INTRODUCTION

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ALPHABET

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BODY TEXT

Halley’s Comet

Halley’s Comet or Comet Halley, officially designated 1P/Halley, is a short-period comet visible from Earth every 75–79 years. Halley is the only known short-period comet that is regularly visible to the naked eye from Earth, and thus the only naked-eye comet that can appear twice in a human lifetime. Halley last appeared in the inner parts of the Solar System in 1986 and will next appear in mid-2061.

Halley’s periodic returns to the inner Solar System have been observed and recorded by astronomers around the world since at least 240 BC. But it was not until 1705 that the English astronomer Edmond Halley understood that these appearances were reappearances of the same comet. As a result of this discovery, the comet is named after Halley.

During its 1986 visit to the inner Solar System, Halley’s Comet became the first comet to be observed in detail by spacecraft, providing the first observational data on the structure of a comet nucleus and the mechanism of coma and tail formation. These observations supported a number of longstanding hypotheses about comet construction, particularly Fred Whipple’s “dirty snowball” model, which correctly predicted that Halley would be composed of a mixture of volatile ices—such as water, carbon dioxide, ammonia, and dust. The missions also provided data that substantially reformed and reconfigured these ideas; for instance, it is now understood that the surface of Halley is largely composed of dusty, non-volatile materials, and that only a small portion of it is icy.

Hyakutake Comet

Comet Hyakutake (Japanese pronunciation: [çakɯtake], formally designated C/1996 B2) is a comet, discovered on 31 January 1996, that passed very close to Earth in March of that year. It was dubbed the Great Comet of 1996; its passage near the Earth was one of the closest cometary approaches of the previous 200 years. Hyakutake appeared very bright in the night sky and was widely seen around the world. The comet temporarily upstaged the much anticipated Comet
Hale–Bopp, which was approaching the inner Solar System at the time.

Scientific observations of the comet led to several discoveries. Most surprising to cometary scientists was the first discovery of X-ray emission from a comet, believed to have been caused by ionised solar wind particles interacting with neutral atoms in the coma of the comet. The Ulysses spacecraft unexpectedly crossed the comet’s tail at a distance of more than 500 million km (3.3 AU; 310 million mi) from the nucleus, showing that Hyakutake had the longest tail known for a comet.

Hyakutake is a long-period comet. Before its most recent passage through the Solar System, its orbital period was about 17,000 years, but the gravitational perturbation of the giant planets has increased this period to 70,000 years.

Hale–Bopp Comet

Comet Hale–Bopp (formally designated C/1995 O1) is a comet that was one of the most widely observed of the 20th century and one of the brightest seen for many decades.

Alan Hale and Thomas Bopp discovered Comet Hale–Bopp separately on July 23, 1995, before it became visible to the naked eye. It is difficult to predict the maximum brightness of new comets with any degree of certainty, but Hale–Bopp exceeded most predictions when it passed perihelion on April 1, 1997, reaching about magnitude −1.8. It was visible to the naked eye for a record 18 months, due to its massive nucleus size. This is twice as long as the Great Comet of 1811, the previous record holder. Accordingly, Hale–Bopp was dubbed the great comet of 1997.

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QUESTIONABLY?
MULTIPRONGED
HYPNOTIZABLE
THIS *IS*
KOMET

EXPERIMENTS

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