

S.F.A.A. Guidelines

S.F.A.A. General Star Party Etiquette_Mt. Tamalpais_Yosemite

Owner: SFAA Treasurer & Officers	Last Revision Date: 17 April 2013
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Overview

This set of etiquette guidelines is designed to ensure harmonious interactions between S.F.A.A. members and others at various star party observing events as well as following established regulations of observing venues. The first section outlines general etiquette guidelines that should be followed at any event regardless of location. Etiquette for specific locations is listed later in this document. By following these simple Guidelines that acknowledge responsible and courteous behavior between members and the public and among members, these exceptional opportunities will be enhanced for everyone.

Please keep in mind that the public views any member of the S.F.A.A. as a representative of the S.F.A.A. and your behavior toward the public will be taken as officially sanctioned by and indicative of our organization. Consider that you are more than an individual with a telescope: you are perceived by the general public to be knowledgeable on astronomy, experienced in explaining matters with which the public is not familiar, and even though the term amateur is in our name, you are seen to be something of a mature professional in handling people and addressing their questions however stated. Also keep in mind that any member of the public that you may interact with may also be a future member of the S.F.A.A. and/or in the case of children and young adults, a future astronomer who may be influenced by their experience with you.

1. General Etiquette Guidelines

1.1. Designated Area

Please observe and follow venue established rules for observing areas including parking and arrival and departure times.

1.2. Arrival and Departure

Plan to arrive at least a half hour before sunset. This will allow plenty of time to set up while it is still light, allow your eyes to gradually become dark-adapted and get acquainted with your observing neighbors. If you arrive after dark the headlights of your vehicle will disrupt everyone's night vision which can take up to a half hour to regain. Use red lights. Ideally use a dim red light, letting your eyes dark adapt. If using a bright red light, especially a headlamp while breaking down equipment, do not point the light directly towards another observer, and be mindful of pointing it towards shiny materials where it might reflect towards another observer.

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Upon departure please use every consideration regarding your vehicle's white lights, exterior and interior, so as to not disrupt others night vision.

The last people at the event should sweep the area with their flashlights to see if anyone accidentally dropped something important. If you find anything left behind, contact the club President the next day and then bring the item with you to the next meeting to be re-united with its owner.

1.3. Parking Your Vehicle A good idea is to back your vehicle in at the start of the evening so that when you leave, you can pull straight out and thereby minimize disruption and the dreaded headlights destruction of everyone's night vision. It will also make unloading and loading your equipment much easier.

1.4. Preserving Night Vision

Don't use white lights! Use red light. If for some reason you must use a white light, kindly inform your neighbors and give them a chance to close camera shutters and eyes. Each person should have a red flashlight for use at the site. It is easy to modify a regular flashlight by covering the lens with a red filter of various materials - automobile brake light repair tape works very well.

1.5. Workable Space between Observers

As you set up your telescope be sure to put it at least several yards away from your closest neighbor. Many people need room for star chart tables, chairs, power supplies, cables, etc.. If members of the public are present there may be long lines for a view at the eyepiece of everyone's telescope so having plenty of workable space between telescopes will be particularly important.

1.6. Laser Pointers

Please be extremely cautious when using a laser pointer or to align your telescope. Keep laser pointers upward and not horizontal. A misdirected beam of laser light can blind by causing retina damage. When showing constellations or objects in the sky make sure to keep the beam away from any aircraft as the range of the laser is far more than you may realize.

1.7. Smoking

While attending observing events where smoking is permitted please smoke downwind of other observers or smoke far away from the observing area. It is far easier for a smoker to re-locate him or herself, than it is for an observer to pick up equipment to re-locate in order to avoid the smoke. If you are smoking please ask folks nearby if your smoke is bothering them. If you are a non-smoker and/or are bothered by someone's smoke, don't be afraid to ask the smoker to re-locate. If smoking is not permitted be considerate enough to strictly observe the local rules.

1.8. Music

Please respect everyone's observing concentration and enjoy your music via headphones. What is music to your ears may be obnoxious and distracting noise to others. If you do wish to play music or the radio out loud check first with the entire observing group, and be prepared to turn it off if it becomes annoying to someone. Some people want to escape to the mountain to escape the drone of the city, to enjoy some peace and quiet.

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1.9. Children

If you do bring a child make sure that he/she acts like an adult so as to not disturb or irritate observing neighbors. Do not allow them to run about the observing area as this is not a playground. Children should always be supervised to insure they do not run into or trip over astronomical gear, hurting themselves and/or others. Close supervision of children will help ensure you do not wind up paying to replace some expensive equipment or deal with personal injury.

1.10. Pets

For events where dogs are permitted, keep them away from equipment. For the sake of your dog, please also keep leashes short as they are difficult to see in the dark and folks may accidentally get caught up walking through the leash.

1.11. Ask before Touching

Never touch anyone else's equipment without permission and never touch any glass optical surface. Some astronomers may be adjusting their equipment or doing delicate astrophotography. But, don't be afraid to ask if you can view what they are observing or any questions you may have about their equipment. On the other hand, observers should be accommodating to other astronomer's or members of the public inquiries - a warm welcome and thoughtful responses to questions may stimulate a lifelong curiosity and enthusiasm toward astronomy. Also, please keep food and drinks away from equipment.

1.12. No Litter

Do not litter. Everything you bring to the event you must take with you when you leave. It may be helpful to bring your own trash bag to properly store your waste to dispose of at home.

1.13. Emergencies

Any emergency, such as a medical condition, should be immediately reported via 911 and subsequently to the S.F.A.A. event leader or designated authority.

1.14. Local Rules and Regulations

Honor facility rules. At any SFAA event, abide by rules established for the location. For example, smoking, alcohol, or pets may be prohibited. Not following the facility rules puts us at risk for not being able to use the location.

2. Mt. Tamalpais State Park / Rock Springs Parking Lot

2.1. Designated Area

Our Special Use Permit (S.U.P.) is specific to the Rock Springs parking lot located at the intersection of Ridgecrest Boulevard and Pantoll Road. For public star parties our area of telescope set-up is the western half of the parking lot defined approximately by the wooden Rock Springs parking lot sign on the east, to the end of the lot on the west. On public nights the Friends of Mt. Tam will set up

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safety cones to help identify our area of operation. For members only parties we have access to the entire lot but typically set up in the same area as the public nights.

On either public or members only nights, upon arrival you must display your current year California State Parks (C.S.P.) Parking Pass on the dashboard of your vehicle. This pass distinguishes you from the public attendees as a current member of the S.F.A.A. and covered under our S.U.P. By not displaying the permit you may be subject to a fine by Park Rangers for unauthorized presence in the Park after closing hours.

2.2. Arrival and Departure

Plan to arrive at Rock Springs at least a half hour before sunset. This will allow plenty of time to set up while it is still light, allow your eyes to gradually become dark-adapted and get acquainted with your observing neighbors.

Every Mt. Tam event, public or members only, will have an assigned Designee (per the S.U.P.) who will be responsible for coordinating departures. At the beginning of the evening, the Designee will facilitate with attendees departure times structured on an on-the-hour basis (e.g. some combination of 11:00 PM, 12:00 AM, 1:00 AM, and if necessary the final 2:00 AM) so as to maintain the integrity of the gate lock combination; allow efficient and safe departures; give individual attendees the ability to allow plenty of take-down time for their equipment; ensure that no one is left behind a locked gate to which combination they do not know!

Upon departure please use every consideration regarding your vehicle's white lights, exterior and interior, so as to not disrupt others night vision.

2.3. Workable Space between Observers

Typically on Public nights there will be long lines for a view at the eyepiece of everyone's telescope so having plenty of workable space between telescopes will be particularly important.

2.4. Smoking

Our SUP stipulates no smoking. This stems from the safety issue of fire danger – we are in a heavily wooded and dry grassy park. In addition, it can be quite irritating to other observers and public in the entire area so the SFAA supports this rule and any member who lights up will be advised to put it out.

2.5. Pets

Our SUP stipulates that dogs will not be permitted in the park after closing hours which occurs at sunset.

2.6. Emergencies

All emergencies that occur shall be reported via land line telephone to Park Dispatch at: 1-866-227-4181 or 911. **If using a cell phone do not dial 911 – Dial 415-472-0911 for fast response.**

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3. Yosemite National Park

3.1. General

The San Francisco Amateur Astronomers (S.F.A.A.), along with other amateur astronomy organizations, have obtained an Entrance Fee Waiver to Yosemite National Park in exchange for providing park visitors an interpretive program on astronomy offering observing opportunities through our telescopes, answering questions, giving explanations and, in general, offering an introduction to astronomy. In addition to the park visitor interpretive program, after midnight when the program for visitors ends, members are free to observe the night sky on their own and utilize the dark and dry skies available in Yosemite. This set of etiquette guidelines is intended to preserve the privilege of the entrance fee waiver for current and future members of the S.F.A.A. and ensure the ability of the club to offer members the extraordinary experience of night sky observing at Yosemite National Park.

3.2. Park and Camp Area Rules and Regulations

Please respect and follow any park campground rules with regard to pets, smoking, and quiet hours. Yosemite Park rules, along with these guidelines, will be distributed to attendees well in advance of the event.

In particular, be aware and follow rules for storing food away from bears.

Please clean up after yourself at the campground, being mindful to use bear-proof trash receptacles.

Quiet hours -- Keep in mind that some folks will take advantage of late-night observing at 7000ft, and may want to sleep in. If an observer stays up viewing through astronomical twilight at 4am, then packs up and heads back to camp, they'll need to sleep until 10am in order to get 5 hours of sleep. If you are a late night observer, keep in mind that many of the folks in the campground are not late-night observers -- this event is not as "hard core" as one like GSSP or CalStar. You may want to bring earplugs, an eye mask, or whatever will help you sleep late into the morning.

Camping, including sleeping in your vehicle, at the Glacier Point observing site is not permitted.

3.3. Observing and Outreach Area Guidelines

All vehicles must be moved to the parking lot immediately after unloading equipment at the observing site. This is a safety measure and a way to keep the public from parking in the observing area. We may begin to set-up our telescopes no earlier than 7:00 PM and no later than 8:30 PM. Emergencies – Please follow park instructions to call for help in case of an emergency. Also notify club event organizers or Park Rangers if available of issues.

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