Daily Visitor Activities

Pack a Picnic. Escape the city to fresh mountain air. At 4,200 feet, with Santa Clara (Silicon) Valley and San Francisco Bay at your feet, Mount Hamilton offers the best views in the Bay Area. **Stroll Through the Marble-Halled Visitors’ Center**, with exhibits explaining Lick research. Learn how we find planets beyond our solar system, how exploding stars teach us about the evolution of the universe, how we discern the nature of galaxies and black holes, and how new technologies are used to undo the blurring effects of Earth’s atmosphere.

**Get an Awe-Inspiring Close-Up Look** at the Great Lick Refractor, one of history’s most notable, and notably beautiful, telescopes; the telescope is shown to visitors hourly from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm, in the Visitors’ Center (no advance registration required). **Learn About Lick’s Rich Past** from interpretive exhibits of historical artifacts, and about the work of the Lick Observatory Historical Collections Project (collections.ucolick.org). **Check Out Lick Observatory Apparel**, souvenirs, astronomical photos, posters, educational toys, and other astronomy-related goodies in the Gift Shop.

**Take a Walk** to the gallery of the Shane Reflector to see the telescope and learn about its activities.

**Before Visiting, Please Be Aware That**: There are NO food services at the observatory beyond vending machine snacks and soft drinks. There are NO gasoline or automotive services on Mount Hamilton. In winter, snow occasionally closes Mount Hamilton road. **Check for Road Closures**. Please respect traffic, parking, and other notices, prevent fire, and abate noise and litter. Please do not visit out of hours when, to minimize light pollution, access is restricted and GATES LOCK AUTOMATICALLY.
Lick Observatory was the world’s first permanently equipped mountaintop astronomical observatory. It demonstrated the feasibility of sustained work at a high, remote site, where the best observing conditions are found. Almost all subsequent research observatories have followed suit. Lick’s pioneering influence and inspirational contributions to science are acknowledged by astronomers worldwide.

The observatory is the legacy of self-made California millionaire James Lick. Construction began in 1876, the year of his death, with the building of the 19-mile road that climbs from the Santa Clara Valley through ranch land and native chaparral, to the 4200-foot summit of Mount Hamilton, and was completed in 1888. It has been a part of the University of California ever since. Today, Lick Observatory continues its long tradition of innovation and quality research.

James Lick (1796–1876)
The body of James Lick has been entombed at the base of the supporting pier since re-interment on the morning of 9 January 1887.

“... A powerful telescope, superior to and more powerful than any yet made ...and also a suitable observatory connected therewith ...and make them useful in promoting science.”

James Lick, Deed of Trust (1874)