

# The High Desert Observer

## December 2018

The Astronomical Society of Las Cruces (ASLC) is dedicated to expanding public awareness and understanding of the wonders of the universe. ASLC holds frequent observing sessions and star parties and provides opportunities to work on Society and public educational projects. Members receive the *High Desert Observer*, our monthly newsletter, plus membership to the Astronomical League, including their quarterly publication, *Reflector*, in digital or paper format.

Individual Dues are \$30.00 per year

Family Dues are \$36.00 per year

Student (full-time) Dues are \$24.00

Annual dues are payable in January. Prorated dues are available for new members. Dues are payable to ASLC with an application form or note to: Treasurer ASLC, PO Box 921, Las Cruces, NM 88004. Contact our Treasurer, Patricia Conley (treasurer@aslc-nm.org) for further information.

*ASLC members receive electronic delivery of the HDO and are entitled to a \$5.00 (per year) Sky and Telescope magazine discount.*



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### ASLC Board of Directors, 2018

[Board@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Board@aslc-nm.org)

President: Howard Brewington; [President@aslc-nm.org](mailto:President@aslc-nm.org)

Vice President: Rich Richins; [VP@aslc-nm.org](mailto:VP@aslc-nm.org)

Treasurer: Patricia Conley; [Treasurer@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Treasurer@aslc-nm.org)

Secretary: John McCullough; [Secretary@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Secretary@aslc-nm.org)

Director-at-Large: Steve Barkes; [Director1@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Director1@aslc-nm.org)

Director-at-Large: Ed Montes [Director2@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Director2@aslc-nm.org)

Past President: Chuck Sterling; [csterlin@zianet.com](mailto:csterlin@zianet.com)

### Committee Chairs

ALCor: Patricia Conley; [tconley00@hotmail.com](mailto:tconley00@hotmail.com)

Apparel: Howard Brewington; [comet\\_brewington@msn.com](mailto:comet_brewington@msn.com)

Calendar: Chuck Sterling; [csterlin@zianet.com](mailto:csterlin@zianet.com)

Education: Rich Richins; [Education@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Education@aslc-nm.org)

Grants: Sidney Webb; [sidwebb@gmail.com](mailto:sidwebb@gmail.com)

Loaner Telescope: Sidney Webb; [sidwebb@gmail.com](mailto:sidwebb@gmail.com)

Membership: Open

Observatories:

Leasburg Dam: David Doctor; [astrodoc71@gmail.com](mailto:astrodoc71@gmail.com)

Tombaugh: Steve Shaffer; [sshaffer@zianet.com](mailto:sshaffer@zianet.com)

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*Masthead Image: February 10, 2017 From Las Cruces, Moon rising over the Organ Mts in Penumbral Eclipse.*

### December Meeting --

In lieu of a regular meeting, a Christmas Pot Luck will be held on **Saturday, December 8**, at Rich Richin's house at 6:00 p.m.

See the Announcements section for instructions and directions to Rich's house.

### Member Info Changes

All members need to keep the Society informed of changes to their basic information, such as name, address, phone number, or email address. Please contact [Treasurer@aslc-nm.org](mailto:Treasurer@aslc-nm.org) with any updates.

### Events

ASLC hosts deep-sky viewing and imaging at our dark sky location in Upham. We also have public in-town observing sessions at both the International Delights Cafe (1245 El Paseo) and at Tombaugh Observatory (on the NMSU Campus). All sessions begin at dusk.

At our Leasburg Dam State Park Observatory, we hold monthly star parties. Located just 20 miles north of Las Cruces, our 16" Meade telescope is used to observe under rather dark skies.

Please see *Calendar of Events* for specific dates and times.

# What's Up ASLC?

*December 2018*



I'd like to thank all ASLC members for their financial support during 2018. Without your dues, our club could not function. And, I really appreciate the hard work of our officers, board members, and many volunteers. Without these individuals, we could not fulfill the club's mission of sharing astronomy with the Las Cruces community.

I'm certain that 2019 will be another successful year for the ASLC. But, for now, I wish everyone happy holidays, and I hope to see you all at our Christmas party. This year we're meeting at Rich Richins' home on Saturday 08 December at 6:00 p.m. This will be a pot-luck dinner with a Mexican theme. So, Ho, Ho, Ho, and Merry Christmas as we celebrate the best hobby on the planet, amateur astronomy!

Howard J. Brewington  
ASLC President  
December 2018

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## **Calendar of Events** **(Mountain Time - 24 hr. clock)**

Dec	01	17:02	Sun Sets
	01	19:00	Saturn Set
	01	23:52	Mars Sets
	01	12:00	OUTREACH; Set Back the Sun Winter Solstice Event at Leesburg Dam State Park
	01	17:02	OUTREACH; NPO Presentation at Rockhound SP, B. Nigg, M. Nuss, C. Turner
	07	12:21	New Moon
	07	19:00	OUTREACH; Tombaugh Observatory Open House: 7:00 to 8:00 PM
	08	17:00	OUTREACH; NPO Presentation at City of Rocks SP, B. Nigg, C. Turner, M. Nuss
	08	18:00	ASLC Christmas Party: (see Announcement 1)
	15	04:50	First Quarter Moon
	15	17:00	OUTREACH; MoonGaze, International Delights Café
	15	17:00	OUTREACH; MoonGaze, Pan Am Plaza on University Ave
	22	10:48	Full Moon
	25	00:00	Christmas - All Day
	29	02:35	Last Quarter Moon
	29	17:00	OUTREACH; Dark Sky Observing at Leesburg Dam State Park
Jan	01	17:13	Sun Sets
	01	00:00	New Years Day - All Day
	05	17:00	OUTREACH; NPO Presentation at Rockhound SP, B. Nigg, M. Nuss, C. Turner
	05	18:29	New Moon
	12	17:00	OUTREACH; MoonGaze, International Delights Café
	17	17:00	OUTREACH; MoonGaze, Pan Am Plaza on University Ave
	13	23:46	First Quarter Moon
	20	19:00	Total Lunar Eclipse (see Announcement 3)
	20	22:15	Full Moon
	25	19:00	ASLC Monthly Meeting; Good Samaritan Society, Activities Meeting Room
	26	17:00	OUTREACH; Dark Sky Observing at Leesburg Dam State Park
	26	17:00	OUTREACH; NPO Presentation at City of Rocks SP, B. Nigg, C. Turner, M. Nuss
	27	14:11	Last Quarter Moon

Be sure to visit our web site for ASLC information: [www.aslc-nm.org](http://www.aslc-nm.org)

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## **Announcements**

1. The ASLC will not have a usual meeting in December. Instead, we will have a Christmas Potluck Meal and informal gathering. The Christmas gathering will be held on December 8th. The time will be 6 PM, location is Rich Richin's house at 3115 Sundown Drive. Rich's phone number is 575-405-0470 in case you get lost and need directions. The theme for the potluck and instructions to RSVP will be sent out via email to all ASLC members. Sundown Drive is easy to find. It is one block south of the Encanto Hotel, across from the Mesilla Valley Mall.

2 The January ASLC meeting will be held on January 25, 2019 at 7:00 PM at the Creative Arts Room, Good Samaritan Society Las Cruces Village, 3011 Buena Vida Circle, Las Cruces, New Mexico. The speaker and topic will be announced later.

3. There is a total eclipse of the Moon coming on Jan 20, 2019. From Las Cruces, the Moon will go into eclipse about 7 pm when it is low in the east, and it will last for several hours.

Some of you may have noticed that the HDO has a masthead photo. I took that photo in Feb 2017 during another total Lunar Eclipse. I wanted something more distinctive than text on a white paper or a colored background. Well this is another chance to do better. I am not an accomplished photographer and I really did not plan properly for the event.

I want to invite all you "real" photographers to show up at the "Big Bird" rest area east of LC, or where ever is convenient for you, and make a better photo for the masthead. Bring your results to the next club meeting on January 25th.

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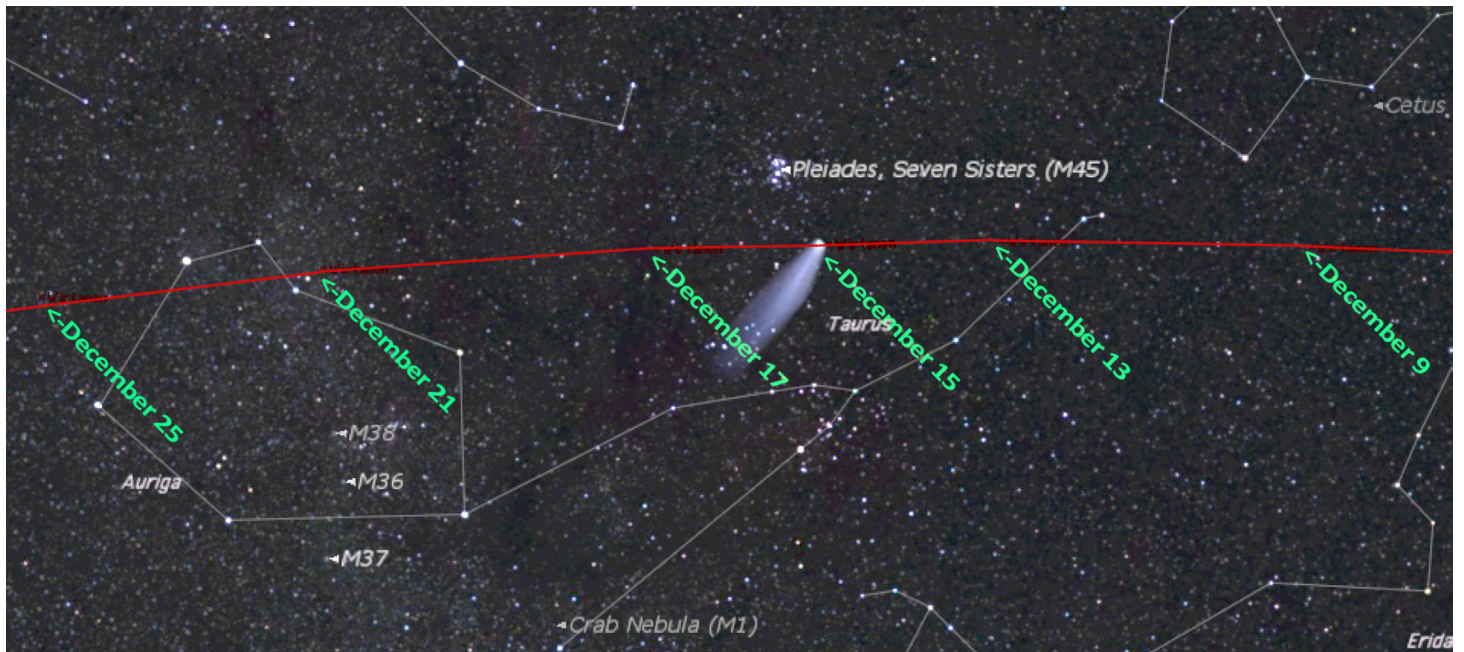


## A Christmas Present from the Heavens:

A Bright Comet for Winter Solstice?

By Rich Richins

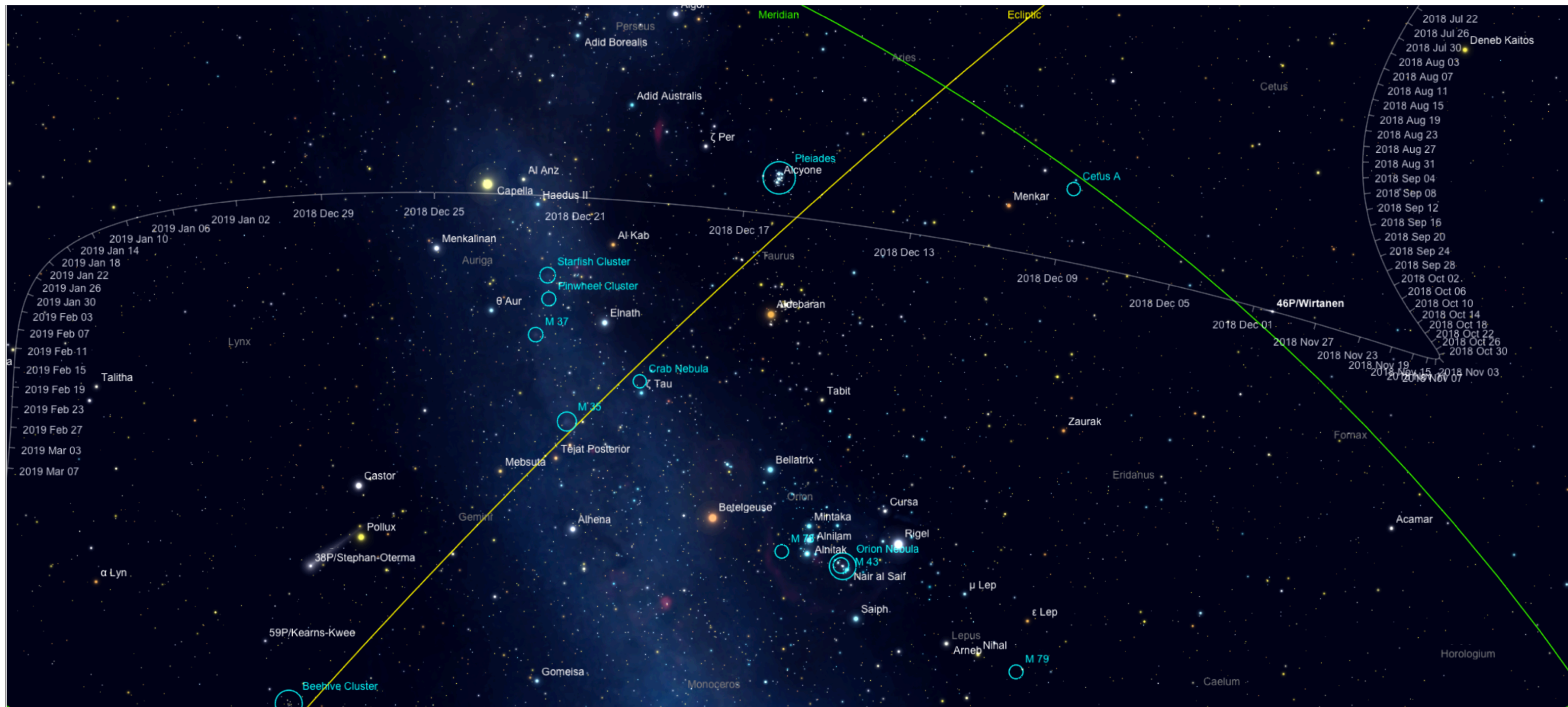
There may be a visual comet coming to a sky near you. Comet 46P/Wirtanen is rapidly approaching Earth and will come within 0.08 au of Earth (about 30 Lunar distances) in mid-December. While comets are notoriously unpredictable with regard to their brightness, it's estimated that Wirtanen could reach third magnitude. If that occurs, it would make the comet a pretty easy naked eye target.



The comet is currently visible in the southeast after dusk. A November 11 sighting put the brightness at magnitude 6.6, so it's probably already a decent binocular object. It's in Fornax until near the end of November. Then it passes through Cetus and Eridanus before reaching its peak in Taurus. Maximum brightness is anticipated around December 15 when the comet will be within  $4^\circ$  of M45 (photo op). The comet should then slowly dim as it moves on through Perseus and Auriga.

**Ed Note:** At the star party at Rock Hound State Park on 1 Dec 2018, it was easily visible in small telescopes and binoculars and finder scopes. Although the comet is small (only about 0.75 Mi) it appears large in a telescope. The nucleus is small but it has a large coma or halo. It looks like a globular cluster in a small telescope slightly larger than Jupiter. It should make a great photographic target as it reaches its closest approach to Earth on December 15 and 16.

There are a number of interesting features and facts about this comet. They are easily researched by searching for comet 46P Wirtanen.



The Path of Comet 46P Wirtanen as it makes it closest approach to Earth. It will make closest approach to Earth on Dec 15-16 near the center of the chart.

Time and Date: Thu Nov 29, 2018 10:02:33 PM Location: 88030, Deming, NM  
 Centered on: SE 138.8° Alt +64.3° Field of View: 157.5° x 81.0°