

Texas Star Party Info

The Texas Star Party has been going on every April or May or June for 27 years, since 1982. Attendance grew from 582 people the first year to 800 in 1994. They presently limit it to 700 people, but this year there were only 481, probably because of the economy. About 2/3 of the people come for the entire week. About 70% of the attendees come from Texas.

TSP is held at the Prude Ranch, a family-owned hundred-year-old cattle ranch and horseback riding camp and kids' summer camp, in the desert.

The nearest town, Fort Davis, 6 miles away, has a population of 1000. Alpine, about 25 miles away, has 5800. El Paso, where you fly in to get to the TSP, has 700,000 people, but is 200 miles away.

Prude Ranch is 12 miles from McDonald Observatory, so there are light restrictions in the surrounding area, keeping it very dark and perfect for astronomy.

Sky Quality Meter reading 21.83 (average of 3 readings at the zenith)
= Limiting Magnitude 6.5

Stars were visible down to the horizon in all directions.

Zodiacal Light and Milky Way extremely bright. Dim low constellations such as Virgo, Libra, Crater, easy to see.

Latitude 30.6° North. Elevation 5040 feet.

Weather

	High	Low	Rain
April	79°	43°	0.5"
May	86°	52°	1.5"
June	91°	59°	1.8"

Most people drive. Mapquest says it is 1660 miles and 26 hours driving time from Detroit to Fort Davis.

Bill Beers, Dave D'Onofrio, Joe Ruggirello, and I flew. Air fare was \$239 from Detroit to El Paso (changing planes in Dallas), and then we had to rent a car (about \$400 for a van for the week for the four of us) and drive 200 miles (just over 3 hours) from El Paso to the Prude Ranch. Phil Martin drove, and pulled a trailer with the telescopes and other equipment for those of us who flew. Jim Shedlowsky drove from his winter home in Arizona.

You'll need to apply to go to the TSP by the January before the event, in order to be in the group from which they randomly select the 700 people they allow in any

year. This year there was no need for that advance application, because far less than 700 people wanted to go. The price is \$50 if you register by mid-March, or \$150 if you register later or if you pay at the door (assuming they are not full and you can still get in). If they have over 700 people apply, they will let you know by email in February whether you were accepted or not. The website to register (and for lots more information) is texasstarparty.org

When you apply online for the TSP, you'll also have to apply at the same time for accommodations at the Prude Ranch. There is enough "covered housing" (motel rooms and bunkhouses) for about 300 people, and they are chosen randomly from those who apply. Everyone else stays in tents or campers, or off of the property. Prices per person per day are

Camping \$9.25

RV \$19.50

Bunkhouse \$40

Family cabin \$56 (\$50 if 3 or 4 people)

Motel room \$77 (\$62.50 if 3 or 4 people)

Lunch and dinner are included in covered housing,
or cost \$160 for the whole week if you are staying in a tent or RV.

I stayed in a motel room with Dave D'Onofrio and Joe Ruggirello, so my cost for the week for room and meals was \$437.50 ($\62.50×7 nights).

Motel rooms have 2 double beds and a bathroom with a small shower. Joe brought a cot and sleeping bag. If nobody brings their own bed, and you put more than two people in a room, then somebody will have to share a double bed.

For some of my photos of the Texas Star Party see
www.jonrosie.com/astronomy/tsp2009

Next year, the Texas Star Party will be May 9-16, 2010.

Jon Blum
jon@jonrosie.com