

The Perseid Meteor Shower 2010

The Perseid meteor shower will reach its peak on Thursday night – 12th August. If it is clear, you should see approx. 30 shooting stars every hour. This year will be particularly favourable in that the moon will not interfere...

What are Meteors

As comets go on their travels, they leave a trail of dust behind. When the earth passes through one of these patches of dust, we get a meteor shower. A meteor (shooting star) is literally a small piece of dust (often the size of a grain of sand) that burns up as it hits the earth's atmosphere. As it is travelling at speeds of up to 38 miles per second, the friction causes the dust to ignite and leave a trail of fire. It is this trail that we recognise as a shooting star.

The Perseids

The Perseids get their name as they appear to originate from the constellation of Perseus. The Perseids are associated with Comet Swift-Tuttle which has left a dust cloud of particles on its 130 year orbit. The comet has been observed for 2000 years.

How to Observe the Meteors

The meteor shower will peak on Thursday night / Friday morning 12-13th August. Experts are predicting the peak to be between 00:30-03:00 on Friday morning. To observe the meteors:

- Find a place that's dark with no street lights (and safe!!)
- Look towards the north east about 60° up – if your view is blocked, do not worry, looking north or east will be fine
- Wrap up warm – it will get cold standing still
- You don't need any special equipment - take a deck chair or a sun lounger (and some coffee) and make yourself comfortable
- The longer you're out, the more you'll see as your eyes get dark adapted
- You will be able to see meteors on Wednesday and Friday so if it is cloudy on Thursday, you still have a chance to see some

Photographing the Meteors

You don't need expensive equipment to image the meteors, but you will need patience and luck. All you need is a camera, tripod and a wide angle lens. You will need a fast ISO setting – at least 400. Set the lens to its widest aperture setting and expose for 2-4 mins depending upon sky brightness. And take plenty of shots. If you're lucky, you might capture

a meteor. Don't aim at Perseus though as this is where the meteors will be emanating from – try Cygnus, Square of Pegasus, Plough...

Star Chart for August 12th 11pm BST looking NE

