

REFLECTIONS / REFRACTIONS

University Lowbrow
Astronomers

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The Lightholder Bucket

by Doug Scobel

This article can be found at <http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/reflections/2011/dscobel.37.html>

LOWBROWS ON TOUR, PART 4

By Charlie Nielsen - June 1, 2011

Welcome to part 4 of my report on our club's outreach activities. This time I was going to report on our last Ann Arbor Schools event for this academic year. Alas, the event was cancelled. The students were so busy trying to catch up on their assignments to finish the year that the teachers felt the timing was not good, and we may not have the full attention of the students. This was scheduled for Lakewood Elementary and they will now be scheduling for our tour next year. This just leaves us with one class at Wines, which our main schools contact and me will do on our own. We have not selected a date as of this writing, but it should be soon as there are only 2 weeks of school left. Next year we will be presenting to 5th grade students exclusively. Both our team and the teachers and Enrichment Facilitators agree that this is the appropriate age group to work with. The objective of Ann Arbor Schools is to make our program a regular part of the 5th grade curriculum. I think we should take that as a huge compliment.

Though our AA Schools program drew to a close, we still had Hazel Park Schools. This was our 4th year in a row that we made an appearance at their camp which is located right at the base of Mt. Holly Ski Resort, which is about midway between Pontiac and Flint. The first year brought us thunderstorms, so our organizer for this event, Mark Deprest did one of his talks about constellations and mythology. The next 2 years brought us beautiful clear skies. This time we had 2 events scheduled for 2 different schools, on consecutive Tuesdays. Mark was unable to attend the first event so Jim Forrester took over the organizational duties. The first event was May 17, which brought us cloudy skies. Even worse, while we were there, it started to rain. But the Lowbrows were prepared for this possibility! We set up small telescopes and targets inside their building, and showed the students the slide show about telescope handling and safety that we use for AA Schools. In addition, we had set up our laser kit to show how lenses and mirrors bend light, and our NSN Toolkit that uses glass and mirrors to demonstrate how optics work. We broke up the 50 students present into 3 groups and had them rotate around the activities. It got very loud in the building, but I think they had fun, and learned something. I know *we* had fun. Our team for this event was composed of Jim Forrester, Dave Snyder, Don Foey, John Wallbank, Jason Maguran, Ken Ruble, and me.

On May 24 the same crew of Lowbrows, plus Mark Deprest gathered at Camp Hazelwood for our second event. This time the weather cooperated very nicely. We had a number of different types of scopes set up to show them Saturn and a few deep sky objects. We did not have a lot of time considering how late it gets dark this time of year, but the time we did have with them was very productive and the kids were very pleased and pretty well behaved. As usual, Saturn really blew them away and we heard the usual comments about whether we were tricking them with a photograph. The crew stuck around for while after the kids had to return to their cabin to absorb a few more photons while we had them. This is one of the rare events that we actually get paid for. We were presented a check for \$100 for *each* event!

This concludes "Lowbrows On Tour", but certainly not our ongoing public outreach activities. I will report on these activities, but I think the article title is getting old. Stay tuned for a report in August about our 2 events coming up at Leslie Science and Nature Center, and by then, maybe more.

Cherry Springs Star Party 2011

By Clayton W. Kessler

I thought the Lowbrows would like a brief report on the festivities in Pennsylvania this spring. Jeff Thrush and I packed our traveling sales wagon and went off as a “vendor” to this star party. I realize the Lowbrows usually have a fair sized contingent at the fall “Black Forest Star Party” at this same site but we were alone in this springtime trip. Observing wise no one missed much. The “Michigan Nebula” – with added downpour for spice – was present and accounted for. Still – there were over 200 attendees and we managed to have a good time despite the weather!



We arrived on Tuesday evening before the official Thursday start. The field had quite a few campsites set up already as you can see.

We tried to setup our camp in the same location that “Camp Lowbrow” was last fall. Unfortunately the ground was very “squishy” and had about a half inch of standing water on it. On the advice of Conrad from the Harrisburg club we moved up the hill to “higher” ground. (OK – higher by a few inches – it WAS drier)

We should have set up our imaging rigs as this was the best night of the week. We did take the opportunity to move about and look through OPT’s – I had some nice views of Saturn in the early evening. After the nice evening I was excited to get setup on Wednesday and the early part of the day was quite nice. By the time evening came around however things were not looking promising so the mount got setup but the scopes stayed in their cases. We had a good time hook-

ing up with fellows we met last fall. Jim, Don and the boys from the Hamilton Ontario club pass on their greetings to all the Lowbrows they met at Black Forest.

On Thursday we setup our booth in the vendor tent. We learned a lot from the other vendors and got some good suggestions for other Star Parties to attend. Despite the low attendance we had a nice steady stream of people through the tent for the entire weekend.

Other vendors present were Astro Gizmos, AstroZap, Sky Stones (Dave was very interesting), Skies Unlimited, Cherry Springs Optics, Wood Wonders (from Pinkney) and Earthwin Optical (Bill Denkmeyer’s new company).

Friday and Saturday were very much like Thursday – a little sun, a lot of clouds and some rain. The closest to an astrophoto I got was a cool rainbow shot just before sunset. You can just see a hint of a double rainbow in the wide shot.



It is a little hard to make out but you can see the rain drips on the vendor tent roof. Most of the rain was steady but light and could be mostly ignored.



Saturday night looked like there might be some sucker hole possibilities. We ended up packing and leaving after the door prize drawing as it had been pretty dry all day and was a good time to snatch the camper out of the soft ground.

No report on this event would be complete without mentioning the trip out. We chose to take the route through southern New York. This had good points and bad ones. Interstate 86 was in very poor shape – but it looks like there will be some large re-paving projects that are already started. As is my habit – when we crossed the New York border I started looking for a “Welcome Center” to get a state map. After 20 miles I had about given up when that familiar blue sign showed up in the distance. We pulled off and immediately wondered if we took the correct exit. The drive was wide, well paved and had very fancy lighting on each side. Up ahead was what looked like a high end resort! Once we arrived we were treated to the fanciest and nicest rest area I have ever visited!



Inside were inlaid ceramic floors, fancy oak trim, vaulted ceilings, wonderful rest rooms, vending areas, TV areas with seating and a manned information desk with – yes – maps! This whole thing overlooked a “finger lake” that stretched for miles in each direction with a great scenic lookout in the front.

As we resumed our trip we speculated on the fancy rest area in contrast to the very poor road surface. Jeff made the comment that the next rest area probably wouldn’t even have toilets! Sure enough the next rest area sign announced – “No Facilities”!!!

At any rate despite the weather I had a great time and I am looking to returning at the end of August for BFSP.

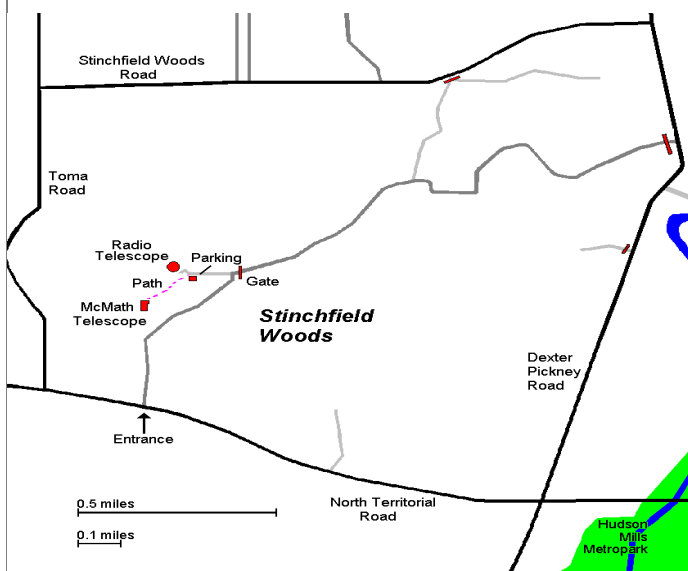


Mark Bialek on the night of June 29, 2011 took this image from the observing field between the radio dishes ... during the exposure Mark illuminated the dish with a red flashlight, for this artistic shot!

Places & Times

Dennison Hall, also known as The University of Michigan's Physics & Astronomy building, is the site of the monthly meeting of the University Lowbrow Astronomers. Dennison Hall can be found on Church Street about one block north of South University Avenue in Ann Arbor, MI. The meetings are usually held in room 130, and on the 3rd Friday of each month at 7:30 pm. During the summer months and when weather permits, a club observing session at the Peach Mountain Observatory will follow the meeting.

Peach Mountain Observatory is the home of the University of Michigan's 25 meter radio telescope as well as the University's McMath 24" telescope which is maintained and operated by the Lowbrows. The observatory is located northwest of Dexter, MI; the entrance is on North Territorial Rd. 1.1 miles west of Dexter-Pinckney Rd. A small maize & blue sign on the north side of the road marks the gate. Follow the gravel road to the top of the hill and a parking area near the radio telescopes, then walk along the path between the two fenced in areas (about 300 feet) to reach the McMath telescope building.



Public Open House / Star Parties

Public Open Houses / Star Parties are generally held on the Saturdays before and after the New Moon at the Peach Mountain observatory, but are usually cancelled if the sky is cloudy at sunset or the temperature is below 10 degrees F. For the most up to date info on the Open House / Star Party status call: (734)332-9132. Many members bring their telescope to share with the public and visitors are welcome to do the same. Peach Mountain is home to millions of hungry mosquitoes, so apply bug repellent, and it can get rather cold at night, please dress accordingly.

Membership

Membership dues in the University Lowbrow Astronomers are \$20 per year for individuals or families, \$12 per year for students and seniors (age 55+) and \$5 if you live outside of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.

This entitles you to the access to our monthly Newsletters on-line at our website and use of the 24" McMath telescope (after some training).

A hard copy of the Newsletter can be obtained with an additional \$12 annual fee to cover printing and postage.

(See the website

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/theclub/>

for more information on joining the club).

Membership in the Lowbrows can also get you a discount on these magazine subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope - \$32.95 / year

Astronomy - \$34.00 / year or \$60.00 for 2 years

For more information contact the club Treasurer. Members renewing their subscriptions are reminded to provide the renewal notice along with your check to the club Treasurer. Please make your check out to: "University Lowbrow Astronomers"

Newsletter Contributions

Members and (non-members) are encouraged to write about any astronomy related topic of interest.



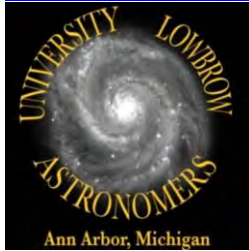
Lowbrow's Home Page

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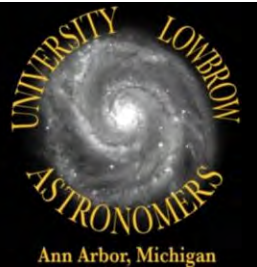
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Website

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Just enjoying a look at the sun! Some of our guests from our CLEAR mini-star party in Atlanta, MI — Image by Dave Snyder