



Insider's Look at Grand Canyon

Webisode #40 – 20th Annual Grand Canyon Star Party June, 2010 Transcript

Ranger Patrick Gamman: Welcome to this week's webisode of Insider's Look at Grand Canyon. Hi, I'm Ranger Patrick Gamman and today I'm joined by Ranger Marker Marshall. She's here to talk about the Star Party. Marker, what's that all about?

Ranger Marker: Well, the 20th annual Grand Canyon Star Party is coming up this year, June 5 through 12. The Star Party always takes place for eight nights in June, when the sky is most likely to be clear. They pick the dates to avoid the light of the moon so it changes a little bit from year to year. It takes place on both rims at once. The Saguaro Astronomy Club of Phoenix provides the volunteers and telescopes for the North Rim. Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association does the same thing for the South Rim.

Patrick: So, Marker, how does this actually work?

Marker: Well, on the North Rim there's an astronomy slideshow at 6:30 pm at the Grand Canyon Lodge and about ten telescopes- as many as fit on the terrace of the Grand Canyon Lodge- are set up after dark. On the South Rim, everything happens at Yavapai Point. Most of the parking lot will be filled up with as many as fifty telescopes. So you arrive mostly by shuttle bus. If you want to stay late, just walk down from above with a flashlight. And the shuttle bus runs until 11 at night. There's a slide show next to the observation station at 8 pm, followed by telescope viewing well into the night. It's an amazing event. You just go from telescope to telescope and you can see Mars and Venus and the rings of Saturn. You can see globular clusters and open clusters and nebulae and lost of far-away galaxies. It's pretty amazing.

Patrick: Sounds like a lot of fun. But do folks need to sign up or reserve anything in advance?

Marker: Nope. There's no sign-up, except for the astronomers. You just show up and enjoy the telescopes and the knowledge that the many volunteers are there to share with the public. I do recommend to bring a red flashlight. You can make one for yourself by covering any flashlight with red cellophane, or red nail polish, or even red magic marker. Also, dress warmly and for the South Rim, you'll be sitting on pavement so bring an extra layer to sit on. The slide show is different almost every night, so come night after night, if you'd like, but do come June 5-12. It's a pretty special annual event.

Patrick: Well, thanks for sharing that with the folks, Marker, and thanks for being on the show.

Marker: It's been a pleasure.

Patrick: Well, folks, just to get you excited for this coming June's Star Party, I have some highlights following from last year's Star Party.

Patrick: So I'm here with the leader of a real neat group, Jim Palmer. Jim, could you tell us a bit about yourself and your group?

Jim: Our group's from the Phoenix area, there's about ten of us. And we're known as a 'Red Light District' and that's because all of our tripods on our telescopes have red lights on them, and it keeps people from tripping over the corners of the tripod. And we come up here and make a big party out of this.

Patrick: Excellent! Well, thanks for coming up to the park to share all this stuff with the visitors here. Do you have any memorable stories that you'd like to share?

Jim: We've met a lot of people from all over the world, which we enjoy. So they talk about their skies differently than as we see them. And then, of course, we've had people come up here that have gotten married here at the rim and then they come out afterwards and they spend the night with us stargazing here in June when they're up here. And we had a group of tourists from Italy, a whole busload that lined up, and we would tell the interpreter what we were looking at and then she would translate to the entire group. And then we'd get this line of 60 people all of a sudden lined up at the scope. And it's just kind of a neat function to do.

Bill: My name is Bill Lofquist. I'm with the Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association, who sponsors this event. And I have a Dobsonian style of telescope, but it's based on the Newtonian reflector, which was developed by Sir Isaac Newton way back when he lived in England two or three centuries ago. It's very simple. It has a 12 ½ inch mirror, which takes in the light from a distant object. It's curved and reflects the light back up to a smaller mirror, which is called a secondary mirror. That's the primary down there. And that reflects the light- it's at a 45° angle- out through the eyepiece, which magnifies the light. So, we can put different strengths of eyepieces in it to get more or less power. So it's a very simple telescope. You can get small Dobsonian scopes like this, which are very, very good for beginners, but they'll last you a lifetime.

Patrick: That's amazing something Sir Isaac Newton made is still being used- and used well- today.

Bill: It was revolutionary back in his day and it still holds up. It's very solid, very simple and a lot of fun.

Patrick: Folks, I've moved down the parking lot a little bit further and I'm here with Randy Peterson. Randy, could you tell us a bit about yourself?

Randy: Sure! I'm an amateur astronomer with the East Valley Astronomy Club out of the east Phoenix area. I've been coming to the Grand Canyon Star Party for about 15 years, other than missing one time because of work. And you meet all kinds of people from all over the world here, which is a lot of fun and is pretty exciting.

Patrick: Thanks! Could you tell me what are some of the things you like to look at through your telescope. Is it planets, is it galaxies? What's your thing? What do you really like?

Randy: Well, from here I like looking at galaxies. We do a lot of outreach parties in the Phoenix area and you basically cannot see galaxies from Phoenix because of light pollution. So, from here, you can show the general public a lot of different galaxies and they say, "Hey! I see that!" Whereas in Phoenix, if you try to show them galaxies, they generally say, "I don't see anything." So, I like to show them galaxies from here.

Patrick: Well, Randy thanks so much for all the years you've been coming out here, and I hope you enjoy the dark night skies of Grand Canyon.

Randy: Thank you very much. I enjoy being here and thanks for the interview.

Patrick: We'll catch you folks next time.

