

## Getting amateurs to visit DARK sites...

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**From:** BllFs6 (*bllfs6\_at\_aol.com*)

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Hi all,

A previous post of mine got me thinking back to the good ole days...the 1980s..

I was involved in a pretty active local club....lots of friendly people willing to share equipment.....many members had 6 to 10 inch scopes....with the standard being a 8 or 10 inch Celestron/Meade Cassegrain....and a handful with the new craze, "big/cheap " Dobsonians, typically 10 to 13 inchers and few with the big guns (16 to 22 inchers).....

Now, when we had monthly meetings it wasnt uncommon for 2 or 3 dozen to show up...and for astronomy day or other public star gazes "intown" plenty of people would always show up....and I think we had well over a hundred members on the roster...and we even had some 8 to 12 inch scopes you could rent for like a buck a month.....

Well, a few of us (the bigger dob owners mostly), with myself having a 2 ton 10 incher with so so grade commercial optics and three eyepieces of dubious quality, eventually "scoped out" a very nice dark observing region/area, probably one of the best half dozen or so areas east of the missippi....i think i recently calculated the light pollution at the zenith was on the order of only 10 percent above the natural background level....we are talking nice and dark here, where when clouds passed above you they only showed up as black holes in the sky....there was just NO comparison between viewing at this site and the typical intown sites the club used....

The observiing site(s) were on public land. The camping was either very cheap (5 bucks a night give or take), or even free if you went to one the empty fields in the woods.....and the for pay campsite was pretty nice, and nearly empty most the time.....decent motels were only 30 miles away (max), and most of the members probably lived only 1.5 hours driving distance away (it was more for me because I lived on the "wrong side of town"). And for most people the drive was hop on the interstate for a bit, then hit empty back country highways for the rest.....so it wasnt like the drive was royal pain in the behind, with bumper to bumper and stop and go traffic the whole way. And we were in the southeast, so 9 months outa the year the nights were nice, calm and NOT cold, so it wasnt like camping or observing was some kind of endurance test.....

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Us 3 or so active observers probably averaged a Friday and Saturday night "run" of between once and twice a month for a 3 or 4 year stretch. We would write club articles noting how fantastic the views were from such a dark site, even with modest scopes or just naked eye.....we would encourage folks to come along, the more the merrier....heck,you dont even have to bring your own, we'll be more than happy to share the views with our "bigger" scopes....

And I can understand how many folks werent gonna be showing up 4 times a month every month for years on end....

But, gawd...it was like pulling hen's teeth to get even a few members to show up even ONCE! I'd be suprised if over that time period we got even a dozen folks to check the skies out EVEN once....it was probably more like 6 of em over a 3 year period.....

Any other folks have this kinda of experience? Or were our club members just more homebound than usual?

take care

Bill