

ASTRONOMY

Calculation Nearly Gives Earth a Second Moon

THE MOON nearly lost its distinction of being earth's only satellite.

From the Royal Belgian Observatory Prof. E. Delporte sighted a new faint point of light in the heavens. This occurred the middle of March. Cables and telegrams carried the news to observatories throughout the world and the race was on to determine the character and future of the heavenly visitor. "Probably a new comet" was what the astronomers thought.

As their telescopes followed its movement in the sky, as their tedious computations searched out its orbit, it was discovered that there was a chance that it might be a new and second satellite of the earth, diminutive sister of the moon. At Harvard College Observatory one night when the quest was keenest, opinions on whether the Delporte object was comet, satellite or planet changed with the hours.

For days the uncertainty continued. The "Delporte object" grew in fame and diminished in brightness as it moved. In six days it speeded a twenty-fourth of the circumference of the heavens along a great circle, a performance unusual to a comet or one of those tiny planets that are known as asteroids. This strengthened the idea that it was another moon of the earth.

But the University of California's eminent authority on planets and comets,

Prof. A. O. Leuschner, and his associate, Dr. E. C. Bower, devised a new kind of orbit determination that can be used on visitors that come close to the earth. This showed the Delporte object to be a tiny planet moving in a cometary orbit. It can justly be called either planet or comet.

Although not the earth's second satellite, the Delporte object is destined nevertheless for fame. It comes even closer to earth than the minor planet Eros, heretofore our nearest planetary neighbor. It is about ten million miles away. As luck would have it, the Reinmuth object, discovered April 27, turns out to be even closer to the earth, only eight million miles away. (SNL, May 21, '32, p. 330). Astronomers will seize upon these two objects as good chances to determine more accurately the distance of the sun from the earth.

Meanwhile their hopes have been whetted that there will be discovered some day a second moon of the earth.

Science News Letter, May 21, 1932

BOTANY

Poison Ivy Worst When Leaves Are Young

POISON IVY is at its worst when its leaves are young and just expanding. At least it is in the early spring that

the most cases of ivy poisoning occur. This of course may be partly due to the fact that people do not recognize the plant and therefore fail to avoid it as they do later, said James B. McNair of the Field Museum of Natural History, in a radio talk given under the auspices of Science Service. The talk went on the air over the network of the Columbia Broadcasting System.

Mr. McNair denied the old notion that poison ivy is most venomous when it is in bloom, and also the belief that its pollen is poisonous. The pollen of poison ivy, he said, has none of the poisonous material in it, and even if it had it could not do any mischief at a distance, for it is a sticky pollen of the type borne by insects, not the dry type adapted for wind transportation.

Special Tubes for Poison

The real poison of poison ivy, Mr. McNair said, is a kind of resin, that travels through the stem and out into the leaves in a series of special tubes, and not in the general sap stream. Some of this resinous stuff has to reach the skin before poisoning can occur. It cannot travel through the air in any way; although persons who have not touched poison ivy can still be poisoned by contact with garden tools or other articles that have brushed through its leaves.

People vary greatly in their susceptibility to ivy poisoning, Mr. McNair stated, and some fortunates are apparently quite immune to any ordinary contact. Many remedies have been proposed, but the one he recommended is a solution of an iron salt. Of this remedy he said:

Iron Chloride Recommended

"The best and most effective preventive proves to be iron chloride, which completely neutralizes the poison, though it is effective as a remedy only if used in the very early stages. The use of iron chloride to the extent of five per cent. in a half and half mixture of alcohol and water is recommended. If the hands and face are bathed freely in this solution either before or immediately after one goes into a region known to contain poison ivy or its kindred plants, no ill effects need be expected. The remedy is cheap, is easily obtainable at any drug store, is non-poisonous and safe."

Science News Letter, May 28, 1932

There is only a small amount of helium in the air we breathe close to earth, but 62 miles up the air is 67 per cent. helium.

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