



Comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock

“Saving Apollo 16,” the Focal Point by Mark Gingrich (*S&T*: Apr. 2022, p. 84), reminded me of something that happened in May 1983, shortly after I’d started working at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago.

Comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock (C/1983 H1) made the front page of the Chi-

◀ In 1983, Comet IRAS-Araki-Alcock (C/1983 H1) passed just 0.03 astronomical units from Earth, the closest confirmed cometary approach in 200 years.

cago newspaper. The next day, more than 200 people called to ask how to see the comet.

Answering those calls was part of my job, but the comet was only 2nd-magnitude, not much brighter than the limiting magnitude in the city. Worse, the comet had no tail obvious to the unaided eye. To see the comet reliably, one needed to know where in the sky to look. It would also have helped to drive an hour outside the city.

Almost no one who called knew how to find the Big Dipper. By mid-afternoon, I was getting tired of disappointing people.

At the time, Venus was bright in the evening sky. The temptation was strong to say, “Yep, that bright one, just after sunset. Can’t miss it!” But I resisted.

Fred Ringwald • Fresno, California

Red Galaxies

In the article “An Unusual Home” by Shannon Hall (*S&T*: Apr. 2022, p. 34), she notes that one way to identify small galaxies apparently near a larger one as being more distant in the line of sight rather than genuine satellites is to see if they are redder than the other galaxy. However, dead galaxies will naturally be redder than ones still actively forming stars. Could this lead to astronomers overlooking genuine dead satellite galaxies, biasing the conclusions from the Satellites Around Galactic Analogs (SAGA) Survey?

Michael Baxter
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“**Monica Young replies:** You make a good point that older galaxies will also look redder, so the SAGA team members had to be careful with their color cuts in order to not bias the survey. What they did was make two color cuts by galaxies’ g-r and r-i colors. (The g-r color, for example, is the difference in an object’s magnitude as measured in the g and the r bands.) Having two color measurements gave the team a crude photometric redshift for any given galaxy.

Photometric redshifts are common in larger surveys with thousands of objects, but the key here was that the team was looking at such low redshifts that those formulae wouldn’t apply, so they had to make their own.

Across Philly for S&T

As an 80-year-old retired university professor and a serious, lifelong amateur astronomer, I very much enjoyed both William Sheehan and Klaus Brasch’s “A Golden Age for Amateur Astronomy” (*S&T*: Nov. 2021, p. 14) and the letters it provoked (*S&T*: Mar. 2022, p. 6). In several cases, these letters were virtually pieces taken out of my own biography.

I particularly remember how I’d eagerly anticipated the monthly appearance of *Sky & Telescope* for sale at the Franklin Institute bookstore. This would provide an excuse for me to take a break from pursuing my PhD at the University of Pennsylvania and

Sirius and the Sun

Thanks to Bob King’s “A Sirius Naked-Eye Challenge” (*S&T*: Mar. 2022, p. 48), I saw Sirius with the naked eye at 7:12 p.m. CDT on March 27th — the very minute the Sun’s westernmost limb touched the horizon at my location in Ottawa, Illinois. I was surprised at how easy it was to see it in binoculars just 10 minutes before and just as surprised at how easy it was to lose. The naked-eye view came and went for a few minutes. Since some of the planets are occasionally brighter than Sirius, my next challenge will be to see them while the Sun is still up — when they’re not at dangerously small elongations, of course. I’ve already seen Venus in the daylight.

Rick Wiegmann Koshko
Ottawa, Illinois

Spotting Mercury

The blurb at the end of Sun, Moon & Planets on page 46 of the April 2022 issue of *Sky & Telescope* notes, “. . . Gary Seronik never misses a chance to catch a mercurial Mercury appearance.” I

have the same outlook. Since January 2011, I’ve spotted Mercury at least once at every elongation. I usually start with binoculars or unaided eyes and occasionally try for the crescent with a scope.

On April 11, 2022, I glimpsed Mercury through a gap in the clouds with my 15×56 binoculars. On April 12th, I saw it again in clear skies three minutes after sunset with the same binoculars, then caught it with unaided eyes 25 minutes after sunset. Three minutes later, I was able to hold it steadily in view with unaided eyes. Sometimes it’s easy to see Mercury with the naked eye; however, oftentimes it’s difficult or impossible without optical aid.

This one makes 72 elongations in a row for me. Sort of like an old golfer, that score matches my age. I started in January 2011 with the hope of spotting Mercury at each of its seven elongations that year and just kept going.

I’m glad to see that someone else appreciates spotting Mercury.

Joe Stieber
Maple Shade, New Jersey