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Blog

Awaiting Comet Pan-STARRS

Posted by admin on March 13, 2013



Comets Cometh

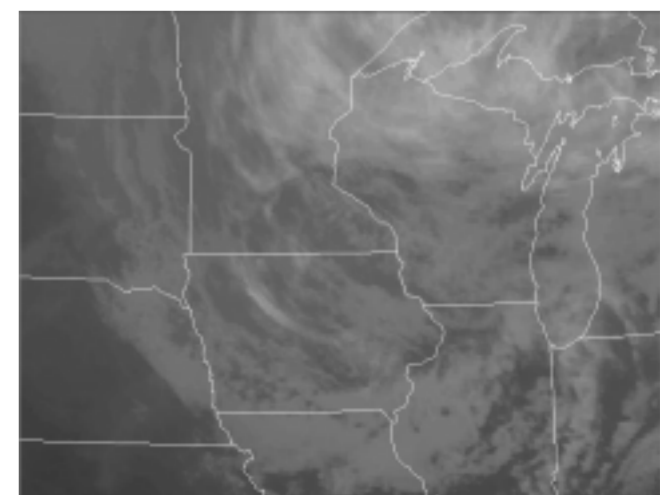
Comet Pan-STARRS has come around the sun and is emerging in the evening twilight. Each day the comet puts some more distance between itself and the sun. Yet as it gets away from the sun and into the darker sky, the comet also gets away from the sun's heat and leaves a smaller debris trail.

I have been anticipating [AstroWatch: Comet Pan-STARRS at Weko Beach](#), a comet-watching opportunity in Bridgman, MI, hosted by the Andrews University Astronomy Club and the [Michiana Astronomical Society](#).

The weather was expected to be "clearly cloudy," if you don't mind the oxymoron, but there I met Kelly Youngberg of Andrews University who had organized the public event and who was responsible for postponing it a day. It proved to be a good call.

Bottom line is that we did not see the comet near the young crescent moon on March 12 because of clouds. But it has been a fun couple of days leading up to this comet's arrival. For example...

In a prelude to a [comet-making class](#) on **Monday, March 18**, this Monday night I made a comet with David James. Meanwhile, both the new moon and Comet Pan-STARRS had been separating from the evening sun, enough to be seen together in the twilight the next day, March 12, 2013.



Today, Tuesday the 12th, I met with Ken Lewton, whose website [f-Stops in Time](#) features great photography, a Kenyan upbringing, and an unsparing blog. It was a good launch to my day. We commented on Richard Bell's compilation of SOHO videos, [Comets Bitin' the Dust](#), which emphasizes the

unpredictable outcome of Comet ISON, the Thanksgiving Comet that grazes the sun.

This evening I scared my daughter when I shrieked, "Sun!" Just in case my optimism was warranted, I packed a telescope, along with [dry ice](#) and all of the comet-making supplies and dashed from home to Weko Beach in Bridgman, MI, just north of Warren Dunes State Park. [My description](#) of the AstroWatch site includes a google [map link for Weko Beach](#).



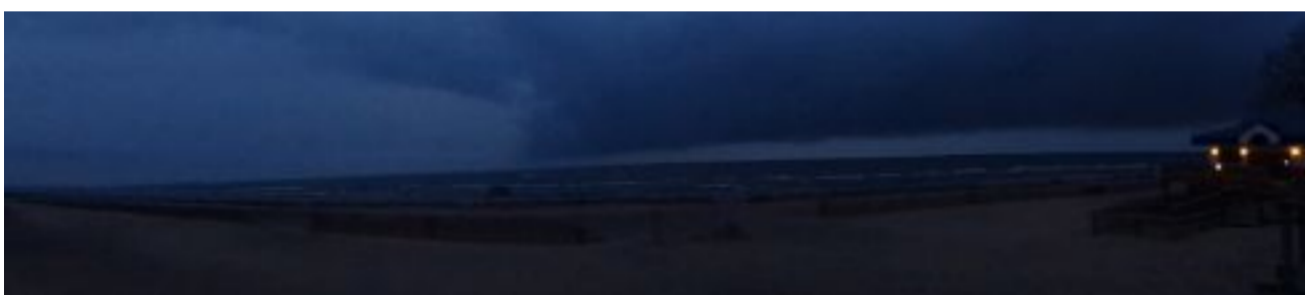
On the way I wanted to pick up two pizzas. The day before I had delved deep into the world of new media when I publicly asked on the [Facebook page of Pizza Transit](#) in Niles, MI, what kind of pizza they recommend for comet-watching over Lake Michigan. Their professional opinion guided me to a four cheese pizza and their pizza of the month--a reuben pizza.

I had been so eager to leave for the lake when I saw the sun that I forgot to bring my telescope's solar filter or a [Sun Funnel](#). To improvise, I asked the kind folks at [Pizza Transit](#) if they had a white cardboard tray onto which I could at least project an image of the sun and its sunspots. They offered a large white pizza box, a perfect solution.



At the beach, the sun emerged briefly above the decorated light base at the waterline. Kelly and I joked about our pictures being wrongly captioned with the sun interpreted as the comet. The sun was a bright guidepost in helping to find the young moon and Comet Pan-STARRS a short while later. The concrete base helped us find the sun. However, there'd be no finding the comet.

A well-defined cloud line slowly advanced across our panorama.



Meanwhile, Janet Hayes of the Herald Palladium had arrived at the beach. Kelly, Janet, and I got out of the cold and waited for the brighter backside of the cloud line. Kudos to Janet for coming out and asking good questions in the cold and wind at night. She was a trooper on the heels of a school board meeting.



When we eventually stepped outside, Kelly called out Jupiter and pointed high to the south. Sure enough, the planet was visually prominent, and I expected to see a few stars overhead. Before Kelly could retrieve the binoculars from her car, the clearing had passed. The moon and comet would have been setting.

The Andrews University Astronomy Club will [re-visit the comet-watching from Weko Beach](#) on Wednesday, March 13 or thereafter (check the [Astrowatch website](#) or the [Andrews University Observatory](#) page on Facebook for updates). I encourage you to go out early enough to watch the sun set over the concrete light pad. Comet Pan-STARRS and the crescent moon will soon follow the sun's path.

I have a few leftover slices of pizza for tomorrow. I've decided comets are like pizzas--they're great when you re-heat them.

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