



Dark Sky Astro Camp Etiquette

Astro camps provide the ultimate opportunity to experience truly dark skies, well away from any light pollution. The key aim for those who attend these camps (besides enjoying the great social atmosphere) is to make the most of the dark skies, whether it be for visual appreciation of the treasures of the sky, or capturing the faintest unpolluted photons via astrophotography.

As attendees may have different plans, please be considerate of others and refrain from any raucous behaviour or loud talking. Some people will want to catch up on some sleep for a few hours during the night and others will be sleeping during the day. Please be considerate of others trying to sleep, by not playing music (late at night or otherwise) and generally minimising noise.

Visual astronomers and astro-imagers can have different objectives in maximising their opportunities under dark skies, and hence can have separate areas set aside for each activity. Please ask the organisers about this aspect before you set up your equipment.

In particular, control of lighting is the key component in maximising everyone's enjoyment.

Lighting Etiquette

Typically accommodation and shared facilities used by the astro camp can have strict control of fixed lighting, by keeping most lights off, and replacing essential lights with dim red task lighting, and/or using blackout screens.

Toilet block lights will typically be switched off or covered in red acetate during the dark hours.

ASSA discourages the use of laser pointers as they will interfere with astro-imaging and can be dangerous.

Please be aware that lights inside tents and caravans are also visible to people outside of them - red lights or no lights please.

True dark adaptation can take 20-30 minutes and can be ruined by someone momentarily turning on a phone screen, or a cigarette lighter. That brief exposure to normal light will take dark-adapted eyes back to square one.

For attendees, please only use dim red light torches at night. Only ever point them down to see where you are walking, to check trip hazards such as power cables, or to examine your equipment or star atlas. Never point them directly at other astronomers as night vision can still be affected.

Astro-imagers typically use many and varied types of electronic equipment in the field, from laptops to batteries to cameras, with various display screens and indicator lights that are not necessarily red, or dim, or fully controllable. Please consider ALL of your sources of light such as USB hubs and other devices that have L.E.D's. These devices appear very bright in very dark conditions. You may want to bring a roll of tape such as insulation or gaffer tape that can cover up rogue light sources.



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If you use a laptop, please cover the screen with a sheet of red acetate, turn down screen brightness, and direct the screen away from visual observers in particular, even if well separated at the other end of the observing field.

It is still best practice in any case, to plan from the start to physically separate visual astronomy from imaging, as mentioned previously.

Please minimise car movements after dark, and ideally, arrange to arrive before dusk. (Arriving before dusk will also reduce the risk of animal collision on lonely country roads.) Remember that opening car doors or the boot always turns an interior light on so disable them if you can, or remove the fuse before sunset. Alternatively, cover them with opaque tape, including those in the boot. If a bright light is unavoidable call out: "LIGHTS IN 3 SECONDS" to give everyone time to turn the other way. The best advice here is to remove everything you will need from cars before nightfall and minimise going back and forth.

Equipment Etiquette

Be mindful of astro-imagers. Astrophotography requires very steady and unobscured exposures, so please do not touch or walk in front of a scope being used for imaging. Apparently Astro-imagers are still a very friendly bunch, despite their obsession with long exposures while hunched over a laptop screen !

Please also be mindful of visual astronomers whose desire to maintain dark adaptation is paramount. Maintaining your own dark adaptation by minimising all personal lighting is key to your own enjoyment as a visual observer. Visual enthusiasts will be happy to share their view through the eyepiece at their scopes, but please do ask the owner before taking a look. Be aware that telescopes are carefully aligned and assembled and as little contact to see through them is best.

Insects and Bug Sprays

Flies and mosquitoes could be a problem, day or night. Insect sprays should not be used anywhere near any optical equipment, especially if optics are uncovered. Insect sprays can drift in the breeze, and contain some nasty substances that can be very unfriendly to optical surfaces. Preferably use roll-on insect repellent if the need arises.

Other Campsite Residents

Some at nearby campsites will be holidaying in their own caravans. They are generally made aware of our need for total darkness at night and respect it. If however, you do see stray white light from nearby campers, please politely ask them to turn it off, or speak to one of the organisers.