

The Stella Della Valley Star Party

What to expect at Stella Della

The activities and events at Stella Della are typical of most StarParties. Amateur Astronomers come to an event like this with various objectives and motivations. For most the main objective is to enjoy the night sky under hopefully clear conditions. StarParties are also great opportunities to pursue specific aspects of our hobby such as astrophotography, deep sky observing, checking off Messier objects, observing double and variable stars or hunting down open or closed star clusters. An overnight StarParty like Stella Della allows for long periods of uninterrupted observing. Most of the astronomers I have met are warm generous people who don't mind answering questions or sharing a view through their eyepiece. With that said, there are also astronomers who are very involved with personal projects during this time. Use some common sense and I think it will be obvious who probably doesn't want to be disturbed on the field. Most though are very happy to discuss their endeavors with like minded people.

After dark, it is not uncommon for folks to make the circuit around the observing field asking their fellow astronomers for a look through their eyepiece. This is a great time to chat, ask questions and compare the equipment available on the field. Always ask the astronomer if you need to re-focus. Everyone's eyesight is a bit different and refocusing is normal. Your biggest clue for the need to refocus is if the stars in the field of view are not sharp and crisp pinpoints. If you wear glasses, you can try observing with or without them. Personally, I wear glasses, but do not use them when observing most of the time.

Registration

We recommend that attendees to Stella Della pre-register. This helps us plan effectively and you will benefit from a substantial discount off of registering on-site the day of the event. Please read the registration form carefully. Your registration fee includes access to the grounds Friday 3 PM through Noon Sunday / 2 nights lodging (extra fee for indoor accommodations) / 1 free door prize raffle ticket (additional adult raffle tickets available during the event) / Free access to all lectures, presentations and workshops unless otherwise noted.

Setting Up on the Observing Field

Please try to plan your arrival to occur before dark. RV's and trailers will be directed to park primarily along the outside perimeter of the observing field. Tent campers can set up along the inside or outside of the main driveway circling the observing field. The driveway is marked with "field paint". Please drive slowly. There is no driving on the observing field after dark. If it is an emergency and you must leave during the night, please ask one of the BMAA members to assist you in leaving the premises safely. If you know ahead of time that you will be leaving after dark, we ask that you park near the baseball backstop, with headlights facing away from the observing field.

Regarding noise: Star Parties are not loud, rowdy events. Please do not play loud music after dark. We also ask that you do not run generators at night or early morning as some of your neighbors may be sleeping. There are a few AC outlets in the dining hall for recharging batteries. No open fires, pets or alcoholic beverages are permitted at Stella Della. Please place trash in proper receptacles provided for your use.

Other sleeping options

There are also raised wooden tent platforms with bunks (and mattresses) available at no additional charge on a first come, first served basis. There are a few raised wooden platforms available that do not have a tent covering (or bunks).

For a modest additional charge (see registration form), we have warm indoor accommodations. There are no private rooms; all rooms have more than one bed available. Guests choose their own bed and rooms when they arrive. Note: these indoor accommodations are about 200 yards from the main observing field.

Hot showers and flush toilets are available next to the observing field and in the indoor bunk facilities.

Food

Guests may bring and prepare their own food (no open fires) – camp stoves, BBQ's are OK. We also try to get an on-site vendor to provide food throughout the event. Check our website and registration materials for more information regarding the food vendor. There are also several restaurants and fast food places within a few miles of Camp Onas. On Saturday evening we usually have a huge "Pizza Buffet" complete with beverages and dessert. Sign up for the Pizza Buffet on the mail in registration form.

Protecting Everyone's Night Vision

It's a pretty simple concept, red light good, white light bad. Anything that emits white light must be turned off or covered with red cellophane. Astronomers buy red filtered flashlights, if you haven't done that yet, you can cover an ordinary flashlight with the red cellophane. We have red cellophane available at the registration desk of Stella Della. It takes at least 20 minutes for your eyes to adapt to the dark. One of the worst breaches of StarParty etiquette is inadvertently "flashing" your neighbors with white light during the night. Astronomers are not known for treating white light violators kindly! It's one of those things you'll only do once. Check you car lighting before you arrive at the StarParty. Can you manually turn off all interior and exterior lights? Some cars have running lights that cannot be turned off when the engine is running. Whatever cannot be manually switched off, must be covered. This includes lights what come on when you open car doors. I have found that duct tape works well on most interior lights. If you must leave Stella Della at night we need you to park you car so that headlights face away from the observing field. We will be happy to escort you with red lights until you are off premises and can safely turn on your headlights.

Very bright red LED's can also be annoying and harmful to your night vision. Due to many guests doing astrophotography we do not allow laser pointers during Stella Della.

If it is totally cloudy and no one is observing, white lights are permitted with some courteous consideration to your neighbors.

Children at StarParties

Children are welcome at Stella Della, but please keep them under your supervision at all times. Although your child may express an interest in astronomy it is rare that they will have the same level of patience and concentration as an adult. You know your child best. Above all please do not allow children to run or throw anything in the vicinity of the observing field. Your neighbor's telescope may cost more than your car! There is lots of open space at Camp Onas away from the observing field for kids to have fun. Please

make sure kids are aware of the specific areas that are off limits in the camp (pool, barn, pond, etc.). There is a game room available in the Texas building that kids will enjoy, again adult supervision is required.

Daytime Activities

Saturday is a day filled with events and activities at Stella Della and in the local area. Most of the main non-observing activities take place in Camp Onas's Dining Hall. This is a covered area complete with a large stone fireplace, tables and seating for all. The dining hall is open 24 hrs a day for astronomers to meet and warm up anytime day or night. Note: the dining hall does not serve food and is not available for food preparations.

Beginning around 7:30 AM the dining hall is host to our "Astronomical Flea Market". Anyone who gets serious about amateur astronomy eventually grows a collection of telescopes, eyepieces and all sorts of related paraphernalia. This is a great opportunity to buy, sell or trade astronomy equipment. We do not charge a table or entry fee for our Flea Market so please bring some of that equipment that is just taking up space in your basement (and maybe you'll bring something else home, too!).

Later in the morning may be other workshops and presentations. In the afternoon, we bring in several fabulous speakers who will make presentations on a variety of astronomical topics. See our flyer or visit our website for specifics related to presentations and workshops. These are free events with your registration, unless stated otherwise. Later in the afternoon is our annual door prize drawing. All registered guest of Stella Della will receive one ticket for the drawing. Additional "adult" tickets are available for purchase. Registered children also receive 1 ticket for their special drawing. No additional children's tickets will be available for sale. Complete door prize rules will be posted in the dining hall and are on our website. Visit our website often for an up to date list of door prizes received. This list grows right up to SDV.

Following the door prize drawings at 5 PM we will have our famous Pizza Buffet in the dining hall. This is an extra cost dinner. Please see the registration form to reserve your spot at the Pizza Buffet. Pizza, drinks and TastyKake desserts round out the dinner.

Saturday evening programming often depends on the weather. If the weather is clear, all astronomers will be enjoying the crisp autumn skies of Bucks county. If inclement, we will run additional programming Saturday evening.

Upper Bucks County in the fall is beautiful with many local attractions and events nearby. See <http://www.visitbucks.com/activities.php> for regional activities.

What about bad weather?

About the worst thing that can happen to any StarParty is the unfortunate circumstance of running into cloudy, rainy, windy weather. Although it can happen, rarely is Stella Della completely rained out the entire weekend. Unfortunately, as is the rule with virtually every Star Party in the country, there are no postponements or refunds. StarParties are usually scheduled around the monthly "New Moon" weekend. Rescheduling is pretty an impossibility. We rent our weekend from Camp Onas specifically for our traditional October New Moon weekend. Our costs are fixed, and much preparation goes into holding the event on the scheduled date.

In the event of poor weather we will schedule extra activities in the dining hall. We always have a number of interesting astronomy/space related DVD's available, games, presentations, etc. for both Friday and Saturday night if needed.

Dress for the Occasion

Expect cool/cold nights and reasonably warm days. Attire at Stella Della is always informal. Layered clothing, hats and warm shoes will make your evening star gazing more enjoyable. If camping, bring a warm sleeping bag and maybe an extra blanket or two.

Web Links and other useful information:

Bucks-Mont Astronomical Association <http://www.bma2.org>

Stella Della Valley webpage <http://www.bma2.org/Sdv.html>

SDV Door Prize webpage http://www.bma2.org/Sdv_sponsors.html

SDV Door Prize Rules webpage http://www.bma2.org/Sdv_prize-rules.html

Camp Onas Webpage <http://www.camponas.org/NEW/index.php>

Long. & Latitude of Camp Onas -75.10417 / 40.48944

Physical Address of Camp Onas
609 Geigel Hill Road
Ottsville, PA 18942

Email address for questions (up until event) sdv@bma2.org

Phone # for directions and other SDV questions (before & during event weekend)
267-733-7253

Camp Onas Clear Sky Clock <http://cleardarksky.com/c/CampOnasPAkey.html?1>

Camp Ockanickon Weather Site <http://www.bma2.org/Ockanickon/Weather.html>
(Nearby Boy Scout camp)

NOAA (input 18942 for local zip code of Camp Onas) <http://www.noaa.gov/>