

## August Skies

August should turn out to be a busy month for sky watchers. Our first treat will be the annual Perseid Meteor Shower. The shower should reach its peak on Thursday and Friday nights, 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup>. The moon will be in its first quarter and will set mid to late evening making for nice dark skies to watch the shower (weather permitting). Each year the Earth plows through multiple debris trails left by the comet Swift Tuttle.

There are many such debris trails from different epochs of the passing comet. The size of each year's shower is a matter of timing and of how many trails the Earth passes through. Even though the peak, this year, will occur during daylight hours on the 12<sup>th</sup>, predicted rates for both nights are as high as 60 per hour.

The New Mexico Tech Astronomy Club will hold a Perseid/Star Party on Thursday, August 11<sup>th</sup> beginning about 9 PM local time at the Etscorn Campus Observatory. To reach the observatory, take Canyon road past the golf course. At the 4-way stop turn right on Buck Wolfe Drive and follow the signs.

Venus and Jupiter still dominate the early evening sky. As the month progresses Jupiter will draw ever nearer to Venus and on August 31<sup>st</sup> these two dazzling planets will be only a scant 1.5 degrees apart, about the width of your little finger at arm's length.

Mercury and Saturn both appear in the early morning skies this month. By August 24<sup>th</sup> Mercury should be easily visible in the east-northeast skies rising about one and a half hours before the Sun while Saturn will rise one half hour earlier.

The moon will be new on the 4<sup>th</sup>, first quarter on the 12<sup>th</sup>, full on the 19<sup>th</sup> and last quarter on the 26<sup>th</sup>.

Mars will rise 2 to 3 minutes earlier each night coming up around 10:30 PM by the end of the month. Headed for opposition in late October, it will grow steadily larger and brighter reaching magnitude -1 by the end of August. It is summer in the southern hemisphere of Mars with the solstice occurring on August 16<sup>th</sup>. With the southern hemisphere tilted toward the Earth, small telescopes should reveal darkish surface markings. Since it is summer, the south polar ice cap will have become small and fragmented but nevertheless interesting to look at.

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