

REFLECTIONS / REFRACTIONS

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University Lowbrow  
Astronomers

November 2012

Volume 36, Issue 11

# *I Like to Observe Comets!*

by Mark S. Deprest

*When Lowbrows want to know something about comets, they come to me. When I plan an observing session, I always check the positions on the brightest of comets at the time. When visitors join us at Peach Mt. and ask about comets, everyone sends them to me. That's right I'm the "Comet Guy". I don't know if every club has one, but our club does, and I guess I'm it!*

*It's true I know something about comets having been fascinated with them since Hale-Bopp & Hyakutake came close back in 1995 – 1996. However, they were not the first comets I have seen with my telescope, that distinction belongs to Comet 6P d'Arrest seen on August 5, 1995 at Peach Mt. Observatory with my 8" Dobsonian a.k.a. "Gilda". Interestingly enough I saw this first comet of my collection with a moon that was 2 days past first quarter high in the sky. Estimates on that particular comet at that time were about 8th magnitude. A well respected and seasoned amateur astronomer, warned me that magnitudes for comets are not the same as magnitudes for stars. That magnitudes which are listed for comets are overall magnitudes and depending on how diffused the comet is will greatly affect its visual perceptibility. He also warned me that I may not be able to see this particular comet, citing the size of my scope may not be large enough to pick this comet out of the sky glow or background.*

*I love a challenge and this sure seemed like one to me. So, undaunted I set about printing finder charts and hoped for clear skies on Saturday night. When Saturday night came and clear skies prevailed, I drove to Peach Mt. and set my little 8" Dobsonian up in front of the observatory. At about 23:00 EDT my efforts were rewarded with a small fuzzy smudge centered in my eyepiece that would managed to ignite a burning passion somewhere deep inside of me. I was hooked on seeing more of these solar systems travelers that has continued for almost 2 decades.*

*Now, I'm being told that I have reached a milestone, 100 comets and still that passion burns, that incredible fascination with these ancient visitors. I am reminded of the words to Led Zeppelin's "Kashmir":*

*Oh let the sun beat down upon my face, stars to fill my dream  
I am a traveler of both time and space, to be where I have been  
To sit with elders of the gentle race, this world has seldom seen  
They talk of days for which they sit and wait and all will be revealed*

*Hey, I'm not a poet, I'm an amateur astronomer with fascination for comets and since you know a little bit about my first comet, let me tell you a little something about my 100th comet.*

*First of all its official name is 168P Hergenrother, yes, I know it just rolls off the tongue ... It currently has a magnitude estimated at about 9.4 and has very recently been confirmed that the nucleus has split. (for more info on this go to: <http://bit.ly/SmFVk3>) This instability in its composition resulting in this nuclear split is no doubt the cause of its current brightening. Because this comet with a 6.9 year periodic orbit discovered in 1998 was not suppose to get any brighter than 15.1, but on September 6th of this year Juan Jose' Gonzalez-Suarez reported a comet in outburst when it brightened to 11.2 magnitude. On the night of October 20th at the Club's Open House, I pulled out my charts and slewed my scope to the point in the sky where this comet was hiding and bingo! I estimated its overall magnitude at 9.5 and fan shaped coma about 3' in size. As the night went on I returned to the comet and after the moon set, I went back to it and noticed it was sporting 2 tails! The most prominent extended about 15' toward the east and a smaller, fainter tail extending about 6' toward the east-northeast. Now, I'm not ready to say I was seeing the nucleus splitting, but there was a second tail! At any rate my latest comet is my 100th and very memorable.*

# The New Lowbrow Blog

by Dave Snyder

A month ago, I created a Lowbrow Astronomy blog as an experiment.

## So what is a blog?

Google defines a blog as “A Web site on which an individual or group of users record opinions, information, etc. on a regular basis.” But that’s only part of it, most blogs are meant to be read by other users.

Blogs have become quite widespread. The types of opinions and information found on blogs vary widely as does the nature of the audience. Blogs have become at least in part because of software that allows people to easily create and update a blog.

## Why create a Lowbrow blog?

If the Lowbrows wish to have any kind of public presence at all, we need to have a web presence. We have an existing website, but it’s showing its age (it was created about 15 years ago) and it needs work. While I could continue to add to the existing web site, I wanted to explore alternatives. My goal was to create a new web presence that shows outsiders some of the diversity of the club. A possible solution: keep the existing web site, but augment it with a blog as a place to add new content.

## Is this working?

So far, I’d say yes, it is easy to add content to the blog. It also has the advantage that the work can be distributed among two or more people (which is difficult with the existing web site). At the moment, there are two people who are writing posts, and there is the possibility of adding other people as well.

## What are the challenges?

While setting up the blog was easy, the hard part is thinking of new things to say on a regular basis. We will need help from club members to make this work.

There are several possible sources of content; In particular people in the club regularly use the club email list and the newsletter to express themselves. We cannot copy all the club emails or all the articles in the newsletter to the blog, but with the author’s permission, some could be used as content for the blog. Quite frankly there is a lot of interesting material within messages in the email list and within articles in the newsletter, and it’s a shame that most of it is not shared with a larger audience. It may take a while before the club sees the blog as yet a third way to express themselves.

## Anything else?

To see the blog, go to <http://lowbrows.blogspot.com>. The 7 most recent posts are shown in reverse chronological order. To see older posts, use the “Blog Archive” (at the bottom) or the “Older Posts” link (near the bottom).

If you’d like an email update as new entries are added to the blog, go to the blog and look for a box on the upper right marked follow “Follow by Email...” Enter your email address and press “Submit.”

Some sample posts. (see page 10)

### Lowbrow Calendar

**Saturday November 10, 2012.** (10:30AM). *Saturday Morning Physics.* (Hosted by the University of Michigan Physics Department). Alicia Aarnio (U-M Astronomy). “The Sun as a Star.”

**Saturday, November 10, 2012.** May be cancelled if it’s cloudy or too cold. (Starting at Sunset). Open House at Peach Mountain [follow this link for up to date information].

**Friday, November 16, 2012.** (7:30PM). *Monthly Club Meeting.*

**Saturday, November 17, 2012.** May be cancelled if it’s cloudy or too cold. (Starting at Sunset). Open House at Peach Mountain [follow this link for up to date information].

**Saturday December 1, 2012.** (10:30AM). *Saturday Morning Physics.* (Hosted by the University of Michigan Physics Department). Keren Sharon (U-M Astronomy). “Gravitational Lensing—Nature’s Largest Telescopes.”

**Saturday December 8, 2012.** (10:30AM). *Saturday Morning Physics.* (Hosted by the University of Michigan Physics Department). Heidi Wu (U-M Physics). “Cosmic Rhapsody: From the Echo of the Big Bang to the Orchestration of the Universe.”

Wednesday, October 24, 2012

### Lowbrow Open House 10/20/12

Wow! Here are a few pictures from our most recent open house.

<http://ottumcanon5d.shutterfly.com/pictures/8>

Posted by Veronica at 12:38 PM

Labels: Lowbrow Open House 10/20/12, star parties

### Which Galaxy Is Earth In? Most Gen-Xers Don't Know It's The Milky Way, Report Shows

If you accept the thesis that an understanding of science and technology is important for a healthy and thriving economy, then stories like this are troubling. It is like a broken record, yet another survey shows that people in the United States do not understand science.

This time it was a survey of 4000 Americans between the ages of 37 and 40. Participants were shown a picture of a spiral galaxy and then asked a few questions.

Only 43% said that the picture showed a galaxy similar to our own galaxy. Men did slightly better than women, and people with a college education did better than those without a college education.

The author of the report, Jon D. Miller (the University of Michigan Institute for Social Research), has concluded that one of the factors that distinguish people with a good understanding of science is exposure to college level science classes.

For more details see Which Galaxy Is Earth In? Most Gen-Xers Don't Know It's The Milky Way, Report Shows ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/23/galaxy-earth-gen-x-milky-way\\_n\\_2006102.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/23/galaxy-earth-gen-x-milky-way_n_2006102.html)).

Posted by Dave Snyder at 8:54 AM

Labels: science education

To see all the posts, go to <http://lowbrows.blogspot.com>


## University Lowbrow Astronomers

The University Lowbrow Astronomers (Lowbrows for short) are a group of telescope makers and users, and people with a common interest in all aspects of astronomy. We are based in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Friday, October 26, 2012

### A great astronomy photo

Well the today's weather is not the best for staring at the stars. So, here's a great fall astronomy <http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/ap121026.html>. In this photo you will see the Pleiades star cluster. On a clear night here you can see this cluster without a telescope. So, if it is clear try to see this beautiful night time sight!

Posted by Veronica at 9:41 AM No comments: 

    Recommend this on Google





[Links to this post](#)

Labels: Astronomy Photo

### Astronomy in Ann Arbor

If you live in Ann Arbor did you know that the Ann Arbor Library has Telescopes you can check out just like one can check out a book. The Library also host astronomy related activities there website is <http://aadl.org/>. If you don't live in Ann Arbor the Library's are open to the public and you are welcome to join them.

Posted by Veronica at 9:33 AM No comments: 

    Recommend this on Google

[Links to this post](#)


Labels: [links to other astronomy resources](#)

#### For More Information About The Lowbrows...

[Lowbrow Web Site.](#)

[Contact Us.](#) 

#### Search This Blog...



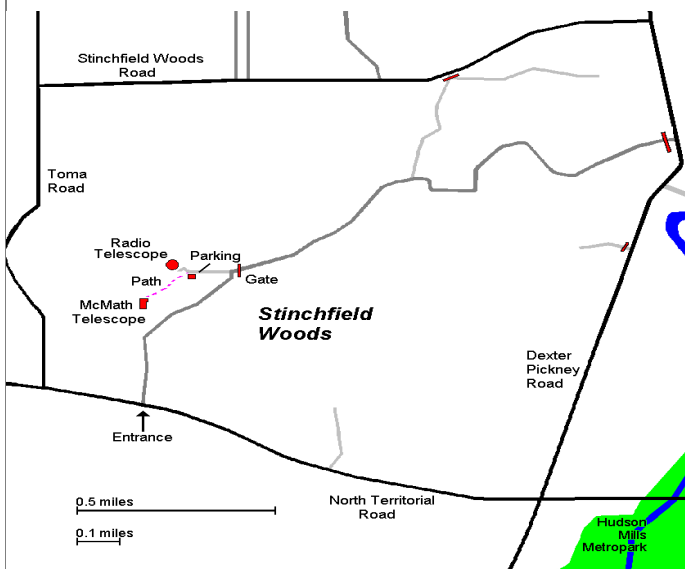
#### Follow by Email...



## Places & Times

Dennison Hall, also known as The University of Michigan's Physics & Astronomy building, is the site of the monthly meeting of the University Lowbrow Astronomers. Dennison Hall can be found on Church Street about one block north of South University Avenue in Ann Arbor, MI. The meetings are usually held in room 130, and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday of each month at 7:30 pm. During the summer months and when weather permits, a club observing session at the Peach Mountain Observatory will follow the meeting.

Peach Mountain Observatory is the home of the University of Michigan's 25 meter radio telescope as well as the University's McMath 24" telescope which is maintained and operated by the Lowbrows. The observatory is located northwest of Dexter, MI; the entrance is on North Territorial Rd. 1.1 miles west of Dexter-Pinckney Rd. A small maize & blue sign on the north side of the road marks the gate. Follow the gravel road to the top of the hill and a parking area near the radio telescopes, then walk along the path between the two fenced in areas (about 300 feet) to reach the McMath telescope building.



## Public Open House / Star Parties

Public Open Houses / Star Parties are generally held on the Saturdays before and after the New Moon at the Peach Mountain observatory, but are usually cancelled if the sky is cloudy at sunset or the temperature is below 10 degrees F. For the most up to date info on the Open House / Star Party status call: (734)332-9132. Many members bring their telescope to share with the public and visitors are welcome to do the same. Peach Mountain is home to millions of hungry mosquitoes, so apply bug repellent, and it can get rather cold at night, please dress accordingly.

## Membership

**Membership dues in the University Lowbrow Astronomers are \$20 per year for individuals or families, \$12 per year for students and seniors (age 55+) and \$5 if you live outside of the Lower Peninsula of Michigan.**

**This entitles you to the access to our monthly Newsletters on-line at our website and use of the 24" McMath telescope (after some training).**

**A hard copy of the Newsletter can be obtained with an additional \$12 annual fee to cover printing and postage.**

(See the website

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/theclub/>

**for more information on joining the club).**

Membership in the Lowbrows can also get you a discount on these magazine subscriptions:

Sky & Telescope - \$32.95 / year

Astronomy - \$34.00 / year or \$60.00 for 2 years

For more information contact the club Treasurer.

## Newsletter Contributions

Members and (non-members) are encouraged to write about any astronomy related topic of interest.



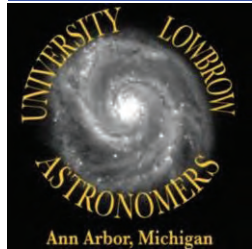
## Lowbrow's Home Page

<http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/>



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Reflections & Refractions



168P Hergenrother 21/10/2012 19h 51m - 20h 13m UT  
TEC 20cm F9 Apo ED Refr. - ST-10XME -25° - 22m exp -2x2 Bin - Rs filter

Alfons Diepvens  
Balen, Belgium MPC: C23



# Mark Deprest's One Hundredth Comet- Way To Go Mark!

Photo by permission

**Website**

[www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/](http://www.umich.edu/~lowbrows/)

