Astro Advisory

Notice of an upcoming astronomical event.

PISGAH
ASTRONOMICAL
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LYRID METEORS TO BE VISIBLE

Rosman, NC (April 10, 2017) – Astronomers at the Pisgah Astronomical Research Institute (PARI) remind the public of the annual Lyrid Meteor Shower in April.

Meteors result from particles of dust causing the atmosphere to glow as the particles enter the upper atmosphere of the Earth. The Lyrid Meteors, or "Lyrids," are associated with Comet Thatcher first discovered in 1861. As this comet revolves around the Sun every 415 years, it gives off gases and dust particles due to the heat of the Sun. While the gases eventually are dispersed throughout space, the dust particles remain as a trail of debris in the path of the comet long after the comet has gone. Since the Earth encounters this trail of debris at the same point in space each time it makes its annual revolution around the Sun, we observe the Lyrids on the same date each year, around April 22. The first recorded observation of the Lyrids was in 687 B.C. In April 1803, there was a particularly dramatic appearance of about 700 meteors per hour. The Lyrids are a bit unpredictable as meteor showers go, some years being more vigorous than others.

In 2017 the Lyrids are predicted to reach a peak of about twenty meteors per hour around 8 a.m. EDT, i.e., after sunrise, on the morning of Saturday, April 22. However, some Lyrids should appear for a day or so on either side of this date and Lyrids are likely to be spotted on the mornings of April 21, 22 and 23. As with all meteor showers, the Lyrids are best observed between midnight and dawn from a clear, dark location with a good horizon. Look to the northeast to find the meteors appearing to radiate out of the constellation of Lyra the harp. Binoculars or telescopes are not needed to observe meteors. This year, a waning crescent moon rises at 4:32 a.m. EDT in Brevard so the predawn skies will be dark until then. Even after it rises the moon will be only 19% illuminated so its light will interfere only slightly with observations of meteors in the predawn hours.

About PARI - PARI is a public not-for-profit public organization established in 1998. Located in the Pisgah National Forest southwest of Asheville, NC, PARI offers STEM educational programs at all levels, from K-12 through post-graduate research. For more information about PARI and its programs, visit www.pari.edu.

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