar. Dinner starts at 5:30 to 7 pm. 7 pm to 7:30 will do club business then 7:30 to 8:30 guest speaker. This is a very casual fun event so come out for a good time with old star buddies.

Astronomy Day April 20th

We are having an Astronomy booth set up at the Twin Peaks Mall, with small scopes outside with solar filters to show the public. We are inviting the public that same night to Flanders for viewing of the stars and planets. We could use some volunteers to help out so come on down and help Mike Hotka and me. This is also the big night for Pam Wheaton and her girls 50 maybe and parents for a very special star night at Flanders. We need to help them with small scopes to show them the skies. This is a family affair so bring the kids and spouses for fun casual night under the local stars. Let me stress local, no long drive, no excuses, see you there.

Flanders on the 20th

This is the same day as the Astronomy Day at the Twin Peaks Mall. Try to make it to Flanders, might have fun showing all the kids and parents the heavens from just a local site. Pam has been very good with her time in helping so we will help her with some volunteers to bring their scopes for night of fun, will not be a late nightier, unless we make it one. See some of you there, I will bring the 16, not 30 scope, easier to use with kids. Be there or be square.

Pictures from the Dark Side (Sterling)
Monthly Star map
By Brian Simpson

Night Vision

Longmont, Colorado
Alt = 90, Az = 180

2002/05/01 11:00 PM
This is a hard one from the yard. You need pretty dark sky to see it. There are no bright stars, it's below the handle of the big dipper. There is a double star Cor Caroli, or Canum Venaticorum with a wide 20 arc seconds apart, easily split by most scopes. My favorite Galaxy is M51, along with M63, M106, M94, NGC 4631,NGC4490, good one, also4449, small. Also M 3 globular big bright, favorite also.