

Preface

In this era of high-tech instruments, meteor observing is the one facet of astronomy that needs nothing more than your naked eye. Meteors can be easily seen without the aid of cameras, binoculars, or telescopes. Just find a comfortable chair and lie back and watch for the surprises that await high above you. It is a great way to involve the family in science where everyone is active at the same time, not waiting to take turns at the eyepiece. The kids especially enjoy the hunt for “shooting stars,” oohing and ahhhing at each streak of light that crosses the sky. While gazing upwards, it is also a great way to get more familiar with the sky by learning the constellations and seeing if you can see the warrior among the stars of Orion or the scorpion among the stars of Scorpius.

Until just recently, one could simply go outside and watch for meteors from his or her yard. Unfortunately, humankind’s fear of the dark and the widespread use of lighting as advertisement have lit the nighttime scene in urban areas so that only the brightest stars are visible. Serious meteor observing under such conditions is nearly impossible as the more numerous faint meteors are now lost in the glare of urban skies. Today, a serious meteor observing session entails organizing an outing to a country site where the stars can be seen in all their glory and meteors of all magnitudes can be viewed.

It is not all that complicated to observe meteors and to provide scientifically useful data. There are very few eyes scanning the skies each night for meteor activity and practically no professionals who actually observe visually. There are so few meteor observers that on a night when no major shower activity is expected, you may actually be the only observer on the Earth scanning the skies for meteor activity. It is times like these when the unexpected outburst occurs or that fireball brighter than the Moon appears. There are still discoveries to be made for those who get out during those chilly mornings and become one with the heavens above.

This book will help you to help you organize a successful meteor watch, and understand and appreciate what you observe, whether it occurs in your rural backyard or away from home.

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