

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park



Dark Sky Festival

Please join us for the 4TH Annual Dark Sky Festival here at Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park. During our annual Dark Sky Festival, visitors are invited to come explore the night sky and the unique park landscapes which can help us better understand wonders beyond our world. This event wouldn't be possible without the help from the volunteers from many different organizations including: The Bell Museum, La Crosse Area Astronomical Society, Luther College, Minnesota Astronomical Society, Rochester Astronomy Club, Starry Skies North, and Winona State University!

FRIDAY, AUGUST 9TH

7 – 9 PM

Build a Star Wheel!

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Ever wonder what is up in the night sky on any particular night? Our stars move across the night sky from hour to hour and month to month, changing constantly! This can make it seem daunting to know and identify what you are seeing in the night sky. One easy way to know what's up in the night sky is to use a planisphere or a star wheel. Come any time between 7 and 8:30 PM to build a star wheel (that you get to keep) and learn how to use it. Weather permitting starting at 8:30 PM we will do some night sky viewing and test out your planispheres you have built!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 10TH

12 – 3 PM

Exploring Our Moon, Sun, and Solar System

Meet at the Townsite Loop Trail Head across from the Historic Forestville Parking Lot

Join Dr. Jennifer Anderson, Professor of Geoscience at Winona State University and safely look at our Sun and the waxing crescent Moon through telescopes during the day! Dr. Anderson will also have a scale model of our Solar System and some meteorites available for you to examine. Then take a 1-mile walk through a prairie field as you travel from the Sun all the way to Pluto and experience how big our solar system really is! The solar system walk can be done on your own and will be up from 12 -8 PM. Please note you should never directly look at the sun without the proper protection, as you can damage your eyes!

12 – 6 PM

Kids Crafts and Activities

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Come on down to the picnic shelter any time between 12 and 6 PM to join some fun activities. Activities will include painting a galaxy, Junior Ranger: Night Explorer activity booklet, kids coloring pages, and creating sidewalk art. You can also pick up a copy of a night sky scavenger hunt!

SATURDAY, AUGUST 10TH Continued

3 – 6 PM

Solar Scope Viewing

Meet at the William H. Morrissey Visitor Center at Mystery Cave

Safely gaze upon the Sun & Moon with an advanced, high-powered solar scope! The Sun is a dynamic and fascinating place to observe, doing so with this technology allows for safe sun staring. Join the Rochester Astronomy Club at the William H. Morrissey Visitor Center at Mystery Cave to see the center of our solar system with your own eyes! Please note you should never directly look at the sun without the proper protection, as you can damage your eyes!

6 – 7 PM

Light Pollution: What it Means to You with Starry Skies North

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Learn about the impacts of artificial light at night, what it means for you, our ecosystem, and how to enact simple change with Starry Skies North – the local chapter of Dark Sky International. Take a tour through the local impacts of light pollution, introduce yourself to easy solutions, and see stunning pictures of the cosmos during this presentation. A Question-and-Answer session will follow.

6:30 – 7 PM

Family Story Time with Starry Skies North

Meet at the Amphitheater

Join Starry Skies North as we discover the wonders of the cosmos, the wondrous corners of our earth, and the creatures that we inhabit our lands with during family story time at the amphitheater at 6:30 PM. Families will also learn about light pollution, what it means for our world, and what solutions we are all capable of, even our youngest - so that we may view the stars and the night sky with the same amazement we experience at a park like Forestville/Mystery Cave State Park, perhaps in our own backyards as well.

7 – 8 PM

The Universe's Story Seen in the Beauty of the August Sky

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

The dark August sky holds an array of beautiful objects, from Saturn to star clouds in the Milky Way Galaxy, and to distant galaxies beyond. Join Dr. Wilkerson, Professor of astronomy and physics at Luther College & explore how these objects tell the story of the universe. From the Big Bang to 2024, let's explore the nature of the physical entities that make up the universe. These objects in the August sky also remind us of the persistence and creativity of people building our understanding of where we are and what lies around us.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 10TH Continued

7:30 – 9:30 PM Right Side of the Box: Bats and Bat Boxes

Meet at the Palisade Trail Parking Lot

Melissa Boman, a Mammal Specialist for the Minnesota Biological Survey, has been conducting research across the state about bats and their use of bat houses. Come learn about her research findings and participate in some community science by help count bats as they emerge from bat houses in our park! This program will start at the Palisade Trail's parking lot with a short talk followed by the bat count. Please bring a chair or blanket to sit on along with a headlamp, bug spray is also recommended along with longs sleeves and pants.

8:30 – 10:30 PM Universe in the Park

Meet at the Picnic Shelter

Join scientists from the Minnesota Institute for Astrophysics for a close-up view of targets like Saturn and Jupiter, the remnants of stellar explosions, or even distant galaxies. We hope you can join us for a night of science under the stars! This program will start at the picnic shelter with a brief talk and then move over to the Townsite Loop Trail Head across from the Historic Forestville Parking Lot.

8:30 – 10:30 PM Minnesota Starwatch Program with Mike Lynch

Meet at the Townsite Loop Trail Head across from the Historic Forestville Parking Lot

Make the stars your old friends with Mike Lynch, a retired WCCO meteorologist. We will watch the great celestial show in the skies over Southeastern Minnesota. Get to know constellations like The Big Bear, Cygnus the Swan, Pegasus the Winged Horse, and many others. Great constellation mythological stories will also be featured! We'll have giant telescopes aimed at the moon, Saturn, star clusters, galaxies, and more. An astronomical camera system will also capture breathtaking color images!

8:30 – 10:30 PM Dark Sky Festival Star Party

Meet at the Townsite Loop Trail Head across from the Historic Forestville Parking Lot

Bring your own telescopes or binoculars and a red flashlight and enjoy the stars in a truly dark sky! The park and Winona State University will provide telescopes for night sky viewing. Dr. Jennifer Anderson of Winona State University and other sky enthusiasts will be there to guide you through the wonders of the night sky, tell you constellation stories, and enjoy the Perseid Meteor Shower. For continued night sky viewing the Minnesota Astronomical Society will be continuing to host the Star Party following 10:30 PM.

ALL WEEKEND

Friday August 11th – Sunday August 14th

StoryWalk®: Star Party by Polly Carson-Voiles and Illustrated by Consie Powel

Located in the picnic grounds around the Picnic Shelter at Forestville

Please enjoy this self-guided StoryWalk®: Star Party by Polly Carson-Voiles and Illustrated by Consie Powel. “When children and nature gather at the right moment in time, something magical happens. Join Nora and her grandparents as they gaze skyward and wonder: who else is having a star party, just like them?”



If you need an accommodation, please contact park staff at mystery.caves@state.mn.us or 507-808-8000, two weeks prior to the event.



mndnr.gov/events

Thanks again to all our volunteers! This event wouldn't be possible without them!!

