

October 2017 Highlight

The Zodiacal Light – October 17th through 31st

- ★ October is one of the opportune months for finding the elusive “zodiacal light” in the early morning sky.
- ★ But what is zodiacal light?
- ★ Zodiacal light is the sunlight reflected from numerous dust grains located along the plane of the solar system → the ecliptic or “zodiac”.
- ★ These dust grains are left over from the formation of the solar system (a type of cosmic dust), and their supply is continuously fed by particles from comets and asteroid collisions.
- ★ The ecliptic is nearly vertical to the horizon this month providing good viewing opportunities.

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- ★ Zodiacal light is seen as a “cone” of light that is widest at the horizon.
- ★ Look for it **low in the east** (with an unobstructed view) beginning about two hours before sunrise.
- ★ The 40-minute prime viewing window closes about 80 minutes before sunrise.
- ★ Pick a **very dark location** far from artificial lights and **without moonlight**.
- ★ The best dates to see the zodiacal light without interfering moonlight will be **from Oct. 1-3 and 17-31**.
- ★ In this fall season, when the zodiacal light is visible in the eastern morning sky, it is often called the “**false dawn**”.



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Zodiacal Light and the Milky Way