

FIELD TRIP: Lowell Observatory Field Trip

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The night sky over San Francisco Peaks, Flagstaff, Arizona. Photo by Dan & Cindy Duriscoe, FDSC, Lowell Obs., USNO

Lowell Observatory Stargazing in the Southwestern U.S.

The Lowell Observatory is situated on Mars Hill less than one mile from downtown Flagstaff. In 1894, Percival Lowell selected Flagstaff to study the planet Mars because of its high elevation (7,000 feet above MSL) and clear, dark skies. The observatory is a Registered National Historic Landmark and in 2011 *Time Magazine* called Lowell one of “The World’s 100 Most Important Places.”

Some of the notable discoveries of Lowell Observatory:

- Discovery of Pluto in 1930;
- First detection of the expanding nature of the universe;
- Moon mapping for the Apollo program;
- Co-discovery of the rings of Uranus in 1977;
- First detection of water in the atmosphere of an extrasolar planet.

Currently, the Lowell Observatory manages or co-manages eight telescopes, including the original, 24-inch refracting Clark Telescope built by Alvan Clark & Sons of Cambridgeport, Massachusetts in 1895.

It turns out that in a city of more than 68,000, it takes a village to operate an observatory. On 24 October 2001, Flagstaff became the World’s first International Dark Sky City.

