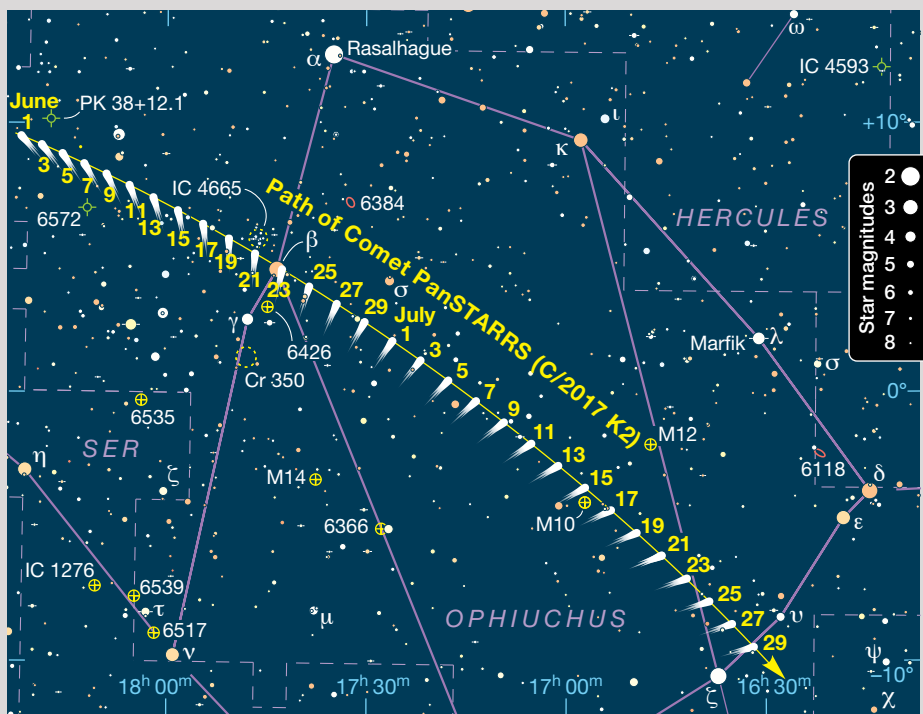


Comet PanSTARRS Arrives for telescope observations



THE PANSTARRS SURVEY at Haleakalā Observatory in Hawai‘i nabbed **Comet C/2017 K2** five years ago when the object was about halfway between the orbits of Saturn and Uranus. Even then, sublimating carbon dioxide, carbon monoxide, and molecular oxygen had lofted enough material from the comet’s frigid surface to create a 129,000-km-wide coma. The outgassing of these exotic ices indicated that K2 was on its first visit to the inner solar system from the Oort Cloud.

Archived images from the Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope revealed activity as far back as 2013, when Comet PanSTARRS was beyond Uranus, at the time making it the most distant, active, inbound comet ever found. (That honor recently passed to Comet Bernardinelli-Bernstein, which was first imaged in October 2014 at a distance of 2.3 billion km.)

▲ The comet’s position is plotted for 0^h UT.

Back in mid-February, I saw K2 as a small, 12th-magnitude fuzzy patch in my 15-inch scope. **The view should be much improved in June. As the comet ambles across northern Ophiuchus, it’s well-placed at nightfall and expected to brighten to about magnitude 8.0.**

On June 7th, K2 will pass 1½° north of the 8th-magnitude planetary nebula NGC 6572 and ½° south of the bright, binocular open cluster IC 4665 on the night of the 20th. The comet swings just northeast of the bright globular cluster M10 on **the nights of July 14th and 15th as K2 has its closest approach to Earth.**

The comet disappears into evening twilight around the autumn equinox but remains in view from the Southern Hemisphere. Perihelion occurs on December 19th, when K2 could peak at 6th magnitude. ***