

1985

Editor's Corner - Halley Hype

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Recommended Citation

Hoff, Darrel (1985) "Editor's Corner - Halley Hype," *Iowa Science Teachers Journal*: Vol. 22 : No. 1 , Article 14.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.uni.edu/istj/vol22/iss1/14>

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Halley Hype

At least three generations of people have grown up calculating how old they will be at the next coming of Halley's comet. The time is upon us! Last visible to the naked eye in 1910, it will again reach naked eye "brilliance" in December and will be visible in January and February of 1986.

"Halley Hype" has already begun. Nearly 20 T-shirt companies are selling comet shirts. Even the staid *Wall Street Journal* reports on the commercialization of this rare event. Books are out or are being rushed to print. Travel companies are capitalizing on the fact that it will be better viewed after perihelion in the southern hemisphere. And yes, comet pills are being marketed by one company. (In jest, we hope!)

How should the serious science educator handle this phenomena? Obviously we began with educating ourselves. (See accompanying article by Larry Kelsey.) Next we should prepare our public for disappointment. This apparition is not a favorable one. It does not pass near the earth. As it fades into the twilight near the end of January 1986, there will be a full moon. In addition, since 1910 we have urbanized our country and night time artificial illumination will lighten our skies. Dark country viewing is recommended.

Yet it is a memorable event, particularly because it symbolizes one of the great stories in science: that of the test of Newtonian gravitational laws and that of a strong personal bond between Halley and Newton. If we do nothing else, we should toast the comet with a glass of brandy (Halley's favorite drink) and remember.

— Darrel Hoff