

Green Bank Star Quest

By, Steven Ahrens - January, 2004

When you think of a star party, you typically think of campers, home-made scopes, tents, lens swapping, porta-potties, exotic equipment, lectures, vendors, and the whole gamut of gadgets attached to amateur scopes for imaging, guiding, and learning the night skies. That experience is about to change! Get ready to attend the first annual Green Bank Star Quest. Your first question might be; Isn't Green Bank for radio telescopes? The answer is yes, but now with much more! The Central Appalachian Astronomy Club and the Kanawha Valley Astronomical Society of West Virginia have teamed up with the Green Bank National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) to bring you the first combined OPTICAL and RADIO star party. Being held July 8th through July 11th, 2004 at Green Bank, West Virginia, there will be lectures, imaging clinics, NRAO tours, daytime and nighttime observing, camp sites, raffle tickets, a Star Lab observatory, movies, kids' activities, cafeteria service, shower facilities, astronomy vendors, instruction on and use of a 40' radio dish for a limited number of pre-registrants, and yes, they'll still have porta-potties down in the field.

There are plans to have an astronaut key-note speaker on Saturday July 10th, and presentations from Hubble imaging specialist Mark "Indy" Kotech of the Space Telescope Science Institute. The Green Bank facility has a brand new visitor center with a tour route, auditorium and gift shop. Computer labs will be available for CCD imaging courses, and presentations. A large vendor area will be located inside the visitor center in a secure location for nightly lockup. Hydrogen Alpha and white light solar viewing will be made available each day. Get a tour of the eight radio telescopes located at Green Bank including the largest fully steerable radio telescope in the world... the 100 meter Robert C. Byrd Green Bank Telescope or "GBT". Scientists from around the world use the NRAO telescopes to study all types of known astronomical objects, from planets and comets in our own solar system to quasars and galaxies billions of light-years away.

Enjoy the night skies in the radio quiet zone of West Virginia. Certain restrictions will be adhered to at the star party, forbidding the use of two-way radios, cell phones, generators, microwave ovens in campers, etc. Set-up will be in a meadow near the visitor center, and away from the GBT, but the entire valley and many miles around are considered the radio quiet zone. Meal tickets will be available for \$25.00/day to include breakfast, lunch, and dinner in the observatory cafeteria. The meal tickets need to be purchased in advance at the time of pre-registration. In addition, there are grocery stores and places to eat nearby. There are several nearby attractions for daytime trips, including the Cass Scenic Railroad State Park where you can ride vintage steam locomotives to the lofty summit of over 4000', visit an

original logging town and company store, or enjoy the Snowshoe Resort. Star Quest participants can enjoy all of this for \$75.00 per person or at a family rate for a family of 4 of \$100.00 for all 4 days. There are no other set-up fees for camping. There are no setup fees for vendors, and tables will be provided. The observatory is located in Pochahontas County, WV. on Route 92/28 about 25 miles north of Marlinton, 53 miles south of Elkins, and 65 miles west of Staunton, VA. For more information, contact Joe Gonzalez at (304) 626-5012 or visit our web sites at www.caacwv.org or www.KVAS.org. This is the one you've been waiting for!