

REFLECTIONS / REFRACTIONS

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University Lowbrow  
Astronomers

OCTOBER 2015

VOLUME 39, ISSUE 10

**AATB 2015**

# Lowbrows At The Beach



Photo: Doug Bock

**Camp Lowbrow At The Beach: From the left--The Club's 17.5" Dobsonian reflector, Bob Graczinski's C-5, John Causland's 24" Starmaster and Jim Forrester's 4.1" TMB refractor. Other Lowbrow scopes attending: Clay Kessler's 62mm Ziess refractor, Paul Walkowski's 10" reflector, Mike Radwick's 14.5" Starmaster, John Causland's 60mm Coronado Ha Solar Scope and John Manney's 70mm refractor.**

John Causland did a walk about and there were over 50 scopes on Friday and in the 40's on Saturday. It seemed like 1/3 of them were Lowbrows. Fridays attendance was estimated around 1100 Saturdays around 1800-2000. I'll get official numbers in a few weeks collected from park folks with hand clickers at the information table. This doesn't count folks who enter the event along the other 2 sidewalks that run along the waterfront or to the beach house, but it's as scientific as we can get. For the curious the sky started 80% clear at dusk on Friday, closed to 40% by 11:00 PM and reopened to 70% by 1:00 AM. Saturday looked dismal at 6 pm but as soon as john assembled the 24" scope we got 50% clear skies which seemed to deteriorate till 10:30 and then suddenly improved to 90% clear in just a few minutes as the crowd slowly diminished. We wrapped up looking at Uranus. We were on the extreme north edge of a huge loud band that at reached to the East coast, and the edge retreated south as it got cooler. Dew was not an issue either night.

**Treasurer Doug Scobel asks:**

**DID YOU PAY FOR YOUR 2016 RASC CALENDARS AND/OR HANDBOOK ORDER YET? THE DEADLINE IS OCTOBER 16! For details, see Doug's article in the September 2015 Reflections.**

***DON'T MISS OUT!***

At the peak crowd on Friday I had 10-12 people waiting at my 10" scope and that peak lasted maybe one hour. Friday seemed to be mostly young couples, families, and retired folks. Saturday was altogether another story. Scout groups, lots of families with kids, college age folks, and middle age groups. Lots of immigrant or foreign visitors of all age groups as well. Numerous groups were speaking Chinese, Indian, Spanish, Russian, and other Slavic languages. I was busy continuously at the telescope from the minute the moon became visible at 6:30 until 11:30 without stopping to take a breath. The line for my scope was 20-25 people long continuously. The line for John's 24" wrapped around me on 2 sides and probably stayed at 50 all night peaking at 70 between 9:30 and 11. I thought the club's 17.5" scope was just as busy but I never got a chance to look through it till after midnight either evening. Jim Forrester was instrumental in transporting, assembling, and showing objects in the 17.5, along with Jack and others. Mike Radwick, Bobbie Graczinski, Clayton Kessler, Jack Brisbin, John Manney, and a host of others all brought scopes. I heard that the talks went well and that Dr Zellner was a hit with the youth, our target audience. Brian Ottum had an Astro photo booth, I hope he did well selling his most excellent photos. We were visited by Milton, Dr Seitzer and his wife, Bob MacFarland, Doug Bock, and lots of long time friends and Lowbrow alumni. Thank you all again, well done. I must be overtired or confused, but for some reason a small still voice in the back of my head said, "and remember to send newsletter articles". Ciao, *Paul Walkowski*



*Paul Walkowski (left), might not be the lord of all he surveys, but he has been the Lowbrow's ambassador to the Great Lakes Association of Astronomy Clubs (GLAAC) for many years. GLAAC volunteers plan each year's AATB and do most of the grunt work required to make Michigan's largest annual astronomy event a success. Paul's contributions are too many to list, but without him and a handful of others, Astronomy At The Beach could not happen.*

*All Photos this page: Chris Nickel*



*The Hydrogen-Alpha solar scope yields fascinating views of the sun and is always popular. John Causland (far left) discusses the set up with a visitor.*

*Above, Mike Radwick coaches a young astronomer on what he is seeing.*

**Black Forest Star Party 2015**

# Lowbrows Invade Pennsylvania !

Lowbrows made a strong showing at the Black Forest Star Party held annually at Cherry Springs State Park in north-central Pennsylvania. Don Fohey, Robert Wade, Doug Scobel and Chris Sarnecki shared their experiences. Unless otherwise noted, all photos are by the various authors.



Lowbrows at BFSP, from the left: Cay Kessler, Wendy Wade, Robert Wade, Jim Forrester, Ken Ruble, Ginia Forrester, Don Fohey, Chris Sarnecki and Doug Scobel.  
Photo: Doug Scobel

**The** Pennsylvania Department of Conservation has declared Cherry Springs State Park as a Dark Sky Park. It has obtained a Gold Level International Dark Sky Park certification from the International Dark Sky Association. The park has two camping fields, one of which is dedicated as an astronomy observing field. The park has made a great effort to accommodate astronomers. Electric pedestal are available to power telescope equipment. Some concrete pads are available for telescope setup. White light sources are prohibited unless it is 100% cloudy. Flashlights must be "red-light" only and you cannot drive on the field after dark. Light sources in campers, vehicles and computer screens must also be blocked or filtered. Green laser devices are prohibited. The field and roads are well maintained and there are new modern restroom facilities. This is a great place for group observing!



The Black Forest Star Party (BFSP) is hosted by the Central Pennsylvania Observers (CPO). They provide the necessary management for some 450 attendees. They provide for observing field camping reservations, a food tent with meals and beverages, speakers, vendors, a raffle, dark sky enforcement, public announcements and augmented restroom facilities. They are small group putting forth a great effort for amateur astronomy.

Of course Cherry Springs State Park has dark skies whether there is a star party or not so members looked at the weather and their personal schedules and made arrangements accordingly. There were Lowbrows on the field from Sunday 9/6 thru Tuesday 9/15 with at least some observing on six of the eight nights. Wednesday and Saturday nights were the only rain outs.

**Camp Lowbrow**

(NGC 7789) the Pacman nebula (NGC 281). Old favorites looked so much better. There was structure apparent in the Crab Nebula (M1) and the Helix Nebula (NGC 7293). I enjoyed seeing arm structure in the Triangulum Galaxy (M33). I have seen the Great Nebula in Orion (M42) countless times, but I was amazed at how extended it really is. There were brief aurora's on Tuesday night. Thursday night there was an aurora and a bolide meteor lit up the field briefly.

Daylight hours passed fast with camp chores, trips to town, local hikes and visiting with fellow Lowbrow's. We sat around and shared life experiences. I came to know my fellow Lowbrow's better. Ginia fixed a wonderful dinner Thursday afternoon for all the Lowbrows (Chris had left by then). I wish now that I had stayed longer and I am looking forward to another BFSP.--*Don Fohey*

I arrived on Tuesday and departed on Saturday morning, enjoying good viewing on Tuesday and Thursday evenings. Friday night provided a couple of hours of keyhole observing. Jim and I helped a couple from Maryland find objects and use their new telescope.

My 10" is small by sky party norms, but even with a small scope you can have a great time. I enjoyed looking at fainter objects that I wouldn't normally see such as the Skull Nebula (NGC 246), Carolina's Rose

**Don with his 10" reflector**

**There** they are! After a roughly 8 hour drive on Labor Day from southern New Hampshire, my wife Wendy and I arrived at the burgeoning Camp Lowbrow in Cherry Springs State Park. Observaytin' any time is fun, but observaytin' with Lowbrows tends to be an existential experience.

**Robert and his new 15 inch Obsession**

For me, BFSP 2015 was all about getting into the swing of observaytin' after roughly a year's hiatus after multiple back surgeries. Due to aforementioned slicing and dicing, I had to part with my 17 year 20" Obsession Classic friend and get used to the idea that I physically couldn't handle the mass that comes with a larger scope. Instead, I picked up, or rather Dave Kriege shipped to me, a 15" Ultra Compact. BFSP 2015 was literally first light for the scope. It still wasn't completely tricked out: the Argo Navis clamped on of the truss poles; I had to rig some cable management for the cables coming out of the Servo Cat/Argo Navis protection board; I had no eyepiece dew control yet (more on that later); and the secondary dew heater was only battery powered as I hadn't UTA power run yet.

The first evening the sky was marginal, but still better than being on the fringes of the Boston metroplex light dome. That pesky Telrad! Ever remember how hard it was to match a new Telrad bulls eye to your eyepiece? It took about 15-20 minutes to get the two in sync. Finally! I could observe. Previously I had collimated (obligatory barlowed laser) so I could see that the star images were nice and crisp considering the seeing. I wasn't sure how much less I was going to see at night for two reasons: a 15" doesn't gather as much light as a 20" (go figure..) and the eyes, the eyes just aren't what they used to be. On top of that, a 31 Nagler in an f4.2 scope gives a much broader fov than a 31 Nagler in an f5 scope (again, go figure!). Knowing intellectually is one thing, experiencing a new scope after parting with my old friend is quite another.

Dew control reared its ugly head late in the evening one of the nights. The exposed secondary on an Ultra Compact combined with inadequate factory temp setting meant the secondary dewed up. I hadn't had to use a blow dryer to remove dew in decades (thanks Doug for the use of your dryer!). The eyepieces stayed dew free by storing them in an insulated lunch box into which I had tossed 2-3 activated hand warmers, and putting them back in after use. Note to self: get Charlie Stark's (Markless Astronomics) UTA power setup ASAP.

Of the many cosmic friends observed over 3 nights of observaytin', perhaps the most memorable was observing something new: the Fetus Nebula. Look it up - under the right magnification, it looks just like it was named.

The weather was deteriorating leading up to the actual star party, so we bid adieu to our observaytin' buddies and the site and made the trek back to New Hampshire - stopping off in Albany NY on the way to order that RV we've been dreaming of. Enough of tents!--*Robert Wade*

**I've** discovered the secret to loving the Black Forest Star Party again. The secret is - attend without attending!

Yes, you read that correctly. Attend the star party without attending the star party. You probably don't remember my experience the last time, in 2013. (You can read about it in the November 2013 Reflections if you're interested). I wasn't too thrilled with the crowd and the amount of light trespass that inevitably comes with it. It seems it gets worse every year. But this year I'm singing a different tune - I LOVED the 2015 BFSP - mainly because I didn't attend. Confused?

The trick was arriving early. I had the entire week of September 7-11 off from work, so when others mentioned that the weather looked good early in the week, I decided to pack up everything and head out earlier than I planned. I left my house at 8:30 pm on Sunday, September 6, stopped in Newton Falls, Ohio (which is at about the halfway point when taking the southern

route), and drove the rest of the way Monday morning, arriving early afternoon. I was able to comfortably set up camp and scope and still had time to relax, eat a leisurely supper (if you can call heating a can of soup "supper"), and be ready for a good night of observaytin'.

There were other Lowbrows already there, namely Ken Ruble and Chris Sarnecki. There were quite a few other attendees, but nothing like when the star party actually starts on Friday. So our immediate neighbors were Lowbrows, who as you know are impeccable in their manners and respect for others' dark adaptation. Starting Monday night, we had four fair to impeccable Cherry Springs State Park dark skies to give us the opportunity to be so courteous. Monday night was clear but transparency wasn't great, not much better than what we can get in SE Michigan. Still, more than acceptable. Tuesday night started out similarly, but around 11:30 the transparency improved dramatically, without sacrificing steadiness. Most of us observed until 4:00 am when the clouds started rolling in. Wednesday evening it started raining, which continued through the night and through the next morning. The clouds remained pretty thick until evening, but forecasts predicted clearing skies as some point during the night. By now most of the rest of the Lowbrows had arrived, such as Robert and Wendy Wade, Don Fohey, and Jim and Ginia Forrester. Many of us were tired and decided to "nap", while others stayed up and watched the sky for the rest of us slackers.

This particular slacker remembers being awoken near midnight by the persistent Jim Forrester. I say persistent because I must have been sleeping pretty hard (ear plugs help a lot) and this was his fourth try since around 11:00. He was considering setting my tent on fire if I didn't wake up this time. Groggy, after laying there a few minutes to force my body



*Doug's Scope--All wrapped up*

awake, I unzipped my tent door, and looked out and up to the most spectacular star and Milky Way filled sky I've seen in a long, long time! That certainly woke me up! We had very transparent and steady skies until dawn. I finally crawled back into my sleeping bag around 5:45 am!

All weather forecasts predicted just a couple hours of so-so skies Friday evening, to give way to clouds the rest of the night and rain all day Saturday and no observatin' Saturday night. Packing up all my gear in the rain only to get home and unpack it all so it can dry out didn't interest me much, especially after doing some really good observing three out of the previous four nights. So I packed everything up Friday while it was sunny and dry, and said adios to everyone mid-afternoon. Yes, I missed the star party itself, including the talks and door prize drawing, but I also missed out on the additional crowd that was due to show up despite the gloomy weather forecast.

So now I'm loving the BFSP again, now that I didn't attend it. Still got to chum around with some of the best observing buddies one could ask for, still got to see some spectacular sights in the eyepiece (you'll have to wait for a different article describing my observations) under some of the finest skies to be found anywhere east of the Mississippi, got one bang-up homemade meal courtesy of the Forresters, all at a venue that really caters to us astro-nerds. Ahhh... the BFSP is awesome again! Can't wait for the next one I don't attend!

[For some photos Doug took during his trip, look here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/djscobelfam/albums/72157659236635941>]

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**This** year I had the opportunity to travel almost a week early to Cherry Springs (PA) State Park, home of the Black Forest Star Party (BFSP). Many Lowbrows attempt an early arrival before the Friday/Saturday annual star party as a way to get-away from work or home, and get a good camping/observing spot on the field. Ken Ruble and I were first out of A2 on Sunday, September 6th. Caravaning with a fellow Lowbrow is a great way to make the eight hour drive pass faster and provides added bit of safety on the road. Ken wanted to stop and see the George B. Stevenson flood control dam that was on the way to the park. We had left at 7 AM with the intent of making it to the park by mid afternoon so we could set up camp and get a little rest before the night's observing run. Everything went according to schedule as darkness approached except the clear skies were, well, not as clear as we had anticipated.

Now at an out-of-state star party, the first night observing is often abbreviated as you are probably too tired to stay up all night. We opted to play some cards under a red light as we waited out the unannounced clouds for about an hour. With no improvement in the sky, we decided to try an get some shut eye and observe in wee hours of the next morning. Up at about 1 AM, I assembled my scope and was ready around 2 AM, the same time the waning crescent Moon cleared the treed horizon. It's amazing how bright a 27% illuminated Moon is at a dark site like Cherry Springs. Ken was soon up and we were off the the races.

We looked at a lot of objects till 4:30 AM, but I'll mention just one. M77 in Cetus has always been but a faint whisk face on spiral galaxy that belies it's alleged almost mag 9 brightness. Normally M77 is a bright nucleus surrounded by a faint suggestion of nebulosity. Tonight, bathing in the bright light of the Moon, M77 was like I've never seen. The face on disk was bright with swirling clouds of nebulosity that jumped out of the eyepiece. Sure the bright nucleus was still there, but that was a side show compared to the 6-arcmin spiral. Every once in a while you experience a moment of clarity in your eyepiece when your scope, the seeing, and the atmosphere all cooperate. Well this was one of those moments. M77's image was burned into the back of my brain. It looked just like a photograph except I was enjoying it's ancient photons from a reported 60 million light years distant. All this under the bright lunar light trying interrupt the view.

While driving to Cherry Springs on the Sunday before Labor Day, Ken and I noticed lots of locals out for an extended camping weekend. Fearful of what I would find when arriving at Cherry Springs, I imagined the campground overrun by unruly and unsociable types of the night sky destroying kind. Well, I had nothing to fear as the folks at the Pennsylvania State Park system are looking out for the interest of amateur astronomers.

Years ago the park system realized the unique dark sky resource in this area of central northern Pennsylvania and has configured the park to safeguard the amazing dark skies. The campground around the main observing field is set aside for serious amateur astronomers. Conifer tree lines and earthen berms have been place along the road to block the nighttime light of passing cars. A light shielding gate is closed at dusk and signage to restrict white lights is placed at the entrance. Across the road a former airstrip has been converted to a nighttime amphitheater, also with earthen berms to shield car light, for the general public to enjoy night sky programs put on by the park rangers. Numerous permanent plaques explaining astronomy concepts are available throughout the park. Even the modern rest rooms have red lights on to protect your dark adapted eyes. All this and more make you realize that the park system is serious about protecting their dark sky.

Additional Lowbrows showed up on Monday and Tuesday. Doug Scobel, Robert and Wendy Wade, Don Fohey, and Jim and Ginia Forrester were welcomed into Camp Lowbrow. It was nice to reconnect with everyone at an overnight star party. Tuesday night's observing had us enjoying our collective 2015 BFSP Observing program. A week before leaving, everyone suggested a couple/three objects of interest for all to observe. Doug compiled the list and forwarded in a Sky-Safari format. While Tuesday night's sky started out less than perfect, by midnight the skies were cooperating. Although not the best Black Forest of dark skies, we did get to enjoy a fine aurora display for about 15 minutes around midnight. All too soon, my BFSP came to an end. I had negotiated three nights at Camp Lowbrow and had to leave Wednesday morning to head back to reality. I'm already looking forward to my next trip to a dark sky with the Lowbrows. If you can, do join the Lowbrows at the next star party under a dark sky. You'll be glad you did.

## University Lowbrow Astronomers Meeting Minutes

Sept. 18, 2015

President, Charlie opened the meeting at 7:38PM

VP, Don Fohey and Treasurer, Doug Scobel gave a PowerPoint and photo presentation of the Black Forest astronomy meeting. Very nice. Support from the other Lowbrow members attending augmented their presentation.

Business Meeting:

President, Charlie Nielsen -

- Charlie gave an update on the "key" situation. Recently communications between us and U of M seemed to be improving.
- He mentioned that tomorrow we will be meeting at LSNC for an out-reach program from 8-10 PM, and asked for more member to bring scopes in support of this event.
- The lunar eclipse was mentioned. A gathering at Washtenaw County Park is scheduled. The parking lot will be available for setup on Sunday, Sept 27.
- He requested support for obtaining meeting speakers for 2016.
- Brother Guy Consolmagno will be the speaker for November, and will take place at an EMU auditorium.
- There was a mention about Night Sky Network. We won a random draw of events logged last May, which was Camp Hazelwoods. We received a "Pocket Solar System", which consist of small, puzzling as to their use, models of the rocky planets and our moon.

VP, Dave Snyder -

- Dave requested more support for our Facebook page. Anyone with a photo of an astronomy event along with a paragraph or two could submit these to Dave and/or Krishna.

VP, Ken Ruble -

- Ken is continuing to pursue a field trip to Plane Wave. Timing may be an issue since the potential speaker is quite busy. Suggestions about timing for this event were discussed. Members who are working might have difficulty attending during working days. Jim Forrester Mentiones that sometimes field trips were arranged on Sunday afternoons.

Treasurer, Doug Scobel -

- Currently, 126 members
- Cash is at \$5995
- Now taking orders for RASC calendars and handbooks. But members must pay in advance of placing orders. Calendars are \$20.00 and handbooks are \$27.00. Oct. 16 is the deadline for orders.

Webmaster, Krishna Rao -

- He supported Dave Snyder's request for more member input to our Facebook page.
- He suggested Ethan Siegel and Pamela Gay as possible speakers.

Observatory Director, Jack Brisbin -

- Jack was pleased that we had UofM support for using chain saws to remove a downed tree blocking the drive up the hill.

Newsletter Editor, Jim Forrester -

- Jim made a plea for more articles for our newsletter.

GLAAC Representative, Paul Walkowski -

- Paul described the changes we should expect at this year's "Astronomy at the Beach" event, next weekend, including costs, parking, and other things regarding financing of this event.
- The main speaker will be a physicist from Albion College who does many out-reach activities.
- This is a large event including astronomy clubs from the area. Typical participation is about 2000 people and many amateur astronomers with scopes.

President, Charlie Nielsen closed the meeting at 9:19 PM

Respectfully submitted,

David Jorgensen, VP, University Lowbrow Astronomers

Lowbrows Photograph the

# September 27 Lunar Eclipse



*Val Guarjado*



*Doug Scobel  
(right and below)*



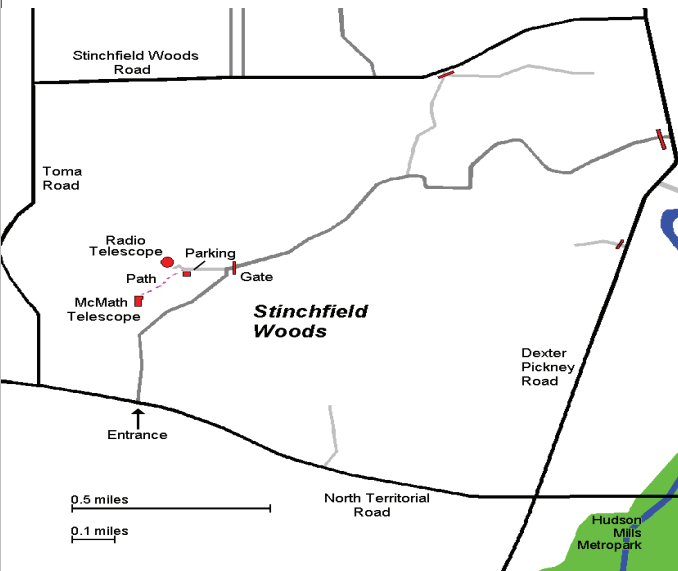
*Jack Brisbin*



**Places & Times**

Monthly meetings of the University Lowbrow Astronomers are held the third Friday of each month at 7:30 PM. The location is usually Angell Hall, ground floor, Room G115. Angell Hall is located on State Street on the University of Michigan Central Campus, between North University and South University Streets. The building entrance nearest Room G115 is the east facing door at the south end of Angell Hall. A club observing session at the Peach Mountain Observatory, weather permitting, often follows the meeting.

Peach Mountain Observatory is the home of the University of Michigan's 25 meter radio telescope as well as the University's McMath 24" telescope, maintained and operated by the Lowbrows. Located northwest of Dexter, MI; the entrance is off North Territorial Road, 1.1 miles west of Dexter-Pinckney Rd. A maize and blue sign marks the gate. Follow the gravel road to the top of the hill to a parking area south of the radio telescope, then walk About 100 yards along the path west of the fence to reach the McMath Observatory.



**Public Open House / Star Parties**

Public Open Houses / Star Parties are generally held on the Saturdays before and after the New Moon at the Peach Mountain observatory, but are usually cancelled if the sky is cloudy at sunset or the temperature is below 10 degrees F. For the most up to date info on the Open House / Star Party status call: (734)332-9132. Many members bring their telescope to share with the public and visitors are welcome to do the same. Peach Mountain is home to millions of hungry mosquitoes, so apply bug repellent, and it can get rather cold at night, please dress accordingly.

**Membership**

**Membership dues in the University Lowbrow Astronomers are \$30 per year for individuals or families, \$20 per year for students and seniors (age 55+) and \$5 if you live outside of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.**

**This entitles you to the access to our monthly Newsletters on-line at our website and use of the 24" McMath telescope (after some training).**

**A hard copy of the Newsletter can be obtained with an additional \$18 annual fee to cover printing and postage. Dues can be paid at the monthly meetings or by check made out to University Lowbrow Astronomers and mailed to:**

**The University Lowbrow Astronomers**

**P.O. 131446**

**Ann Arbor, MI 48113**

Membership in the Lowbrows can also get you a discount on these magazine subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope - \$32.95 / year \$62.95/2 years

Astronomy - \$34.00 / year or \$60.00 for 2 years

For more information contact the club Treasurer at:

lowbrowdoug@gmail.com

**Newsletter Contributions**

Members and (non-members) are encouraged to write about any astronomy related topic of interest.

Call or Email the Newsletter Editor: **Jim Forrester (734) 663-1638 or jim\_forrester@hotmail.com** to discuss length and format. Announcements, articles and images are due by the 1<sup>st</sup> day of the month as publication is the 7<sup>th</sup>.

**Telephone Numbers**

- President: Charlie Nielsen (734) 747-6585
- Vice Presidents: Dave Snyder (734) 747-6537
- Dave Jorgenson
- Don Fohey
- Ken Ruble
- Treasurer: Doug Scobel (734)277-7908
- Observatory Director: Jack Brisbin
- Newsletter Editor: Jim Forrester (734) 663-1638
- Key-holders: Jim Forrester (734) 663-1638
- Fred Schebor (734) 426-2363
- Charlie Nielsen (734) 747-6585
- Webmaster: Krishna Rao

**Lowbrow's Home Page**

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/>

**Email at:**

[Lowbrow-members@umich.edu](mailto:Lowbrow-members@umich.edu)



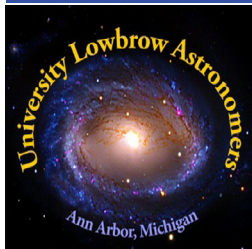


## University Lowbrow Astronomers

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### Reflections & Refractions



### Website

[www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/](http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/)



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## Peach Mountain Deer Want To Know !

Have I got this Right?

Pluto has an atmosphere of Nitrogen and Methane that is layered and has an Ion Tail?

The Tombaugh Region is geologically active with Nitrogen, Methane and Carbon Monoxide ices

Pluto has 5 moons and orbits the SUN !

But it's..... NOT A PLANET !!

Observatory Director Jack Brisbin discovered everyone has an opinion about Pluto.