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The Guide Star

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Nicholas E. Wagman Observatory


Mingo Creek Park Observatory

Mingo and Wagman Observatories Open On Several Dates

ISON Star Parties Are "Go" Despite Comet's Uncertain Brightening

As of the publication date (Nov. 13) of this Guide Star supplement, Comet ISON was just beginning to show noticeable signs of brightening. Thus far the comet has exhibited a less-than-spectacular rise in magnitude, but has developed dust and ion tails and is now visible in binoculars. Web articles seem to agree that it could become a fine naked-eye object. But it will likely not be as bright as several Full Moons, as predicted earlier this year.

The AAAP is taking no chances with ISON, should the comet decide to flare up into a monster morning object after all. We will stage ISON star parties at both Wagman and Mingo observatories, several times over the next two months. Of course, these star parties must be held in the pre-dawn hours.

Below are public news release excerpts from Wagman Director Tom Reiland and Mingo Director Bill Roemer, giving specifics of the star parties. As noted in these releases, call the observatories for last-minute updates. The AAAP Listserver will be likewise updated.

Comet ISON Star Parties At Wagman Observatory

by Tom Reiland, Director – Wagman Observatory

November 7, 2013: Comets are possibly the most unpredictable objects in the Solar System. Comet ISON may or may not be a spectacular object in the morning sky from the end of November through the first half of December. As of November 7 it had not brightened as much as the earlier predictions hyped it would. Should it achieve the brightness predicted or experience a significant outburst and surpass that magnitude, we will provide viewing of the comet at Wagman Observatory on clear mornings from November 30 through December 14 or later if necessary.

It should become visible 30 minutes before Sunrise the first few mornings after its closest approach to the Sun, that is, if it is as bright as we hope. This limits the amount of time anyone can see the comet to less than 30 minutes early on and more than an hour by mid December.

As it moves higher in the sky each morning, it will begin to fade and the Moon will interfere with it by December 14. The comet will diminish in appearance because of the brightness of the Moon as it nears its Full phase.

(Continued at lower right)

Comet ISON Star Parties At Mingo Creek Park Observatory

by Bill Roemer, Director – Mingo Observatory

November 11, 2013: The Amateur Astronomers Association of Pittsburgh (AAAP) invites you to see COMET ISON. Where? Mingo Creek Park Observatory in Washington County. Comets are among the most fascinating solar system objects. Such a visitor to our early morning skies is Comet ISON. So far, it has not brightened as much as predicted, but it might yet become spectacular. If ISON brightens considerably, you are invited to observe it on any clear mornings November 16 to 19, from 6:00 AM to 7:00 AM, and again on clear mornings December 5 to 12, from 7:00 AM to 8:00 AM. Call the observatory before leaving home to make certain it is open: 724-348-6150.

We recommend that visitor call our observatory phone number, 724-224-2510, to check on the possibility of viewing the comet at Wagman Observatory on any of the mornings listed. We suggest that guests arrive by 6:30 AM if they hope to view it from our hilltop because of the small observing window available to us. Save your gas and stay home if it is cloudy. Bring binoculars if you own a pair. They will give you a wide view of the head of the comet and its tail.