

Quadrantids create year's first meteor shower

December 21 2012, by Janet Anderson



Quadrantid meteor shower 2012, seen over the Florida Keys. Credit: Jeff Berkes

(Phys.org)—A little-known meteor shower named after an extinct constellation, the Quadrantids will present an excellent chance for hardy souls to start the year off with some late-night meteor watching. Peaking in the wee morning hours of Jan. 3, the Quadrantids have a maximum rate of about 80 per hour, varying between 60-200. Unfortunately, light from a waning gibbous moon will wash out many Quadrantids, cutting

down on the number of meteors seen by skywatchers.

Unlike the more famous Perseid and Geminid meteor showers, the Quadrantids only last a few hours, so it's the morning of Jan. 3 or nothing. Given the location of the radiant—northern tip of Bootes the Herdsman—only observers at latitudes north of 51 degrees south will be able to see Quadrantids.

Like the [Geminids](#), the Quadrantids originate from an asteroid, called 2003 EH1. Dynamical studies suggest that this body could very well be a piece of a comet which broke apart several centuries ago, and that the meteors you will see before dawn on Jan. 3 are the small debris from this fragmentation. After hundreds of years orbiting the sun, they will enter our atmosphere at 90,000 mph, burning up 50 miles above Earth's surface—a fiery end to a long journey!

Watch the Quadrantids! Live Ustream Feed

A live Ustream feed of the Quadrantid shower will be embedded below on the nights of Jan. 2-4. The camera is mounted at NASA's Marshall Space Flight Center in Huntsville, Ala. During the day you will see either pre-recorded footage or a blank box—the camera is light-activated and turns on at dusk.

Do You Have Some Great Quadrantid Images?

If you have some great images of the [Quadrantid meteor shower](#), please consider adding them to the [Quadrantid Meteors photo group in Flickr](#). Who knows—your images may attract interest from the media and receive international exposure.

More About the Quadrantids

The Quadrantids derive their name from the constellation of Quadrans Muralis (mural quadrant), which was created by the French astronomer Jerome Lalande in 1795. Located between the constellations of Bootes and Draco, Quadrans represents an early astronomical instrument used to observe and plot stars. Even though the constellation is no longer recognized by astronomers, it was around long enough to give the [meteor shower](#)—first seen in 1825—its name.

Provided by NASA

Citation: Quadrantids create year's first meteor shower (2012, December 21) retrieved 23 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-12-quadrantids-year-meteor-shower.html>

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