

Dark Site Etiquette

We have all been to the dark site and been blinded by someone's stray flashlight or headlights at least once. And we're all probably guilty of doing it ourselves even if accidentally or unknowingly. This list is not necessarily a set of rules, but rather things to be aware of and mindful of when attending an event at the dark site. It's intended to limit exposure to stray light, help preserve everyone's night vision, prevent interfering with personal projects and to increase everyone's enjoyment of the activity.

1. Arrive before dusk – While not everyone will be able to arrive before the sun goes down, arriving before dusk allows you to see what you're doing and setup without the aid of a light and possibly cause interference or frustration for others. You also don't risk shining headlights in people's faces as you drive in. If you are unable to arrive before dusk, see below.
2. Turn off your headlights – Not everyone is capable of turning off their headlights. Some have daytime running lights that will never turn off. If possible though, please turn off your headlights so as not to blind those who are already setup or setting up and robbing them of their night vision. If you're unable to turn off your headlights and just run with your marker lights, consider draping something over your headlights, like a blanket or towel, or getting some covers to dim them before driving in. You could even make your own red light covers out of several layers of cellophane.
3. Turn off your interior lights – Again, not something everyone is capable of doing. Most cars though have a button or switch to completely turn off the dome lights or at least turn them off so they don't come on when you open the door to your car. Trunk lights are a bit trickier as they don't necessarily have a switch or button in cars. Open the trunk and leave it open for 15 minutes to see if it automatically goes out. Some will, some won't. If it doesn't, open your trunk as little as possible, remove the light, or replace it with a red bulb. Also, when opening your trunk, try and use the trunk release button inside the car. Trunk release buttons on key fobs tend to cause the marker lights to flash.
4. Use a red flashlight rather than a white one – Pretty self-explanatory. Red lights are less harmful to night vision than white lights. They are no more expensive than regular flashlights and several models of headlamps come with a red light mode built in. You can also use a regular flashlight and make your own red flashlight. Dimmer flashlights work better for these techniques. A) Put a red balloon over it. Get the thickest balloon you can and don't stretch it too tight in order to dim the light as much as possible. B) Put red cellophane over the light. Several layers may be necessary depending on how translucent the cellophane is and how bright your flashlight is. C) Dark red nail polish. This one is a more permanent, but is extremely effective. Get the darkest red nail polish you can and apply several coats. You want the light to be extremely dim, yet bright enough that you can use it to read or see in complete darkness.
5. Avoid areas where people are photographing – Astrophotography relies on long exposures. Walking in front of a camera for even a few seconds can completely ruin a long exposure which may be several minutes' worth of wasted effort. Walking near a camera or touching the equipment can also induce vibration that can ruin a long exposure. It's simply best to avoid the

area altogether unless explicitly asked or invited. When people setup for astrophotography, they should do so at a reasonable distance from the main part of the group to help reduce the amount of interference they may encounter. If setting up near another photographer, be mindful of the direction in which that person may be shooting to avoid interfering with them or them interfering with you.

6. If you don't have equipment, don't drive in – If you're capable of walking a couple hundred yards and don't have anything to set up other than yourself and a maybe a chair, consider not driving in. There is ample space to park outside the gate or just inside the gate before the bend in the road. This essentially eliminates the possibility of causing problems with headlights or interior lights from your vehicle. It also reduces the amount of dust that may be stirred up when driving into the area.

Again, these are not rules and we will not kick anyone out of the club for not following them. However, don't take offense when someone asks you if you can turn out that light or move to a different area. We all understand there may be extenuating circumstances that prevent you from doing so, we just ask that you be mindful and considerate of others when attending an event. If you have any other tips, please feel free to let us know and we will add them to the list.

- Crystal Coast Stargazers