

# GUEST SPOTLIGHT



## FINDING PEACE UNDER DARK SKIES

Andrew Miller

**Dark Skies of the Wet Mountain Valley**

*Board Member*

### *Dark Skies of the Wet Mountain Valley*

Dark Skies of the Wet Mountain Valley was founded in 1999 with the primary purpose of limiting light pollution of the night sky in the towns of Westcliffe and Silver Cliff, CO. After many years spent diligently working with and educating the local community, we finally received Colorado's first, and still only, International Dark Sky Community designation for Westcliffe and Silver Cliff. We also currently maintain the designation as the world's highest Dark Sky Community.

### *Smokey Jack Observatory*

Since our certification, national and international media outlets have covered our story, including the creation of the Smokey Jack Observatory (SJO), where we host free public and private Star Parties where guests can view the magnificence of our Universe through the lens of a state of the art 14-inch telescope.

Beginning in the summer of 2018, we launched a new website and online booking system for groups and individuals to book their own Star Parties and to our pleasant surprise, the SJO was fully booked through the entire summer, hosting over 600 people from all over the country and world. This dramatic increase in tourism to the SJO and the local community we have seen simply shows how much people are desiring to feel the peace and awe found in gazing into our night skies.

Image: Mike Pach, 3 Peaks Photography & Design





*“I’ve never seen  
so many stars!”*

### *A Sense of Peace & Calm*

The most common phrase we hear from first-time visitors is “I’ve never seen so many stars!”. This is usually said with a sense of awe that is simply not possible in just about any city environment at night. As people stare into the billions and billions of stars, just from our own galaxy, which is just one of hundreds of billions of galaxies estimated in the universe, a sense of being overwhelmed can certainly be experienced. However, in this moment of being humbled by the infinite expanse above us, we can find a sense of peace and calm that seems to connect us to what it actually means to be human. And all of this can be experienced by simply preserving the night sky above us by limiting light pollution.

We most definitely think that preserving our dark skies is important to feeling at peace as a human. Connecting with the night sky above us is one of the oldest activities humans have undergone.

In fact, some of the oldest art in the world are depictions of the night sky, such as the star map found in Lascaux cave in France, estimated to be 16,500 years old and the El Castillo, Spain cave painting of the Northern Crown constellation, estimated to be 14,000 years old. Furthermore, entire ancient civilizations, such as the Egyptians, were centered around the orientation of the night sky.

Unfortunately, this deep ancestral connection to the stars is far from many modern humans as 99% of Americans can never even see the Milky Way due to light pollution, regardless of the night sky conditions, according to the

Light Pollution Science and Technology Institute. However, with the work of so many committed individuals from all over working to limit light pollution and educate people on the tremendous benefits of preserving our dark skies, we are excited and optimistic for reestablishing our ancient connection to the stars!

If you would like to visit the SJO in person to experience our dark skies, simply go to [DarkSkiesColorado.org](http://DarkSkiesColorado.org) to book and see the latest availability for private Star Parties. Our events calendar also lists all of our public Star Parties for 2019.

*Dark Skies of the Wet Mountain Valley is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving the exceptional quality of the natural dark skies of the Wet Mountain Valley in Custer County, Colorado, by assisting the community with individual preservation efforts and by educational programs supporting observation, appreciation and preservation of the natural dark skies.*