



Comet McNaught

**Longmont Astronomy Society Newsletter**  
**Month 2007**

### **This month's picture:**

The surprise from outer space, Comet McNaught. (C/2006 P1) Taken by Roger Johansen, Hammerfest, Norway It was discovered on August 7th, 2006 by the hugely successful comet discoverer Rob McNaught. Robert McNaught is an Australian astronomer who has discovered 379 asteroids (currently) and several comets. Internet resource is [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_H.\\_McNaught](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_H._McNaught)

From Wikipedia: Comet McNaught first became visible to the naked eye in early January 2007. It was viewable as a magnitude -3 comet in the northern hemisphere near Venus, Aquila, and Ophiuchus, until January 12, 2007. The comet was closest to the sun at 0.17AU on January 12th, 2007. Due to its proximity to the sun it had a short window for viewing, and could only be spotted during twilight.

The comet entered SOHO LASCO C3's field of view on January 12, and quickly became brighter than Comet NEAT in 2003. The comet exited SOHO's FOV on January 16, 2007.

On January 13, 2007 the comet surpassed Comet West (1975) and became the brightest comet in more than 40 years, being the brightest comet seen since Comet Ikeya-Seki in 1965. The comet has been dubbed *the Great Comet of 2007*. From the 13th to the 14th January 2007 the comet attained an estimated maximum apparent magnitude of -6.0 in the Northern Hemisphere.

On January 15th, 2007 the comet came closest to the Earth at a distance of 0.82AU

You can read the story and watch SOHO's movie of Comet McNaught rounding the Sun at <http://sohowww.nascom.nasa.gov/> SOHO has discovered over 1000 comets, most speeding merrily into the furnace. Search around, and you can watch some of those movies, too.

### **From the President:**

Hello Comet Hunters! This past month we have done so much, mostly shoveling snow.

The Home Planet Stellar views were lacking this past month - too much snow and cold, but otherwise we have been busy with Banquet and comet hunting from yard. Wow when was the last time we got to do that ??

Gil Buller tried three weeks in a row to put on his Star of Bethlehem show at Fiske CU Boulder. Sorry you guys, Show was well worth viewing and after three tries we did get to see the show. Sorry for last minute show up notice, we had a pretty good turn out for Gil. I know snow and cold has slowed a lot of us down some. First time in years we all had a long Christmas holiday with all these big snow storms keeping people at home.

Banquet was held at Izaak Walton Park clubhouse on south Sunset in Longmont, with catered in food. We have had lots of people show up despite the extreme winds we had that afternoon. Alan Stern did a excellent job with Pluto / Charon mission talk. He is an amazing guy from Southwest Research, which has become a major player in aerospace industry Dr Bob Stencel gave a short talk and also invited us, LAS

to Mount Evans once again next summer. I will try to do it again too. I will keep you all posted by summer. Thanks to Bob Spohn, Vern Raben Julie, Marc, Dick Mallot, and the others for working in pulling off a great Banquet again.

Comet hunters have had a real treat this past few weeks. Comet McNaught has dazzled us all with near daytime views and even daytime views this past week. I took some pictures but did not get ones through the scope, darn. Too low from my yard. I had to go to higher ground and took some zoom digital pictures with tripod and shutter cable, not too bad for naked eye comet. Brightest in ten years probably, too bad it was short lived one for us here, it would have been awesome in dark skies like Pawnee or Fox park

Sure has been a cold winter so far. It has kept us away from our favorite dark sky places, too much snow, we will have to wait till sun melts it all off. Well you guys, maybe next month - new moon for next dark sky star party?

Thanks you guys, we are 20 years old this year and LAS is still going strong because of all the people who always help out so much of the time. Star parties take some effort and we have come through time after time. My thanks always goes to the volunteers, we have a reputation now to live up to, we are almost becoming in demand. Lets hope new year will be good to us as we continue to enjoy our love of astronomy. See you in the dark, bye, Gary

### **Local News:**

Scientists (at NCAR) forecast a big solar cycle – wait until 2010/2011!

[http://science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2006/21dec\\_cycle24.htm?list937934](http://science.nasa.gov/headlines/y2006/21dec_cycle24.htm?list937934)

### **In the sky this month:**

Planets:

Mercury Greatest elongation on Feb 7<sup>th</sup> at 18 degrees of separation from the Sun, setting 1 ½ hours after the Sun. Only 6 degrees from Venus on the 4<sup>th</sup>, and 3 magnitudes dimmer.

Venus evening star, 19 degrees high (mag -3.9) on Feb 1<sup>st</sup>, 27 degrees on Feb 28th

Mars

Jupiter mag -1.9, currently rises about 3 AM, and 2 AM by the end of February. I've been watching it at sunrise, moving steadily upwards at dawn.

The "Little Red Spot" is intensifying. Story at:

[http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/news/topstory/2006/little\\_red\\_spot.html](http://www.nasa.gov/centers/goddard/news/topstory/2006/little_red_spot.html)

Saturn Opposition on Feb 10<sup>th</sup>, so it's opposite the Sun, rising in the East at sunset and overhead at midnight. Rings are tilted 14 degrees. As we pass Saturn, you can watch the retrograde motion in action. Great month for Saturn observing.

Meteor showers: pretty lousy month, with the Delta Leonid shower peaking on Feb 25 (1 or 2 per HOUR).

### **Club Calendar:**

Jan: New Moon: 20<sup>th</sup> - Pawnee  
1<sup>st</sup> qtr: 27th – Flanders Park

**Feb:** New Moon: 17<sup>th</sup> - Pawnee  
1<sup>st</sup> qtr: 24<sup>th</sup> – Flanders Park  
Meeting: 15<sup>th</sup> – Topics: Andrew Planck with the 3<sup>rd</sup> installment  
on the moon.

“Local” Star parties this summer:

June 14-17 Rocky Mountain Star Stare Lake George,CO [www.rmss.org](http://www.rmss.org)

July 15-20 Nebraska Star Party Valentine,NB [www.nebraskastarparty.org](http://www.nebraskastarparty.org)

Aug 9-11 Weekend under the Stars Foxpark, WY [home.bresnan.net/~curranm](http://home.bresnan.net/~curranm)

Sept 14-15 Cathedral Gorge Panaca, NV [www.lvastronomy.com](http://www.lvastronomy.com)

Oct 6-14 Okie-Tex Star Party Kenton, OK [www.okie-tex.com](http://www.okie-tex.com)

### **Internet Resources:**

Astronomy magazine has some podcasts online in mp3 files. The ones that are interesting are the “Tours”. Monoceros, Taurus, Lyra, and Sagittarius are up now, and you can plug your iPod into your ears and listen while you’re under the stars. (Who am I kidding – you’ll have to get your grandson to convert the thing to cassette tape so you can listen on YOUR player). There’s other programs of interest, like “why repair the Hubble”. Access the programs at

<http://www.astronomy.com/asy/default.aspx?c=ss&id=104>

The best light echo on the web has been updated. Watch the movie of the expanding explosive event of V838 Monocerotis at (I really love this flick)

<http://heritage.stsci.edu/2005/02/images/v0502a1.mov> What you’re seeing is the explosive pulse lighting up gas that’s already around the star (the cool supergiant – red – in the center of the pulse)

The February S&T has a nice article about the “Face on Mars” – you know, the secret symbolism left be either God or Space Aliens, take your pick. You can watch the 3-D animated movie of the face at

[http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Mars\\_Express/SEMINCO7BTE\\_0.html](http://www.esa.int/SPECIALS/Mars_Express/SEMINCO7BTE_0.html) , pretty much showing that the Face is an eroded mesa.

Check out the asteroid occultations for Colorado at

<http://www.poyntsource.com/New/Paths.htm> They occur at roughly weekly intervals for most locations. If you want to try this sort of thing, have very accurate timepiece and a telescope that points accurately. I got this idea from S&T for Feb.

The Astronomy magazine (binocular column) mentioned “Collinder” objects... Huh?? So I looked it up. Per Collinder made a list of 471 open clusters, of which the most famous is the “Coathanger” (Collinder 399), judging from the search results. Orion’s Belt is Collinder 70. More catalogs that you’ve never heard of are listed at

<http://www.seds.org/messier/xtra/supp/cats.html> Memorize a couple, try to work them into the conversation at the next LAS meeting....

### **This month’s field trip:**

Marshall Space Flight Center <http://www.nasa.gov/centers/marshall/home/index.html>  
has a long history in space exploration. It was the assembly point for a lot of vehicles for

the Apollo and other programs, which were then barged to Cape Canaveral for launch. You can view an SR-71, a shuttle, a Saturn V up close and personal. Information on the tours and exhibits can be found at <http://www.spacecamp.com/museum/> The website is not that good, as the Space and Rocket Center is not interested enough in public activities. (IMHO) Pretty much, you pay your admission price and wander around. They do have the official SpaceCamp associated with the place, so if you're looking for a present for your 9-18 year old that wants to be an astronaut, go for it! And if you're collecting visits to the Apollo capsules, this location has Apollo 16.

Next month's field trip: an astronomy one – Kitt's Peak