

HAL Members-Only and Impromptu Star Party Etiquette

HAL hosted star parties can be a lot of fun, and we encourage you to attend! Like most social gatherings there are some guidelines for acceptable behavior to help ensure everyone has a good time. *Please review the material below before arriving at the star party so that you are aware of our procedures.* If you have any questions, please ask the HAL Events Coordinator by emailing events@howardastro.org.

Members-only star parties and impromptu star parties are intended to give our members a chance to observe or image from the darker skies at Alpha Ridge or Carrs Mill. Unlike our public events, it is expected that each member at these events will be pursuing their own astronomical program of observing or photography while disturbing each other as little as possible.

To that end, we ask that you respect the following guidelines:

- ✓ Please minimize white lights at our observing sites. Although our light discipline is not nearly as strict as it is at a major regional or national star party, we do want to allow each other to get as dark adapted as conditions will support. To that end, we ask that you:
 - Arrive before twilight if at all possible.
 - Turn off as many interior car lights as you can so that if you open the door there is as little light as possible.
 - Use a [red flashlight](#) when you need light.
 - If you are using a white-light source such as a computer, please put it into a dark box so that the light isn't visible to anyone else. If you must use a phone, please make sure it is pointed so that only you are affected by the light from the screen.
 - Let others know if you must use a white light so they can cover their eyes.
 - Notwithstanding the above, headlight use is **mandatory** when driving after dusk at Alpha Ridge Park. Therefore, we ask that if you know that you will leave early, you make an effort to park so that your headlights will point at as few people as possible, and that you warn other observers before you leave so they can cover their eyes.
- ✓ Be polite and don't engage other observers when they are busy. It is fine to be social, but your fellow club members may have a specific goal they wish to accomplish that evening. Please don't be a distraction to their achieving it.
 - Those members doing astrophotography are often busiest when setting up their equipment and acquiring their target. This can be a bad time to approach them. Later in the evening when they are automatically collecting data you may find them in a much chattier mood.
 - If you need assistance in learning to use your equipment, make that known in advance through the [HAL email distribution lists](#) (general HAL Google Group or the Impromptu Google Group). The odds are very good a fellow member will be happy to meet you there and lend a hand. It is not polite to ask other observers to interrupt their own observing program to assist you.
- ✓ If you bring a guest, they are your responsibility and should remain with you and participate in your observing program without disturbing others. This is especially true of children. We welcome astronomy enthusiasts of all ages, but a star party is not a place where it is safe for children to run around unsupervised. Please keep them with you at all times.

- ✓ Pets are not generally appropriate at members-only or impromptu star parties. If a pet must be brought, please keep it inside your vehicle or on a leash well away from other observers.
- ✓ Check in with the host when you arrive and when you leave. If you are one of the last people present, it is thoughtful not to leave the host to close up the site alone. Dead car batteries or other issues can arise where they would be very thankful to have someone there to assist.
- ✓ Be aware that while there are restrooms at Alpha Ridge, there are no restroom facilities at Carrs Mill.
- ✓ Be respectful of others' property - never touch any telescopes or instruments without first asking permission. Keep any food or drink away from their equipment, and always follow the instructions or guidance offered by the telescope's owner.
- ✓ Howard County does not allow smoking at either Alpha Ridge Park or Carrs Mill Park. (At Carrs Mill there is the added risk of igniting the methane vents which would be disruptive to everyone's observing program).
- ✓ Watch your step! It is dark and there are likely to be cords hanging from instruments as well as tripod legs that you can trip over.
- ✓ In general, our events begin at dusk and end at 11:00 PM. You should assume that you will need to leave at 11 unless the host has explicitly offered to stay later.
- ✓ Dress appropriately – it can get chilly after the sun goes down and the stars come out.