

Travel



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Climb aboard for good look at Halley's Comet

MAYBE ALL you have ever heard about Halley's Comet is that Mark Twain was born when it appeared in the night sky over Florida, Mo., in 1835. Or that he died in 1910, as he predicted, on the comet's next pass around Earth.

Perhaps you may have learned that Edmund Halley, English astronomer for whom the comet was named, was a friend of Isaac Newton and that Halley's correct prediction of the comet's return in 1758 (he saw it first in 1682 and did not live to tell the tale) was the first time Newton's law of gravity was applied scientifically.

If this is all there is to it, why all the hype now about the comet's return? The comet makes the cover of Time and Newsweek. Articles appear in everything from scholarly journals to People magazine.

Everybody is getting into the act, from sellers of T-shirts and pins and hats to Carl Sagan and a few astronauts pitching cruises and tours to the best viewing spots.

All this interest and activity may come from the fact that Halley's Comet appears only once in the life span of most humans. In an era of reruns and instant replay, this is all creates anticipation.

Iris Jones
contributing travel writer

AFTER ALL, this celestial happening has thrilled Earthlings only 29 times since the Chinese first recorded it in 240 B.C. Many of those sightings coincided with earthshaking events in the political or social life of the world.

Part of the mystery in modern times comes from stories told by those who saw Halley's Comet in 1910. A Franklin resident, Walter Johnson, now deceased, related how his mother held him close to the window in an upstairs bedroom in what is now Franklin's city offices.

He told how the comet "lit up the whole sky, actually lit up the whole sky with red sparks." Some said the comet made a sound as it swooshed by.

Whatever the romance of memories,

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the passage of the comet will not be an Oscar-winning performance this time out. This is because of a combination of the Earth's position in the heavens and greater amounts of industrial and light pollution.

IN FACT, this appearance will be the worst show in 2,000 years in the northern latitudes. You will have to travel to southerly latitudes for the best seats in the house to see this once-in-a-lifetime show.

Astronomer Halley once spent 18 years looking at the moon, determined to see an entire revolution of its nodes. He did. However, this celestial event has already begun. You won't have 18 years to look at it. After July, 1986, the comet will be too faint to see, 1,300 times fainter than the faintest star.

If you were in the right place, by Nov. 15 you could see the comet as a blur in your binoculars, a 100-million-miles-away blur. The best time to see the dazzling sky-wanderer will be in April, 1986, when it is 30 million miles from Earth.

IF THE idea that a spoonful of dust and gas, which is all that makes up the tail of Halley's Comet, can stretch millions of miles across space intrigues you as it has intrigued mankind for centuries, or if you won't be around for the next show in 2061, perhaps you'd like to check out the cruises arranged for you by several steamship lines.

• Sun Line Cruises' starliners, the Stella Solaris and the Stella Oceanis will sail on eight expeditions into the best viewing waters. You may choose from ports-of-call like Antigua and Barbados in the West Indies, Casablanca or Morocco or Rio de Janeiro, Brazil and Ciudad Guayana, Venezuela and you'll be able to view the comet away from the bright lights and light pollution of cities. All these cruises are in



What better way to see Halley's Comet than complete with well-known scientific speakers, to aboard a luxurious cruise ship such as this? A take advantage of the comet (see story). number of lines are booking special cruises,

March and April, best viewing times.

Lecturers such as Hugh Downs, amateur astronomer and host of ABC-TV's 20/20, or "Dr. Comet," Dr. Fred Whipple, director emeritus of the Smithsonian Astrophysical Observatory, will talk to travelers on one or more of Sun Line's Comet Cruises.

They will be joined by other astronomers and writers. Camera buffs are urged to bring cameras, and instruction will be available for both constellation and deep-sky photography. Because the movement of the ship interferes with time-exposures, as a courtesy to photographers, the ships will make overnight berth at selected ports of call.

ASTRONOMY, CELESTIAL observations, meteorology and the history of science are among the offerings of "Science At Sea" presented by a team of experts who are top names in their fields.

During these comet-watching cruises, everyday, normal sight-seeing is not neglected so you'll still see impres-

sive cities and unspoiled beaches.

Write to them at 1 Rockefeller Plaza, New York, N.Y. 10020, or call 1-800-872-6400.

• Silmar Cruises announces six special Halley's Comet Cruises beginning Jan. 8 sailing along the Mexican Riviera and continuing until March 22 with Caribbean sailings. On two of the six cruises, noted astronomer Dr. David Menke, Copernicus Space Science Center, New Britain, Conn., will lecture.

On other cruises, Alan Bean, the fourth man to walk on the moon; Walter Cunningham, pilot of Apollo 13; and Gene Cernan, last man on the moon, will appear as guest lecturers. Special telescopes will be brought aboard for the sailings. Fares begin at \$1,555 per person and include free air transportation from 120 cities.

• Epirotiki Lines Inc. has 10 cruises on the World Renaissance and the Jason from December through March in regions where Halley's Comet can be seen. The science museums of Boston, Charlotte, Columbus, Louisville and

Philadelphia have chartered space on the March 9 departure from Manaus on the Amazon River.

The ship Jason sails Dec. 22 on a 27-day cruise from Guadalupe to Rio de Janeiro, during which times the comet is expected to be visible from a vantage point near Devil's Island. On each Jason cruise, astronomers from Swarthmore College's Sproul Observatory or Philadelphia's Franklin Institute will talk about the comet and help passengers catch sight of the comet both day and night.

Complete details from Epirotiki Lines, 551 Fifth Ave., New York, N.Y. 10017. Call 1-800-221-2470.

• Salen Lindblad Cruising Inc. This cruise line recently won an award for the "Most Adventurous Itineraries" in the cruise industry. Their trips around Madagascar and to the Seychelles Islands in the Indian Ocean are planned to coincide where Halley's Comet can be seen. The science museums of Boston, Charlotte, Columbus, Louisville and

Cruising Inc., 133 E. 55th St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Call 212-751-2300.

• Holland America's three ships, the Noordam, Nieuw Amsterdam and flag ship Rotterdam will also take Halley's Comet Cruises next spring. On-deck viewing, science fiction films and lectures with informal question-and-answer sessions will be featured. The cruises will take you from San Francisco to Acapulco, or into the Western Caribbean and the Eastern Caribbean. Contact your travel agent for more information.

• Vacation Travel Concepts has chartered the Epirotiki ship Pegasus for 12 sailings from Dec. 22, 1985, through April 17, 1986. The Pegasus is the old Sandancer after a \$14 million renovation.

The ship goes to Bahia, Vitoria, Rio de Janeiro, Paranaigua and Sao Paulo, Brazil; Montevideo, Uruguay; and Buenos Aires, Argentina. You can buy 12 nights and 13 days southbound or 11 nights and 12 days northbound. Air-sea packages are available \$1,249-\$2,349.

• The Royal Viking has several Pacific Ocean sailings, many already booked. Carl Sagan will be on the Royal Viking Sea when it leaves San Francisco Dec. 19, 1985, for a two-week cruise down the Mexican coast, through the Panama Canal to Costa Rica. There are still a few spaces on that.

Sagan will also be on the March 26, 1986, sailing of the Royal Viking Star from Auckland, New Zealand, to Sydney, Australia; but that and the other two Australia/New Zealand cruises are booked, as is Sydney to Hong Kong April 9. Royal Viking also has three trans-canal cruises Feb. 21, March 9 and 25. Call 1-800-422-8000.

You can see the comet best in the southern hemisphere. You can see it while touring the Andes or the Amazon, while on safari in Botswana, while touring South Africa or Australia. The best place may be the center of Australia.

If you'd like to see Halley's Comet from Ayers Rock in central Australia, ask your travel agent about Travel Directions Worldwide of Milwaukee, or call Quantas, the Australian airline, at 1-800-227-4500. Or, write to the Australian Tourist Commission, P.O. Box 7049, N. Hollywood, Calif. 91605.

'Bird-brains' are show's stars

Tampa, Fla. — People sometimes ridicule others as being "flighty," or "bird-brained" but if they could see the bird act at Busch Gardens in Tampa, Fla., they would not use those terms in derision again.

The act, now 16 years old, makes the audience think that birds may be among the smartest beings in the animal world.

Bob Garner, manager of animal training at The Dark Continent, uses precocious macaws and cockatoos in a display which features magic, free-flight, acrobatic and audience participation acts.

The task most central to the show's success is selection of the "stars."

Potential stars begin training at age 2 or 3 and are given an "IQ test" to measure their aptitude for learning the required acts. The fastest learners, of course, become cast members.

GARNER SAID that birds are quicker learners than many other animals because they are able to generalize — to apply what they have learned in one trick to a new, similar trick. The ages of the show's birds range from 3 to 30, Garner said, adding that some of the birds live to be 60 or 100.

The present 30-minute show features 10 macaws and cockatoos. It begins with acrobatic performances in which the birds stand on their heads and make 360-degree turns by flapping their wings.

Talking birds are also featured, with macaws that can imitate sounds entertaining the audience by saying "hello" and "bye-bye" and laughing and coughing with human-like voices.

The birds demonstrate their intelligence by solving puzzles on a "form board," putting different-shaped puzzle pieces in their appropriate places on the board.

A FREE-FLIGHT act, in which the birds circle the audience and fly through hoops, and a gymnastic act, in which the birds turn somersaults through steel hoops, follow.

One of the most popular acts, Garner said, is the one which incorporates audience participation. In this act, a member of the audience will hold up a dollar bill and one of the birds will fly up and pluck the



One of the star's of the Busch Gardens bird show is Fred, a blue and gold macaw, on the arm of trainer Lisa Harris.

bill from the person's hand.

The bird show's grand finale is a true crowd-pleaser. In this intricate act, the birds raise a flag, fire a cannon, salute and play dead. Then, one of the birds returns to the stage with outstretched wings in an imitation of the Anheuser-Busch eagle.

GARDNER ATTRIBUTES the bird show's ongoing success to its high entertainment value. "There's something for everyone," he said. "It's the type of thing that people can watch time and again and always pick out something new."

Some fans have seen the show every year

since 1959, when it first went on stage.

"In the early shows," Garner said, "the acts were fairly simple and built around the birds' natural behaviors, such as hopping and raising a wing."

The Busch Gardens Bird Show is performed six times daily at Busch Gardens, a 300-acre African-theme family entertainment park offering rides, shows, one of the nation's largest zoos, shops and restaurants. The park is located at 3000 Busch Boulevard in Tampa, eight miles northwest of downtown and two miles east of Interstate 75.

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