

Our Night Sky for December 9th, 2024

I think this week is a unique sky viewing opportunity for us. There is an interesting meteor shower already underway. Every year in December we have the Geminids meteor shower. Temperatures of minuses twenty or thirty are not unusual. To enjoy a meteor shower calls for a bit of patience, it calls for standing still and watching an area of the sky for several minutes at a time. With the weather being a bit milder, viewing should be that much easier. The constellation Gemini is just to the left of familiar Orion which is easy to find. A bit left will be two stick men, with two bright stars at their head, Castor above and Pollux below. This is the radiant for this meteor shower which often can exceed one hundred meteors an hour, improving later in the evening as that area of the sky slowly becomes the earth's leading-edge plowing through the debris left by a short period asteroid 3200 Phaethon.

Because the asteroid refreshes the meteor shower every one and a half years the showers stretches out for as much as two weeks. Now that brings me to one other important point for you to enjoy a meteor shower, the darker the sky the better. A lot of meteors are small rocks or gravel you could pick up so a good number are small quick flashes of light and the background sky glow in the city simply extinguishes a lot of meteors.

So very dark skies give you a much better chance to enjoy Our Night Sky.