



Kitt Peak Remains A Valued Public “Wonder”

Douglas Isbell

A series of media events in late June and early July 2007—one planned, one unplanned, and one far beyond our control!—demonstrated vividly that Kitt Peak and the telescopes situated there remain objects of great public interest and affection.

On the afternoon and evening of June 28, NOAO public affairs hosted meteorologist Chuck George of KOLD-TV (the highest-rated TV weathercaster in Tucson) at the Kitt Peak Visitor Center for live broadcasts throughout the 5, 6, and 10 pm newscasts. Chuck enthusiastically interviewed Robert Wilson and Doug Isbell about the pending 50th anniversary of Kitt Peak National Observatory in 2008, the Kitt Peak Nightly Observing Program for the public, and the Kitt Peak membership program. Beautiful live views of the McMath-Pierce Solar Telescope and the Mayall 4-meter telescope were topped off at 10 pm by live pictures of Earth’s craggy Moon, and planet Jupiter and its moon Io, fed to the TV broadcast truck from the Visitor Center Observatory’s 20-inch telescope and its talented operator, Flynn Haase.



A video crew from the station toured Kitt Peak a few weeks in advance to tape three extensive stories about the observatory’s public outreach programs, the McMath-Pierce, and the Mayall, plus interviews with NOAO staff members and University of Clemson observers at the 4-meter. Kitt Peak was chosen to kick off a summer-long series of visits by the TV station and Chuck George to all of the major observatories and public telescopes in southern Arizona. Based on the most recent Tucson television ratings, the three broadcasts at Kitt Peak were seen by more than 50,000 local viewers ages 25-54.

Nine days later, a fire was spotted in the Alambre Valley a couple of miles to the south of Kitt Peak. By mid-afternoon that Saturday, two TV media crews (including KOLD-TV) were at the mountain to get video footage of the fire, and to talk with mountain employees. The situation escalated quickly, and the mountain was evacuated by night-fall. For more details on the fire, see the related story in the KPNO section of this *Newsletter*.

From Saturday evening through the re-opening of the Kitt Peak Visitor Center on following weekend, media calls and emails came with regularity, and the NOAO Tucson building lobby became a temporary TV studio. The Alambre wildfire “near Kitt Peak observatory” was at the top of nearly every TV news broadcast, and it received banner headlines and color photos on page 1 of the *Arizona Daily Star* for three days. (From Sunday onward, media access to the Kitt Peak roadway and summit was handled with consummate professionalism by the fire incident management team.)



The tone of all the reports was that a valuable local scientific and economic treasure, and sacred mountain to the Tohono O’odham people, was threatened but that an active response was beating back the danger. By the third day of the fire, the focus of the secondary TV stories turned to the lost science and cancellation of public programs caused by the fire, including two independent stories by the ABC and CBS stations reporting the frustration felt by NOAO staff at missing some important commissioning nights with the new infrared instrument NEWFIRM on the Mayall telescope.

Topping off this run of publicity for Kitt Peak, word of the fire and the threat to the observatory hit the national media on the very Sunday (July 8) that Kitt Peak National Observatory was named one of the “Seven Wonders of Southern Arizona” in an online public poll sponsored by the *Arizona Daily Star*, the major local daily newspaper in Tucson. (Kitt Peak was number three in the voting, behind Mission San Xavier del Bac and the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum.)

The NOAO office of public affairs would like to thank all of the staff members who kept us well informed during the fire, volunteered their time for media interviews, and helped get the word out on the Web and elsewhere on the status of the observatory. We know that Kitt Peak National Observatory is a special place, and it was made very clear again that many, many people in our region (and far beyond) feel the same way.

KPNO Hosts Tohono O'odham Boys & Girls Club Horse Camp

The picnic grounds at Kitt Peak National Observatory (KPNO) welcomed some special overnight visitors from June 22-24—three dozen kids, ten adults, and a dozen horses came to the mountain to attend one of the periodic horse camps conducted by the Tohono O'odham Boys & Girls Club, based in Sells.



The summer horse camp (one of four camps held each year) has generally been held under the hot conditions typical of the Sonoran Desert, so the cooler weather on Iolkam Duag (also known as Kitt Peak), was appreciated by the kids and the adults. The mountain location also provided the opportunity for the participants to experience a site with great cultural significance to the people of the Tohono O'odham Nation in a program that has cultural education as a major goal.



The group was led by Silas Johnson Sr., president of the Sells Boys & Girls Club Board of Directors. Si developed and has led the horse camps for many years. In the spring of 2007, Si and Cody Chavez, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club, approached KPNO Director Buell Jannuzzi and NOAO outreach astronomer Katy Garmany about having KPNO host the 2007 summer edition of the camp on the mountain. They were very pleased to say yes. KPNO worked with the Tohono O'odham Natural Resources office and the government of the Schuk Toak District to make arrangements (beyond the normal open access of the mountain to the Tohono O'odham people) to host the camp in a manner safe for both the participants and the natural inhabitants of the mountain. Meals were provided on site with financial support from KPNO and the NOAO public outreach office.

Si also requested some teaching of astronomy as part of this edition of the camp (see photo below). With the help of three members of the Tucson Amateur Astronomy Association and NOAO public outreach staff, four small telescopes were deployed on the opening night of the camp to offer views of the Moon, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn, and a few deep-sky objects, along with a timely flyover by the International Space Station.

The Horse Camp program provided the participants with an interesting mix of camping, cultural education, and horse-riding instruction. The program aims to teach the value of personal responsibility and Native American cultural traditions. Jack Kennedy, a member of the KPNO and public outreach mountain staff, learned a lot during his weekend with the group as the Kitt Peak Emergency Medical Technician on hand.



The camp began with an opening ceremony around noon on Friday, including some welcoming remarks from KPNO facilities manager John Dunlop, and ended with a closing ceremony two days later. Tribal elders spoke to the kids around a talking circle (lower left photo) that housed a small fire, which the kids were tasked with keeping burning around the clock for the duration of the camp. The elders shared their life experiences and gave advice to the kids on how to make the most of their futures. Two Tohono O'odham rodeo queens talked about how to succeed through hard work. On Saturday afternoon, traditional O'odham dancers entertained the kids.

When they arrived on Friday morning, most of the kids appeared very timid around the horses, who function, as Si Johnson, Sr., says, as the "professors" that instruct the kids as they master horsemanship skills and the challenge of interacting with the horses. After some demonstrations on feeding, watering, brushing, and learning how to saddle the horses, each camper earned the right to climb aboard. By midday Sunday, the kids were full of self assurance, and comfortable enough to pick a horse, saddle it, and ride in the corral.

Throughout the weekend, the spirit of the gathering was very upbeat and inspiring. The group leaders expressed interest in returning, and KPNO looks forward to hosting further horse camps on Iolkam Duag in the future.

Six Students Needed for REU at CTIO

Styliani Kafka



The Cerro Tololo Inter-American Observatory (CTIO) offers six Undergraduate Research Assistantships during the northern winter semester 2007/2008 through the NSF- funded Research Experiences for Undergraduates (REU) program. The CTIO REU program provides an exceptional opportunity for undergraduates who are considering a career in science to engage in substantive research activities with scientists working at the forefront of contemporary astrophysics. Student participants will work in close collaboration with members of the CTIO scientific and technical staff on specific research projects. These projects include research in areas such as galaxy clusters, gravitational lensing, supernovae, planetary nebulae, stellar populations, star formation, variable stars and interstellar medium.

Furthermore, the CTIO REU program emphasizes observational techniques and provides opportunities for direct observational experience using CTIO's state-of-the-art telescopes and instrumentation.

Participants must be enrolled as full-time undergraduate students during the REU program, and must be citizens or permanent residents of the United States.

The program will run for 10 weeks, from approximately January 16 to March 25, 2008. Complete applications, including applicant information, official transcripts and two or three letters of recommendation should be submitted no later than October 5. For more information (and an application) please check www.ctio.noao.edu/REU/reu.html. Women and minorities are strongly encouraged to apply.

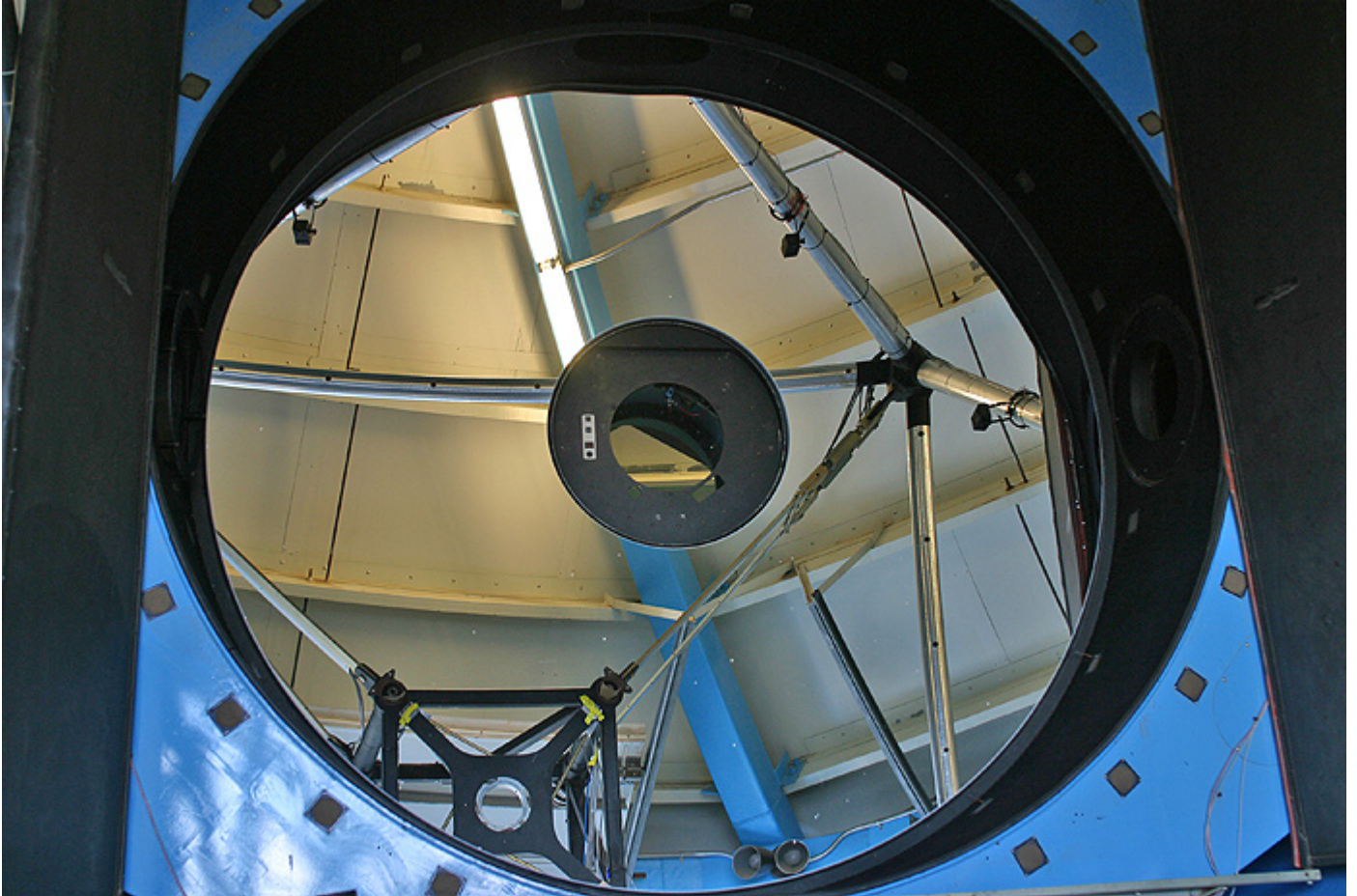


These three new posters describing NOAO and the Gemini Observatory will be displayed at the Centro de Apoyo a la Didáctica de la Astronomía (CADIAS), a community science center and Internet-connected library in Altovalsol, Chile, 14 kilometers east of La Serena.

CADIAS is funded primarily by NOAO and Gemini, and receives additional support from the University of La Serena, the local city government, and the European Southern Observatory. The center has hosted more than 2,000 visitors for programs and star parties in the past six months, along with thousands more who have attended its mobile planetarium program.

Credit: P. Marenfeld and NOAO/AURA/NSF

Big Summer Shutdown for WIYN



The WIYN 3.5-meter telescope on Kitt Peak underwent extensive work during the summer shutdown of 2007, including re-aluminizing of its primary, secondary and tertiary mirrors, and refurbishing of the elevation drive surface. The secondary mirror was removed at the time of this photo.

Image credit: Heidi Schweiker and WIYN/NOAO/AURA/NSF