

After Dark

Updates from the Great Basin Observatory



First Light and the NPS Centennial: August 25, 2016

On August 25, 1916, President Woodrow Wilson signed the “Organic Act” creating the National Park Service. A century later, Great Basin National Park celebrated the anniversary with the “First Light” of the Great Basin Observatory, the first research-grade astronomical observatory located in a national park. The facility was built with funds raised by the Park’s non-profit partner, the Great Basin National Park Foundation.

The ceremony included addresses from several honored guests. Alvin Marques, Chairman of the Ely Shoshone Tribe, recalled his grandmother’s stories of the stars above, while Congressman Hardy and Governor Sandoval expressed their fondness for Great Basin National Park and Nevada’s starry night skies. Foundation representatives Becky Mills and Mike

Niggli shared with the audience how the GBO came to be and the opportunities it creates for students.

A highlight of the ceremony was the honoring of Elinor Tilford Charleston as Great Basin’s Centennial Ranger. Born in Ely, Nevada in 1916, Elinor reached her 100th birthday earlier this year. Elinor was given a ranger badge and flat hat by the Park, while Governor Sandoval took to his knee to present her with a Nevada silver dollar minted in Carson City.

The ceremony closed with the EskDale Girls’ Ensemble singing *Bright Morning Stars* and Park Superintendent Steve Mietz cutting the ribbon. Following the ceremony, guests toured the dome and control room before heading to Baker for birthday cake, solar scopes, and more centennial activities.



The GBO was dedicated with a ribbon cutting ceremony on August 25, 2016, the centennial of the National Park Service.

What's Next?



With construction completed, the GBO is now in the “shakedown” phase. Project manager Paul Gardner has been remotely operating the GBO every night, running a series of tests. And so far, everything is working just as it should. The GBO even got an unscheduled test in early September due to a power outage: the battery backups performed as programmed, closing the dome until power was restored.

For the first year, Mike Niggli will be the GBO Director, leading the GBO team as it develops operating procedures and begins its initial research projects. Key committees are the Advisory Committee (chaired by Mike Niggli); Operations & Research (chaired by Dr. Tyler Nordgren) and Education & Outreach (chaired by Dr. Briget Eatep). The Foundation will continue fundraising for the GBO.

First Light Photo



The official “First Light” photo taken by the Planewave CDK700 telescope donated by the Niggli Family was of a star located in the W constellation of Cassiopeia. The star, named *Ruchbah*, holds special significance for the National Park Service and the Great Basin Observatory. Ruchbah sits almost exactly 100 light years away from Earth. Light that left Ruchbah 100 years ago, in 1916—the birth year of the National Park Service—reached us the day we celebrate First Light. Moreover, Ruchbah is close enough to the North Star, Polaris, so that as the Earth turns, Ruchbah circles around Polaris but never sets. It is therefore always visible, all night, every night, all year long. Like the Rangers of the National Park Service, it is always there, always on duty.

Who We Are

The Great Basin Observatory is a collaborative effort of Great Basin National Park; the Great Basin National Park Foundation; and four partner universities: University of Nevada, Reno; Western Nevada College in Carson City; Southern Utah University in Cedar City; and Concordia University in Irvine, CA. These partners have joined together in order to build and operate the first research-grade telescope in a National Park for the benefit of students, scholars, and Park visitors. The GBO will enable researchers

to explore fundamental questions about our universe, and its location in Great Basin National Park underscores the need to preserve night skies as a park resource.

Learn more at www.greatbasinobservatory.org.
Send us a note at greatbasinobservatory@gmail.com
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Great Basin Observatory
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GBO Donors

The Great Basin Observatory is now a reality because over 100 individuals, families, and foundations made generous donations. All told, over \$800,000 has been raised: enough to build the GBO, purchase the essential equipment, and fund the first three years of operations. We are also grateful for the donation of broadband internet service by WestNet.

Sagan Society - \$100,000+

Michael and Linda Niggli and Family
David Nathan Meyerson Foundation
Great Basin Heritage Area Partnership
Mt. Cuba Astronomical Foundation

Galaxy - \$20,000

Cashman Family Foundation
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Marge Sill
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Moving forward, we will continue to raise funds for additional equipment and to create the *Reach for the Stars* Education Outreach program to connect K-12 students to the GBO and the educational opportunities it makes possible. Visit www.greatbasinobservatory.org and help us to raise the next generation of scientists and stargazers!

Galileo Group - \$50,000+

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Community Foundation of Western Nevada
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