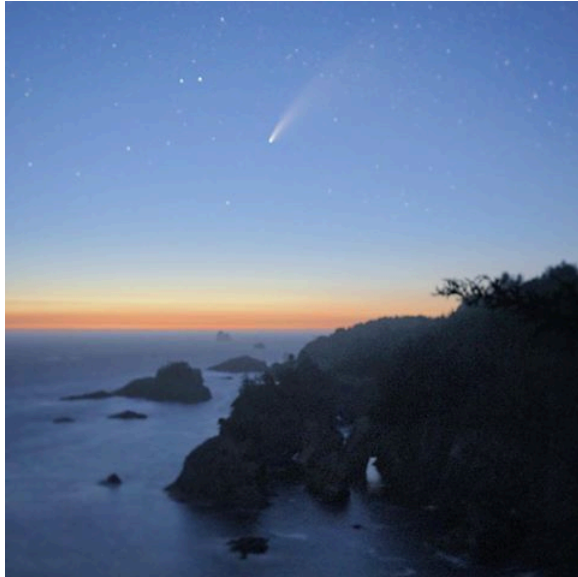


Comet Neowise: Taking the time for a once-in-a-lifetime event

July 18, 2020



In the midst of the pandemic, it's hard to stay focused sometimes. It's important to stop what you're doing and take a deep breath, if you can. After a week of many deadlines, I did just that Friday afternoon, enjoying a few hours watching my grandchildren play at Miller Bar on the Chetco River. Then it was back to meeting deadlines for a couple of hours and enjoying a bit of lovely weather on our deck.

It had been a long week and I was facing a busy weekend covering the Azalea Festival in Brookings. Still, there were things to do and I noticed a Facebook message from Adrian Alonso of Brookings. He shared two

photos of Comet Neowise that were taken Thursday evening south of Natural Bridges viewpoint in the Samuel H. Boardman Scenic Corridor north of Brookings.

Although I had seen some other photos of the comet on Facebook earlier, I must admit that I've been so busy recently that news of Comet Neowise hadn't come into my orbit, so to speak.

Hmmm, a comet, I thought as I viewed the message from Adrian Alonso.

"May we publish," I wrote back to him.

"Yes you may, I would appreciate it," he responded.

Believe me, I was appreciative. We have little staff and I am so grateful when photographers are willing to share their work with us.

I wanted to learn more about the comet.

If you don't know, the comet was just discovered on March 27. It is now bright enough to be visible to the naked eye (in a dark sky). And it is one of the brightest comets in the northern hemisphere since 1997's Comet Hale-Bopp.

But I was tired. I figured there would be too much light around our home to see the comet and I didn't know if I had the energy to stay up late and drive somewhere away from town to find a darker sky.

Then I read that the comet won't be back for another 6,800 years!

I thought of my two grandsons. Could we really let them miss such an opportunity?

So, after a bit more research, we headed north on Highway 101 just before sunset Friday night, July 17, and parked at a pull-out just north of the Thomas Creek Bridge. We watched a brilliant sunset. And we waited. And waited. My grandsons, ages 10 and 11, threw rocks toward the ocean. Finally they settled down and sat on the guardrail, watching the darkening sky as stars (and maybe planets) emerged.

Guided by Adrian Alonso's photo and the knowledge that the comet would appear somewhere below the Big Dipper, we waited. It was an hour past sunset when we noticed a little blur in the sky toward the right and down from the constellation. Our grandsons' eyes are sharper than ours, so they were sure it was the comet. My husband confirmed with his binoculars and we passed the glasses around a few times.

"Once in a lifetime," I heard our oldest grandson whisper to his little brother.

Yes, it was worth staying up late and driving out of town.

This pandemic, we all hope, is a once-in-a-lifetime event. Once will certainly be enough.

But Comet Neowise is such an event, as well. I recommend you check it out sometime soon.

And thanks, Adrian, for sharing your photo!

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Helpful information here.