

FOR: Immediate Release

FROM: Lake Afton Public Observatory
WSU Fairmount Center for Science and Mathematics Education
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DATE: March 8, 2013

RE: Lake Afton Public Observatory.

New Comet Visits the Inner Solar System

A “new” comet is visiting the inner solar system and will be visible to the unaided eye from mid to late March. The comet was christened PanSTARRS. Comets are usually named after the person that discovers them but since this one was discovered by a large team of observers, computer scientists and astronomers, it was named after the telescope.

PanSTARRS will make its closest approach to the Sun on Sunday, March 10 after which it will brighten and become visible to observers in the northern hemisphere as it begin its return trip to the outer reaches of the solar system. It is estimated that it will reach its brightest during the week of March 11-17 when it will be visible to the unaided eye.

For this special occasion, the Lake Afton Public Observatory will have two special programs to observe Comet PanSTARRS on Tuesday and Wednesday evenings, March 12 and 13, from 7:30 pm until 8:30 pm. Through the Observatory’s big telescope visitors may get to see features near the comet’s head. However, comets are best viewed through binoculars so a good way to observe PanSTARRS would be to use the Observatory’s binoculars or bring a pair of your own if you have them.

On Friday and Saturday evenings, March 15 and 16 the Observatory will open at 7:45 pm to watch the Comet until it gets too low to observe (around 8:45 pm). The Observatory will then remain open until 10:00 pm for the regularly scheduled public program, ***Journey to Jupiter*** where visitors will get to view Jupiter and the Moon through the Observatory’s big telescope. There will also be a number of special comet related exhibits available in the Observatory.

Even if you can’t make it to the Observatory to see Comet PanSTARRS, find a location with a clear view of the western horizon and look for it on your own. It will be visible just after the sun sets at 7:30 to 7:45 pm and remain above the horizon only until about 8:30 to 8:45 pm. It will be located 15 to 20 degrees above the horizon and almost directly West. Look for a dim, fuzzy, object with a bit of a tail pointing almost straight up. If you have a pair of binoculars, be sure to look at the comet through them as well. Keep in mind, if you look for the comet too early the sky will be too bright to see it but if you look for it too late, it will already be below the horizon.

Office:
1845 Fairmount
Wichita, KS 67260-0032
(316) 978-3191

Program Information:
(316) WSU-STAR
Internet:
webs.wichita.edu/lapo

Observatory:
20 mi. SW of downtown Wichita
on MacArthur Rd. at 247th St. W.
(316) 794-8995

The Observatory is located about 20 miles southwest of downtown Wichita on MacArthur Road at 247th Street West in Lake Afton County Park. Admission to the Observatory is \$5.00 for adults and \$3.00 for children ages 6-12; children under 6 are admitted free. The Observatory is open Friday and Saturday evenings from 8:00 - 10:00 p.m. during the month of March. Current programs and times along with events taking place in the sky are available on our website at <http://webs.wichita.edu/lapo> or in a recorded message by calling WSU-STAR (978-7827).

The Lake Afton Public Observatory is operated by the Fairmount Center for Science and Mathematics Education, a part of the Fairmount College of Liberal Arts and Science at Wichita State University.

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