

ASTRONOMY

Look For The Perseid Meteors This Week-End

AMATEUR astronomers throughout the country, many of them members of the American Meteor Society, are watching the night skies this month for the famous Perseid display of shooting stars.

This is one of the best months of the year to see meteoric visitors from outer space, and their observation is one of the few things that can be done in astronomy without the aid of a telescope. A pair of reasonably keen eyes, a willingness to sit up a good part of the night and a clear dark sky are the essentials.

When a meteor, or shooting star, encounters the friction of the earth's atmosphere, it is slowed in its motion, and burned. The flash that we see is the meteor's dying gasp.

Most meteors are seen during the hours from midnight to dawn, for then we are on the advancing side of the earth, and so we meet them head on. Those that are seen in the evening hours must catch up to us, and few are moving fast enough to do this. But on any night in August, if a person gets away from the glare of city lights, two or three shooting stars can probably be seen every hour, even before midnight, and after that the number may increase to a dozen or more.

On two particular nights, these numbers will be greatly increased. In the early morning hours of Saturday, August 11, and Sunday, August 12, several hundred an hour will probably be seen, weather permitting. If you watch at these times, you can assist the astronomer who studies meteors. First of all, he wants to know the number of meteors, so it is a real help to count all that you see, in any part of the sky, by half hour periods. If you know the constellations, and have access to a map of the stars, it is a further help to plot the paths of those that you see on such a map.

When so plotted, it is found that the August meteors do not flit about the sky at random, but their paths all radiate from a point in the constellation of Perseus, which can be seen in the northeast soon after midnight. It is just below the constellation of Cassiopeia, which

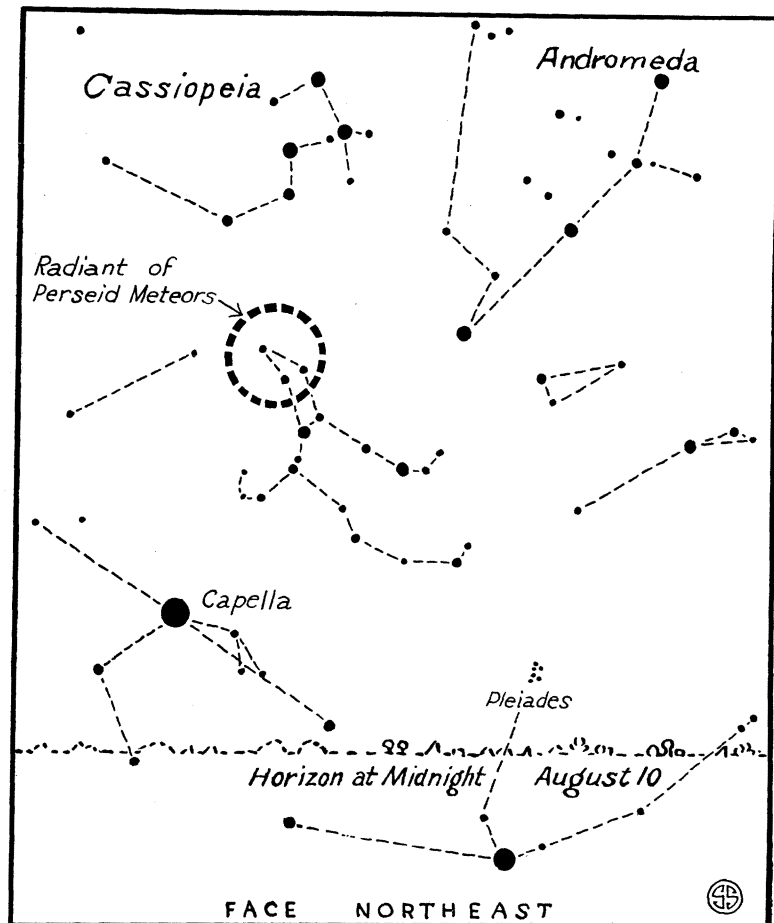
is shaped like the letter W on its side, and just above the bright star Capella. The August meteors are therefore called the Perseids. Other showers of meteors, appearing in other months, radiate from other constellations.

Although they seem to radiate from one point, they are moving in parallel paths, which apparently converge in the distance, like the tracks of a railroad. They travel in a ring-shaped cloud around the sun, and every August the earth crosses their paths. This ring corresponds very closely to the orbit of Tuttle's comet, which was observed

many times during the last century, but has not been observed in recent years. Perhaps the meteors are the remains of the comet, for the two forms of body are believed to be closely related.

Dr. Charles P. Olivier, director of the Flower Observatory of the University of Pennsylvania, at Upper Darby, Pa., is president of the American Meteor Society, and a leading authority on shooting stars. He has announced that he will be glad to receive reports of amateur observations. Such reports should give the place from which the observations were made, the times, the number of people watching, the numbers of meteors seen during half hour periods, and notes of any changes that occurred in the clearness of the sky during the time of watching. The moon will be new on August 10, so the nights of the Perseid shower will be dark.

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MAP FOR HUNTING METEORS

Best results in meteor hunting on the nights of August 11 and 12 may be obtained if the observer goes out in the country away from the city's glare. First find the constellation Perseus, the apparent center of meteor radiation. This can be done if the star, Capella, one of the brightest in the northeastern heavens, is found. The larger the dots representing the stars on this map, the brighter are the stars. The stars shown below the horizon may not be visible when you first look for them. They will appear, however, in the early morning hours when meteor hunting is best.