



## **TUCSON AMATEUR ASTRONOMY ASSOCIATION (TAAA)**



### **Chiricahua Astronomy Complex (CAC) First Time Users Primer**

Welcome to CAC one of the premier dark sky observing facilities in the United States. As a TAAA member this site represents an incredible resource and should be experienced by all members. When I first joined, I remember having questions about what CAC would be like and what facilities were there to support my observing activities. I also wanted information to help guide what I needed to bring with me to make my visit a success. This short paper is my effort to try to answer some of the questions that I had before heading to CAC for the first time and that perhaps are on your mind as well.

### **What kind of overnight accommodations are available at CAC?**

Folks do a variety of things to stay overnight at the site. Some bring their RVs and stay at one of the four RV parking spots that have power available. Some folks sleep in their cars or trucks. Some folks take advantage of the warm room of the RMO and use either their own or one of the four TAAA cots available for use there. The RMO warm room can accommodate up to about 6 people. Others use tents. There is also a bed & breakfast nearby called the Dreamcatcher. A link to their site is listed below:

<http://dreamcatcherbnb.com/>

We are working on developing sleeping rooms at the site so more accommodation options should be available in the near future.

### **What kind of kitchen and eating facilities are available at CAC?**

The RMO warm room has a microwave, a full-size refrigerator, a sink, two hot plates, and counter space. There is also a large round table with chairs that is a common gathering spot. TAAA provides a variety of warm drinks, especially welcome during observing sessions, including instant coffee, hot chocolate, tea, and apple cider. One of the first things a star part host does is setup a hot water urn that is kept full and running throughout the star party weekends for a continuous supply of hot water. The fridge is also stocked with water bottles that are available to everyone. Some snack items, such as various chips, crackers, cookies, and often some form of chocolate that are available to all. Most folks usually bring their own food for meals. Others travel to some of the local eating spots for meals. Everyone is welcome to store food in the fridge. Just remember to take your leftovers home when you leave!

A good general rule to follow is similar to leave no trace camping. If you pack it in, pack it out! Plan to take home what you bring with you. There are trash cans at CAC but we have no trash service so the weekend star party hosts or the CAC Director remove the trash bags and take them to our homes for disposal. So you can help by taking most of your trash home with you. Do NOT use any of the private trash containers on S Price Ranch Road. Those do NOT belong to TAAA. Thanks!

In addition to the table in the warm room there is also a large Ramada with four picnic tables adjacent to the bathrooms and RMO for when it is nice to be outdoors.

### **What are the bathroom and shower facilities at CAC?**

We have two bathrooms and a separate shower room at CAC. These are all located in a single building near the center of the site. These facilities are connected to an on-site septic system. Water is supplied via an on-site well. The well water quality is excellent, although, as is common around here, there are



## ***TUCSON AMATEUR ASTRONOMY ASSOCIATION (TAAA)***



lots of minerals in the water. The bathrooms are stocked with hand soap, paper towels, and TP but you need to bring your own soap/shampoo and towel if you are planning to use the shower.

### **How about the observing?**

There are 10 concrete observing pads available for general use by visiting observers. Each pad has 120v power supplied with 4 outlets. The general use pads are oriented with the corners pointed in the cardinal directions. So, getting close to polar alignment is as easy as pointing your mount toward the north facing corner. When night comes, Polaris will be right there. There is also a large (8.4 m diameter) pad that can be used by anyone for observing. Some members have leased observing pads for their personal use. Each of these is also supplied with power.

There are two main observatories at CAC that provide observing opportunities through TAAA owned telescopes. The main attraction, when it is in operation, is the 40-inch Dobsonian telescope at the Reynolds-Mitchell Observatory (RMO). This scope requires two trained operators for operation. So far there are not many trained operators, so it is not always in operation. However, when this scope is in operation it acts like a magnet for many site users. How often do you get to look through a 40-inch telescope? It offers amazing views! And we are always open to suggestions for what to look at! So do some research and come with a list! We also have a unique 9-inch Folded Refractor on an Astro-Physics AP1600 German equatorial mount.

The Wally Rogers Observatory houses a 14-inch Celestron on an Astro Physics 1200 mount. This is a telescope that you can be trained to use, and once certified, can use on your own. Sometimes there will be other trained users of this scope at the site and you can follow along with what they are observing, or again make some suggestions.

The site also has an 18-inch Obsession Dobsonian. So far there are not many who know how to use this scope so it mostly sits in its storage container. It is an opportunity waiting.....

Soon, we will have a 9 ¼", 11", and 12" on the Stinger Learning Center Observing Pad (along with the 18" Obsession). These will be used for outreach events but members can also be trained to use them for personal observing.

I hope this brief discussion is helpful to you for planning your first trip to CAC. If you have any additional questions please contact the CAC Director at: [cac-director\[at\]tucsonastronomy.org](mailto:cac-director[at]tucsonastronomy.org).

All the best and clear skies!      Written by Mike McDowell.

Current CAC Director: Jim Knoll (520-241-3113)