



Preface

London's Underground may not be the most suitable place for contemplating the universe, but on a journey in the late 1990s from Green Park Underground station to London Waterloo, my eye was caught by a car card, one of those small advertisements that run along the carriages below the roof line. Unusually, it advertised stargazing holidays. Its message: that jaded Londoners could seek rest and relaxation beneath the star-strewn night skies of Pembrokeshire, southwest Wales, away from the bustle and the light pollution of the big city.

I spent my childhood in East London in the 1950s, a time of post-war rationing and austerity. Road lights were rather sparse and fairly dim and went off in the late evening. During the winter, when the nights were long and I could play outside with friends before bedtime, I noticed the stars and planets in the sky from the relative darkness between the lights. My interest in astronomy was sparked. When I dared to stay out late, risking my mother's wrath, I would wait for the lights to go off and see just what the universe had to offer, marveling at its shifting lights and star patterns, before going home to face the music.

Then came the decades of intensive lighting, most of it poorly directed, shining outwards and upwards. On all night, it erased the starry scene that had formed part of my childhood.

Now, in the twenty-first century, the vast majority of urban children have had no experience of the real night sky. For many, their evening world has shrunk to the size of a small screen or two in a bedroom at home. Of course, they can use their computers to call up, should they wish to, images of startling beauty taken by today's giant telescopes or by amateur astronomers with the latest cameras and image processing programs. Here is a sad irony of modern life. Most people in the developed world, the town and city dwellers, have lost sight of the near and far



Fig. 1 “Half the park is after dark.” (Photo courtesy Dr. Tyler Nordgren)

universe from their gardens and parks because so much lighting now shines where it is not needed, while other technologies, those of spacecraft and state-of-the-art optics, can show them in their own homes what the universe looks like, on televisions, tablets, laptops, and telephones. The immediacy and reality of the universe have receded into the pixels.

Perhaps we have never really lost our desire to see for ourselves what’s up there. Recently, astronomy clubs and courses have seen a marked increase in attendance.

Outdoor observing sessions attract ever greater numbers of hopeful stargazers. Teachers know that, of all their science topics, space is the one that is likely to hold the attention of their classes. People are seeing more stars in cities, thanks to the work of campaigners for better directed lighting, and the lighting industry has responded over the years with increasing numbers of downward-directed lamps on our streets.

The trickle of astro-tourists from urban areas has become a stream, though not yet a torrent. Many hotels and campsites and indeed whole counties, national parks, and nature reserves now advertise and protect their stars. For example, national parks in the United States have published striking posters (Fig. 1) designed by Dr. Tyler Nordgren, telling us that “Half the park is after dark”.¹ Like so many other such areas, Maine’s Acadia National Park now holds star parties, where volunteer local astronomers and park rangers guide visitors through the constellations and zoom in on planets and other night sky wonders from Cadillac Mountain.

That single Underground car card, with its Welsh stars, nowadays has competition. Ever more numerous ads for breaks beneath the stars appear in newspapers, on the Internet, in travel magazines, and cruise line leaflets. This book will examine a new tide of discovery, as urbanites reconnect with their ancient heritage above. *Finding a Million-Star Hotel* is aimed primarily at those with limited possibilities for astronomy, who seek out the thrill of the stars they cannot see at home. It will also look to a future when the real night sky will be readily accessible even from urban areas, just as images of the Crab Nebula and the Andromeda Galaxy can nowadays be revealed by a quick web search.

Wimborne, UK

Bob Mizon

¹ www.ecology.com/2013/05/10/national-park-service-posters.

<http://www.springer.com/978-3-319-33854-5>

Finding a Million-Star Hotel

An Astro-Tourist's Guide to Dark Sky Places

Mizon, B.

2016, XVII, 322 p. 179 illus., 175 illus. in color.,

Softcover

ISBN: 978-3-319-33854-5