

Orange Blossom Special 2015 Retrospective

Steve Robins

Wednesday, Feb 11

This year was going to be different. I would arrive mid-morning to set up my tent and avoid the sunset rain dance from 2014. It worked out great and the relaxation time meeting old and new friends before observing time was great.

I encountered John O'Neill at the food trailer, talking about how snow was great the first day, okay the second, but by the end of the week was the worst thing that had ever happened.

The evening's observing was different from any in OBS recent history, not a cloud in the sky! We literally did more astronomy in the first hour than in all of OBS last year!

Thursday, Feb 12

After a great breakfast at the food trailer, we all met at the lecture tent for the John O'Neill moderated Meet and Greet.

After lunch it was time for the Mirror Lab demo and present was a middle school astronomy class with their teacher. It was refreshing to see their interest and great questions about the details of mirror grinding.



Paul's Mirror Grinding Demonstration

Then it was on to Tom Crowley's lecture, *Amateur's Hunt for Super Novae*. With great humor, a bit of math, some teamwork and informative lecture skills, Tom lead us to a new understanding of the trials and opportunities an amateur supernova team encounters and the pride of personal discovery.

Observing Thursday night was again completely cloud-free but the seeing was twice as good as the night before. If we live through this star party we'll never forget it.



Vendor Area

Peter Haviland had a guest at the eyepiece of his 12" Dobsonian scope saying, "These are great views. The collimation is perfect!", to which Peter said, "Thank God for Howie Glatter." His guest muttered something about "embarrassing me" and wandered off to leave Peter to be filled in by an observer, who noted "You know who you were just talking to? HOWIE GLATTER!" Made both Peter's and Howie's night—mine also. This kind of connection is priceless.

Friday, Feb 13

A great breakfast for early risers, followed by the nature walk/bike ride at 9:30. Not enough bicycles showed up so we agreed to dismount and combine events. Mike Davis led a fascinating walk through park trails while we reminisced about the old days and Dan Bricker's "death marches" to the Hickory Hill waterfall.

OBS Retrospective

This was followed by the ultra-secret ritual of the ladies' luncheon, of which we mere men were permitted no part. However Roni Fritz writes: "It's not just lunch, there's also fellowship, followed by browsing, and shopping. Be sure to sign up next year."



On top of the world at Withlacoochee

After lunch, Rob Teeter, of Teeter Telescopes gave a fascinating talk of how he and his father partnered to start building custom Dobsonian telescopes. Every one of his scopes is unique, built to the taste of the customer. Rob brought a prototype of his 11" lightweight travel scope, telling us that his target price was around \$2,500. If he can meet that he may find himself unable to build any other telescopes than that one!

Then (ho hum!) another great dinner from our food trailer!

What? Another night with no clouds? Yes! And the seeing was again much better than the preceding night. Galaxies were great on Friday the 13th. Featured in the early evening sky was NGC 2419, Robert Burnham's Intergalactic Tramp, one of only two globular clusters visible before about midnight.

Saturday, Feb 14

After breakfast, John O'Neill and cohorts assembled to judge the first OBS astrophotography contest, announcing that they would accept entries after the previously announced deadline of 10:00 AM.

Then Mike Davis led the traditional Telescope Walk-about. There were more

scopes out than any previous walk-about, so many that we saw only about a quarter of the scopes on the field before running out of time. More time for that next year!

Do you have too much money and not enough things? The Swap Table could fix that with can't pass it up deals on telescopes, eyepieces, books, whole telescopes, binoculars, Hey, YOU NEED THIS! It was great this year.

Then it was the kids' favorite, the Hee Haw Hay ride. Thanks to our great park rangers all the kids, and some adults, had a great time taking a tour of the park.

At 2:00 PM, our keynote speaker, Dr MacKay, presented a mathematics studded, humor enriched, empirical, yet philosophical talk on supernovae. Treading not one bit on the content of Tom Crowley's earlier presentation, Dr MacKay presented the mechanics and underlying principles of the different types of supernovae, and then launched into a fabulous section "what can we thank them for." He connected the dots, revealing the connection between supernovae and all elements heavier than iron in the universe. Our hands are made from bits of exploded stars.

Afterwards, at 3:30 began the Awards Presentation. With the John Dobson award being given again this year, the 50-50 drawing, the best prizes ever, the kids' prizes (a special thanks to one donator of a telescope for that) it was the best awards presentation ever.

Then Saturday night's observing was the best night of the star party with everything looking great for exhausted but happy survivors of OBS 2015.

We look forward to seeing you at next year's Orange Blossom Special Star Party.