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Iowa County Astronomy Club Newsletter

Comet Hyakutake - Photo by Shannon O'Donnell - April 1996

The Great Comet of 1996

On January 30, 1996, Yuji Hyakutake in Japan discovered a new comet using 25x150 binoculars. The comet was designated Comet C/1996 B2 (Hyakutake) and it passed as close as 0.10 AU (9.3 million miles) from the Earth on March 25, 1996! The comet became a bright naked-eye object and remained so through March, April and May of 1996. The comet had exceeded expectations, becoming the brighest comet since Comet West in 1976. A long tail of up to 100 degrees was reported, and small fragments have been observed to break off the main nucleus. Comet Hyakutake was indeed the Great Comet of 1996.

How Hyakutake Was Discovered

By Yuji Hyakutake - April 1996

I searched for a comet for only 4 hours in two nights in January , because we had a long spell of disagreeable weather here since my discovery of 1995Y1 a month ago.

On January 30, as it was likely to clear up at dawn, I left home for my obse rvation place. I wanted to reach there at 3:30 AM ,when the Moon would set in the west. The sky was in a nice condition when I left home, but I found low clouds flowing from the west at the observation place.

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Iowa County Astronomy Club

Iowa County Astronomers was formed in September, 2006. We are a group of like-minded astronomy enthusiasts that meet monthly to discuss current topics in space science and spend time observing together. All are welcome at our meetings and we don't even charge dues at this time.

We have an email list that we use for announcements and discussion. If you would like to join, send an email to icastro@allprosoftware.com with the word 'subscribe' in the subject line.

For more information, point your browser to http://www.icastro.org..

Astronomy.com Picture of the Day

The Rosette Nebula

The Rosette Nebula is found in the constellation Monoceros. Inside this nebula is the open cluster NGC 2244. Both objects are viewable through small scopes.

Klaus Brasch imaged the nebula November 17, 2006, from the Mojave Desert near Cima, California.

http://www.astronomy.com

How Comet Hyakutake Was Discovered...

The zenith of the sky began to clear around 4:00 AM. I tried to turn my binoculars to see Comet 1995Y1. When the binoculars were pointing almost straight up, I ma naged to catch three objects together , M101 , NGC5474 and then 1995Y1 a lit tle smaller than M101. My comet was about 9th magnitude, 8' in diameter. As I made a sketch sitting in a awkward posture, I got a pain in the neck. After sketching I began comet searching freely as usual.

It was about 20 minutes later when I unexpectedly came across an object like a comet. At first I didn't know where it was because of the clouds. Judging from the constellations sometimes glimpsed between floating clouds, the object seemed to be in the southeast of Crow Constellation. I had moved my binoculars to the southern part of the sky without being aware of it.

I was surprised when I mentally connected the stars. Unbelievable! I had thought I already knew the pattern of these stars well! I said to myself, "I must be dreaming ."

I left my binoculars for a while to calm myself down , and then I started drawing the comet-like object. It was much more condensed than 1995Y1. It was still dark but easy to see. 11th magnitude, 2.5' in diameter.

It was at 4:50 AM when I looked at my watch after marking its position. What I had to confirm first was whether it was moving or not. At 5:40 AM the morning twilight began. I again went back to the binoculars. I couldn't confirm the motion of the object by comparing it with the stars around it. At last I gave up trying to confirm. I concluded to myself that the "possibl e comet" should be coming directly toward the Earth.

I came back home and checked comets which had already been discovered but I couldn't find reports referring to the comet-like object in question. So I began to draw up a report. I sent the report to the New Astronomical Findings Infomation Department at the National Observatory. I also sent a fax to Syuichi Nakano (the Calculation Center of O.A.A) and

How Comet Hyakutake Was Discovered...

sent a fax to Syuichi Nakano (the Calculation Center of O.A.A) and moreover left a message in his answering machine.

At midnight the condition of the sky was poorer than the previous night, and what was worse, a drizzle began to fall at 0:00 AM. Just as I had decided to give up trying to confirm the object that morning, a fax came to me saying that my find was confirmed.

2007 Dark Zone Star Party

The 2007 Dark Zone Star Party, held near La Farge, Wisconsin, was a night filled with great viewing, education, and a chance to check out some really unique astronomical equipment..

On the night of April 15th, 2007, a group of midwest Astronomers got together to experience astronomy in one of the darkest zones in Wisconsin

As anyone who has ever stepped outside on a clear night to view the evening sky can attest, our modern skies are anything but dark. Light pollution fills the sky all across our globe. Despite that, however, there are still a few places on Earth, and more importantly, in the midwest, where you can find relatively light-free zones. That was the concept behind the recent Dark Sky Party.

The weather could scarcely have been better. Clear skies and relatively low wind made for a great night of star gazing. Although the moon was somewhat annoying for the first three hours or so, we still had a great time observing Saturn, the Moon, Venus and some of the brighter Messier objects such as the Beehive Cluster. In addition, the time spent waiting for the moon to set gave all of us time to check out each other's telescopes and binoculars.

It also gave us time to spend a little more time learning about each other's interests in astronomy. We even had a few visitors during the evening! Some of the locals from the area (including a couple of Mennonites) were "Wowed!" by the rings of Saturn and the craters and mountains of the Moon.

The turnout, personnel-wise, was low, but the quality was high. ☺ The equipment turnout was even better! In attendance, were Two 8" Schmidt-Cassegrain's, One 10" Schmidt-Cassegrain. One 10" Dobsonian reflector, One 80D (I think) refractor. One 4" refractor (I forget what it was exactly…), One Astroscan rich-field, Greg's JMI 6" Reverse Binoculars (which had to be seen to be believed! And oh man!, what a view!), another pair of large aperture binoculars (John Wunderlin's), which unfortunately got broke just as the star party ended, and even a pair of steady-bino's which allow you to shake like a madman while holding them and still have a steady image. And finally, we had one home-made 16" dobsonian reflector and one 18" Obsession dobsonian reflector.

The JMI Reverse Binoculars and the 18" Obsession both saw first light last night, which made using them even more exciting. What's more, the 18" Obsession was a prototype for Obsession's newest scope so we were quite lucky to have a chance to offer our own input, small as it was, on what we liked or didn't like about using it. Mostly, we loved it!

Photos By John Wunderlin

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As far as viewing goes, John Wunderlin showed us Comet Lovejoy through his 10" dob, and everyone took turns viewing Saturn, the Orion Nebula, the Moon, the SUN with NO SUNSPOTS! (that's a first for most of us), several nebula and galaxies. We also saw the International Space Station and several meteors. One meteor, in fact, left a trail so bright that it imprinted on our eyes for some time. It then outdid itself by exploding, lighting up the southern sky and leaving a glow in the sky for at least 20 seconds.

The star of the show was the 18" inch Obsession. It was extremely lightweight and easy to use. It could be adjusted with only a finger-tip of pressure and it's 2" focuser was dead-on and smooth to use. The view through this system almost defies description.

M51, the WhirlPool Galaxy, looked like a photograph with extremely clearly defined dust-lanes and spiral arms. M33 was like looking at a 3-dimensional object, the dust-lanes and spiral arms were so well defined and bright. The Sombrero galaxy showed a very clear bulge and central dust lane. M81 and M82 were both bright and surprising large and well defined. M101 was absolutely breath-taking, the Pencil Galaxy was so long that it filled the eyepiece from one side to the other, and the Virgo cluster of galaxies…WOW! I counted 17 in ONE FIELD OF VIEW before I gave up and stopped counting because there were just too many! Incredible!

If you have the chance to attend the next Dark Zone Star Party, or really, any star party you need to find a way to do so. The fellowship and the sharing of knowledge and experience and the opportunity to look through such a wide variety of instruments all in the same evening, cannot be beat.

- Shannon O'Donnell

2007 Dark Zone Star Party

www.dzsp.org

Photos by John Wunderlin