

# Fort St. James hosts star buffs

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Prince George-based skywatchers are helping Fort St. James get star struck.

Astronomers from the local chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada will bring their expertise to the 2012 Star Party at Fort St. James National Historic Site tomorrow for the third year.

Society president Blair Stunder said the event draws avid and amateur sky viewers of all ages, families and the merely curious to the annual event that offers basic stargazing, telescope use instruction and education about light pollution.

Stars of all kinds will be up for grabs on Saturday, beginning with the largest in our solar system – the sun. Between 1 and 4 p.m., Prince George astronomers will have special telescopes and those with strong filters blocking out nearly all of the light to view solar flares.

"It's interesting to see people who have never seen the sun from that aspect," Stunder said.

At 7 p.m. there will be a screening of *The City Dark*, a film about light pollution and the importance of conserving night sky views commonly found throughout northern B.C. By the time the film is over, Stunder said it will be dark enough to break out the larger telescopes for the night-sky viewing.

The event is timed to coincide with new moons, which set earlier and leave the night sky darker.

"We're not going to have moonlight at night to interfere with viewing," Stunder said.

In addition to constellations and nebulas, there are also remnants of the Perseid meteor shower – which reached its peak last weekend – still to be seen.

New to the Star Party is the ability for attendees to spend the night. While stargazing lasts until the wee



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hours of the morning, for a \$15 fee, a maximum of 15 tent-bearing visitors can bring their camping gear and sleep over.

On Sunday morning, visitors can explore the historic site and refuel on a free pancake breakfast. Campers must register by calling the Fort St. James National Historic Site at 250-996-7191. Public programs during the daylight hours, including the solar viewing, are subject to regular admission fees. Those who attend the evening film screening and night stargazing (but not camping) are admitted for free after 5 p.m.

The society's observatory, near West Lake on Tedford Road, is also now open for its fall public viewing sessions on Friday nights at 7:30 p.m. The fall session runs until the last Friday in November, weather permitting.