

La Société Guernesiaise Astronomical Observatory

Risk Assessment and Guidance to Visiting Groups

General

- ☆ The Observatory is operated by the Astronomy Section of La Société Guernesiaise. Members of the Astronomy Section are volunteers.
- ☆ Evening visits to the Observatory are inevitably in dusk, near-dark or dark conditions. Therefore people may bump into things or into each other.
- ☆ Small torches for personal use are advisable (although they should not be used indiscriminately as that can affect people's enjoyment of the night sky).
- ☆ There are no known flashing light hazards. Hand-held green lasers (<5-milliwatt power) are used by Astronomy Section members to point out objects, such as stars, in the sky, and a laser is also used to align the main telescope. These devices are safe when used properly, but can be hazardous if shone directly into someone's eyes or at aircraft. They are, therefore, under the secure control of our members at all times; others are not permitted to use them.
- ☆ The Observatory does not have a salle publique licence, none having been applied for. However, it does comply with Building Control regulations, and the advice of the Fire Safety Officer has been followed in respect of fire precautions, including the provision of fire extinguishers.
- ☆ Three members of the Astronomy Section have applied for and received Police clearance in respect of working with children and vulnerable people.
- ☆ La Société Guernesiaise holds adequate insurance in respect of third party liability.
- ☆ There is an outhouse-type modern toilet with hand-washing facilities (cold water only).
- ☆ No charge is made to visiting groups, but donations are always welcome to assist with maintenance and equipment.
- ☆ Directions to the Observatory are attached. The telephone number is 264252.

Access

- ☆ There is limited parking at the Observatory. It may, therefore, be necessary to park at La Houquette School, where there is usually space during the evening or school holidays. The parking system there is such that it is possible to get blocked in by other cars.
- ☆ **If walking at night between La Houquette School and the Observatory along the main road (Rue des Paysans, 100 metres) torches are definitely needed. High-visibility clothing should be considered. There are no street-lights, and the single pavement, which is on the opposite side of the road, is uneven. It is necessary to cross the road twice. There is a 25 mph speed limit in the area, because of the proximity of the School, but traffic is known to go considerably faster than that, especially at night. At the School there is a pedestrian crossing, but care is needed, especially in the dark. There is no pedestrian crossing at the Observatory end of the road.**
- ☆ Rue du Lorier is a narrow lane, and there is no pavement. However, there is only a short stretch (about 20 metres) to walk along it from the main road. There is little traffic on it, and the 25 mph speed limit applies.
- ☆ Direction signs are normally put out (at the entrance to Rue du Lorier and at the Observatory entrance) when visitors are expected.

- ☆ If driving into the Observatory car park, please dim lights so as not to disturb any observing taking place.
- ☆ Usually at least one large telescope (an 11-inch Celestron) is operated from an outdoor concrete pad. There is easy wheelchair access to this area and to the main building, which are level with the general outside area. There are two steps up into the building housing the largest telescope, and there is no ramp.

Car park / entrance

- ☆ The surface is rough (rolled road planings), but reasonable. There are no exceptional surface hazards, although there are a few dips. There may be puddles after heavy rain.
- ☆ Two security-type lights in the Observatory car park illuminate when movement is sensed. They may occasionally be switched off, so it is advisable to use a torch.
- ☆ Cars are usually parked in this area, and it is necessary to walk around them.
- ☆ On the left (grass) side, there is a slight dip (about 50 cm), and gorse. However, it is not on the direct entrance route.

Outside

- ☆ The outside area surface is grass, which is normally kept mown. It can, of course, be wet from rain or dew.
- ☆ Protruding from the concrete pad is an electric outlet (about 10 cm high). It has a screw cover when not in use. When it is in use the telescope covers it; otherwise it is a trip hazard.
- ☆ Sometimes, but not always, red and/or white lights are on.
- ☆ Dogs from the neighbourhood occasionally leave their droppings; there has been little evidence of this recently, however.
- ☆ The area is surrounded by a hedge, in which there are brambles.

Main building

- ☆ Visitors to the Observatory can go into this building, and if it is cloudy they are most likely to spend some time in it. Members of the Astronomy Section present PowerPoint slide presentations and computer demonstrations, and can talk with visitors, answer questions, etc.
- ☆ The building is equipped with a ceiling-mounted projector, computer, seating for 20 people, wall-mounted pictures and displays, astronomical magazines, a library, and coffee/tea making facilities.
- ☆ The building has a single entrance/exit door, and two shuttered windows (which can be opened from the inside).
- ☆ Usually a white light is on, but sometimes just a red one (which helps to maintain night vision).
- ☆ An all-sky camera at the site (mounted on the corner of the telescope building) takes continuous images of the entire night sky, and uploads them to a website. It can be affected by lights in the area, so the door to the main building is kept closed as much as possible.

Telescope building

- ☆ The telescope building has a roll-off roof, providing a clear view of the sky. It is operated by an electrically powered winch and cables. Hands must be kept clear of these when it is operation, but they are not readily accessible and usually a member is present near the winch when it is working.
- ☆ The building contains two telescopes (a 16-inch Meade, and a 5-inch Takahashi refractor) mounted together on a single pier. It also contains a computer on which can be shown sky simulations, pictures of objects, websites, etc. Sometimes a live image of the Moon is shown, by the use of a webcam attached to one of the telescopes.
- ☆ There are two steps up to the door. They are constructed of concrete blocks, and the edges of the steps are marked by white paint and/or reflective tread grip. On one side of the steps there is a single, wooden railing, painted white.
- ☆ The telescopes are computer-driven, and, although under operator control, can move suddenly. It is possible for people to get struck by them, but their rate of movement is slow and unlikely to cause harm. We normally give a warning when the telescopes are about to move.
- ☆ People can also bang their heads or eyes on the telescope, especially the eyepieces. We generally guide people to the eyepiece.
- ☆ A small stepladder is available for use when the telescope eyepiece is in a high position, especially for children who may not be tall enough to see through the eyepiece. Users should:
 - ensure that the ladder is in the best position, not too close or too far; they should be able to stand upright, without leaning forward or backward;
 - not mount higher than the second step;
 - hold onto the rail provided on the ladder.
- ☆ There is a single entrance/exit to this building. During observing the roof is open. The walls are about two metres high.
- ☆ There are two 60-watt wardrobe-type heaters, one on the telescope pier and one in the computer cupboard. These can be hot to the touch, but they are not easily accessible.
- ☆ There may sometimes be trailing leads, although we try to keep these out of people's way.

Observing

- ☆ It is helpful if persons waiting their turn to look through a telescope can queue, and then, once they have had a look, move away from the telescope so that the next person can take a look. We are happy for people to take their time to ensure that they get a good telescope view.
- ☆ Please do not touch the telescopes. This can cause them to go out of alignment, which takes time to re-establish.
- ☆ There are no eye hazards from observing objects visible in the night sky.
- ☆ Members of the Astronomy Section will attempt to point out stars, constellations, interesting objects, and passing satellites, and to inform groups about objects of interest and the equipment. It is helpful if adult supervisors can ensure that children are attentive. We encourage questions.

- ☆ **It is dangerous to look at the Sun directly, and especially through any optical instrument which has not been appropriately filtered.** Sometimes during daytime the Sun is observed using a heliostat mirror device, which projects an image onto a screen in the main building. The projected image is safe to look at, but those present should be warned not to look into the mirrors, which are outside. Occasionally specially filtered telescopes may be used for observing the Sun. People must follow members' directions and warning notices.

Postscript

- ☆ Thousands of people have visited the Observatory since it was opened in 1991, and there have not to our knowledge been any significant untoward incidents.
- ☆ Our aim is to provide people with an enjoyable, memorable experience, and to impart some knowledge and understanding of the night sky, of the universe, and the wonderful objects it contains.
- ☆ If anyone is interested in pursuing the subject of astronomy, our website (www.astronomy.org.gg) contains a lot of information and links. We welcome new members. A leaflet about the Astronomy Section is available on request, and is published on the website.
- ☆ This self-assessment, consisting of four pages, has been compiled in good faith as an aid to La Société Guernesiaise and organisers of group visits to the Observatory. Neither the author nor La Société accept any responsibility for its accuracy or completeness.
- ☆ We welcome feedback on this document.

La Société Guernesaise Astronomy Section

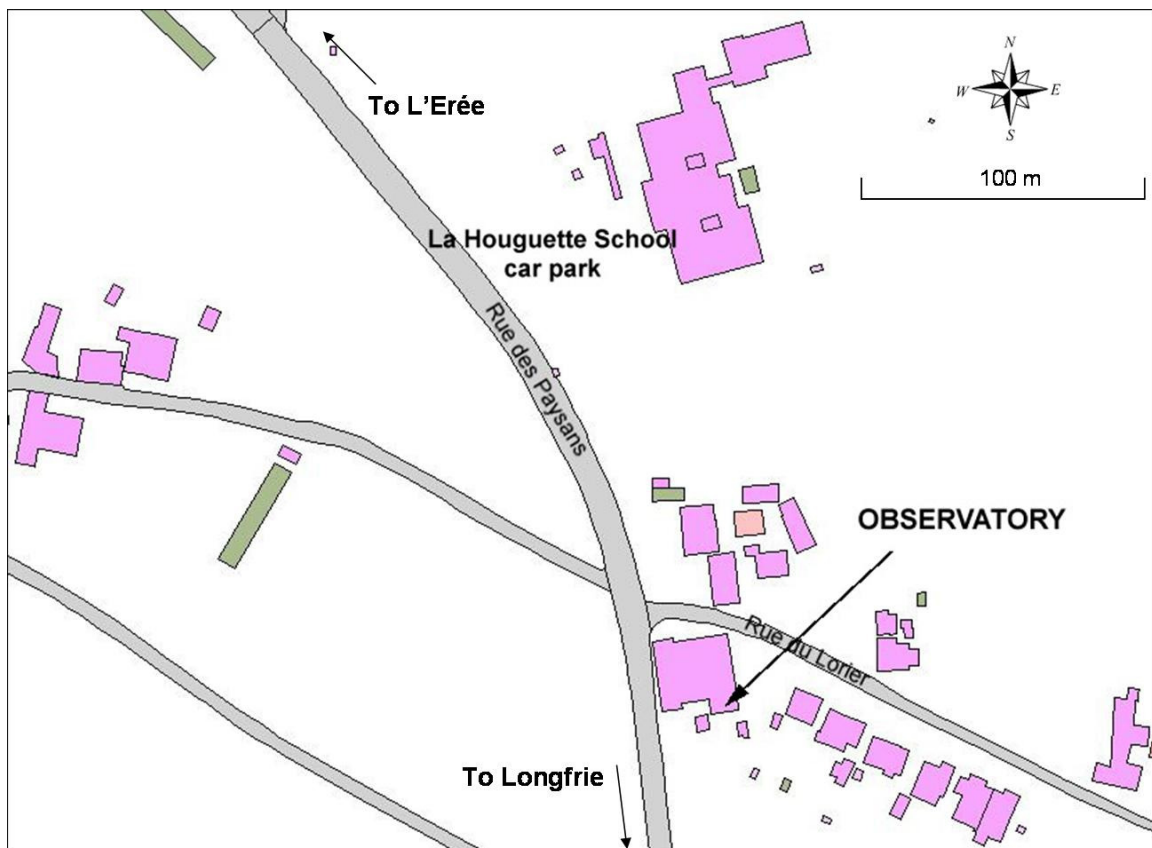
Directions to Observatory

Lat 49° 26' 57".3895 N (49.44927), Long 2° 38' 08".8610 W (2.635795), Alt 46 metres.

The Observatory is at La Pointe, Rue du Lorier, St Pierre du Bois. Perry's Guide reference: Page 21 E3. It is about 100 metres up the road from La Houquette School, behind the large German bunker on the corner of Rue des Paysans and Rue du Lorier. Turn into the Rue du Lorier, and then immediately right, and proceed around the back of the bunker to the double doors. If these are locked, knock. Note that there is usually no sign indicating the location of the Observatory, except during open days and when groups are expected.

Parking at the Observatory is very limited, but additional parking is often available at La Houquette School. Note that there are no streetlights, so a torch is essential when walking along the road at night.

The Observatory telephone number is 264252.



Map courtesy of Digimap Ltd, Guernsey