

A Night of Stars

Jupiter, Saturn, globular nebulae, double stars and dying stars. Not the celestial bodies one might think of in Hollywood, but what a treasure sits atop the San Gabriel Mountains.

PCA GPX arranged a run up to the Mt. Wilson Observatory for a night session with the 60-inch telescope. The evening started in La Cañada at The Dish, a local restaurant with a homey feel. We all enjoyed the food, camaraderie and talk of the "stars" which brought us all together ... our PORSCHEs !

If you have not been up CA Hwy 2, plan a day trip and enjoy the open area and the vistas of LA which this road offers. The last 5 miles in particular are spectacular, with all of the tight, twisty turns, the dodging of rocks on the road's surface, the views of the surrounding country and the sedimentary layers of the mountain side are definitely worth the drive even if you don't go to the observatory, but why wouldn't you?

At the end of the road is the Mt. Wilson Observatory. As one enters the gated grounds, one can imagine all of the discoveries which have occurred here and continue to this day as researchers gaze into the Heavens, taking note of all they see. As evidence to the foregoing, Mt. Wilson has one of the most accurate and most complete sun spot records.

Upon arrival at the dome which houses the 60-in telescope, all our heads turn skyward. The dome was built in 1908 with all parts brought up the mountain either by mules or winch and pulley systems. The telescope was assembled like our battleships, heavy iron, built to last. And it has. The telescope with all the use and all the years in the alpine extremes, still looks perfect. The viewing began as the white lights were turned off and the red lights were turned on. One realizes this is special, different from other places. Just the change in lighting builds the excitement.

Words hardly do our session leader, Shelley, justice. Her enthusiasm and quirkiness exude. Her love of the sky and the Mt. Wilson Observatory is palpable. The wealth of knowledge she imparted to us, no question unanswered, took us on a journey through time and space.

Our telescope operator, Nik, began our evening showing he was “one of us” by sporting his Monza '71 PORSCHE T-shirt. We all identified our kindred spirit, even before he expertly guided the telescope to the Heavenly objects for our viewing pleasure.

Our first object was Jupiter, sitting low in the sky as it was nearing the end of its visible traverse. Jupiter was clear and beautiful along with several of its moons. Each sighting was more dazzling. We were shown a star which was dying and the gases around it made it look like a beautiful flower growing in the sky. One object named M3, a globular nebulae, was so spectacular, that one had to keep going back for another look. Shelley informed us that it was so far away that it is possible that it no longer exists. Think about it, here we are, a PORSCHE club sitting in an observatory in California, looking through a 60-in telescope, marveling at the sight of M3, and it may no longer exist. Humbling to say the least, we are such a small part of this mysterious earth, galaxy, and universe.

As the evening was coming to a close, one couldn't help but sit back and take in the majesty of the Mt. Wilson Observatory. The dome itself is a beautiful architectural marvel, simple in design, but complicated in working parts. It opens and closes, rotates clockwise and counter-clockwise, all the while accommodating the telescope. The 60-in telescope stands in the center in all her aged-pride. Consider for a moment, the eyes which have peered through her lenses to investigate the Heavens ... George Ellery Hale, Edwin Hubble, Albert Einstein, and let us not forget members of PCA - Grand Prix region.

It truly was a night of stars. Mt. Wilson Observatory is a “must visit” if in the LA area. The history, the location, the ride up and down the mountains, and, last but certainly not least, Shelley and Nik. A few nights before we had our close encounter with the Mt. Wilson telescope, we were all treated to the “Red Moon” Lunar Eclipse, so we were all revved up for even more. Tours are offered at the Observatory and we highly recommend doing so, as soon as you can. It is an historic facility having contributed greatly to our knowledge of the skies. Go for a drive and include a visit.