



PRESS RELEASE
For immediate release

Live, on December 28, 2009 The Moon Will Occult the Pleiades

Montréal, December 16, 2009 – Montréal's Nature Museums are inviting members of the public to observe a relatively rare astronomical phenomenon, as the Moon occults the Pleiades on the evening of **Monday, December 28, 2009**. Visitors of all ages can come to the Planetarium **between 7 and 9 p.m.**, where astronomers from the Montréal Planetarium and the Société d'astronomie du Planétarium de Montréal will have telescopes set up outdoors for them to gaze through.

A gift from the heavens

The occultation of the Pleiades will occur right after Christmas and just a few days before the full Moon, on December 31. In fact, it is the Moon that will be obscuring some of the stars from our view as it moves through the sky. If the sky is clear on the evening of December 28, the Pleiades will be clearly visible by 7 p.m. (EST), in the southeast, very high in the sky. The almost full Moon will be right next to them. Gradually, the two celestial objects will meet, as the Moon passes in front of the Pleiades and obscures some of them from view. Merope and Atlas, two of the seven brightest stars, will disappear in turn at 7:28 and 8:44 p.m., and reappear at 7:53 and 9:39. In Quebec, this occultation is described as partial, because the Moon will be passing only through the edge of the star cluster.

Occultations of the Pleiades occur for five-year periods, once every 18.6 years. The next one visible in Quebec will not happen until November 2024.

What are the Pleiades?

A star cluster located in Taurus, a "V" shaped constellation around Aldebaran, a very bright star. This triangle is said to be the bull's head, with the Pleiades resting on its shoulder. There are more than a thousand stars in the Pleiades cluster, all born from the same cloud of gas and dust about 100 million years ago.

A star-studded opportunity

Despite the late-December cold, hardy observers will be well rewarded for their effort. They will be able to see the Pleiades with the naked eye if the night is clear, and make out six of the twelve brightest stars. The view will be even more stunning with binoculars or a telescope!

Origins

The Pleiades get their name from Greek mythology. These seven sisters, daughters of Atlas and Pleione, were pursued by the warrior Orion and turned into doves by Zeus. When they died, they were placed in the sky and became a star cluster ... still pursued by Orion, who had become a constellation.

General information

Montréal Planetarium

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Montréal's Nature Museums – the Biodôme, Insectarium, Botanical Garden and Planetarium – helping people enjoy nature to the fullest.

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Visual available on request

Please, contact us before December 23 to set an interview with an astronomer from the Planetarium.