

Offered Title: Party All Night Long!

By the time you read this the party will be over.

I'm sitting in our hotel room in Fort Davis, waiting out a thunderstorm and writing this article. A couple of months ago Nancy decided we needed some Fort Davis time and I, being the smart cookie I am, said of course, we will go! I also saw an opportunity to give Nancy a private 'star party' at the top of Skyline Drive in Davis Mountains State Park. My only requirement was no interference from the Moon, so the dates were set, May 7-10. Nancy even found us a place friendly to our dog Frankie.

We pulled into Fort Davis early in the evening of May 7 to find that the Texas Star Party had just started! I think, jeeze, this is quite the coincidence. I forgot about the Texas Star Party (TSP) and now am having my own at the same time. Weird. Well OK, this gives me an opening to go on about star parties, my experience, and maybe get someone excited enough to attend one.

A Star party can be an exciting way to dive into astronomy, even without any equipment. Plenty of people go to star parties and simply look through other's telescopes and binoculars. Star parties are immersive, they can be intense and overwhelming, but can be highly entertaining and inspiring. Think of it, you're with hundreds of astronomers who, for the most part, want to have a good time. Most are willing, if not hoping to talk about astronomy, astrophotography, what they are looking at.

I attended the 1995 TSP. Made one big mistake. Should have known not to tent camp. With west Texas daytime temps hitting the mid 90's in May, tent camping is risky. Guess I just didn't think...oh yeah, up most of the nice – cool night, then sleep during the day. Sleeping wasn't pretty.

The rest was fantastic. I was able to look at objects in large scopes, 20 – 30" mirror large! M104 (The Sombrero Galaxy) in Virgo was stunning! I attended interesting talks on observing and the big bang. Got to meet famed astrophotographer Jason Ware.

While star parties are fun, they also provide a forum for serious study, and therefore require strict rules. If you go, have fun and obey the rules. We took a drive to the 2018 TSP site and I showed Nancy where I had been. We talked with someone from Fayetteville, Arkansas as he was setting up. TSP security informed us that dogs were not allowed. Rules.

Some upcoming relatively nearby star parties: Grand Canyon Star Party on June 9-16; Rocky Mountain Star Stare on June 13-17, Okie-Tex Star Party on October 6-14; Eldorado Star Party on November 5-11

What's in the Sky?

May 17-19; Dusk: A waxing crescent Moon slides past Venus, Gemini, then ends up 6 degrees below M44 (The Beehive Cluster in Cancer) on the 19th.