

SOHO sees something new near the sun

February 24 2015

An unusual comet skimmed past the sun on Feb 18-21, 2015, as captured by the European Space Agency (ESA) and NASA's Solar and Heliospheric Observatory, or SOHO.

This [comet](#) was interesting for two reasons. First it's what's called a non-group comet, meaning it's not part of any known family of comets. Most comets seen by SOHO belong to the Kreutz family - all of which broke off from a single giant comet many centuries ago.

The second reason it's interesting is because the vast majority of comets that come close enough to the sun to be seen by SOHO do not survive the trip. Known as sungrazers, these comets usually evaporate in the intense sunlight. This comet made it to within 2.2 million miles of the sun's surface - but survived the trip intact.

"There's a half-decent chance that ground observers might be able to detect it in the coming weeks," said Karl Battams, a solar scientist at the Naval Research Lab in Washington, D.C. "But it's also possible that events during its trip around the [sun](#) will cause it to die fairly fast."

Provided by NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center

Citation: SOHO sees something new near the sun (2015, February 24) retrieved 18 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-02-soho-sun.html>

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