

Public Service Announcement
Joshua Tree national Monument
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Good Afternoon, this is Park Ranger Debbie Ohlfs at Joshua Tree National Monument with today's Monument message.

The dark desert skies over the monument provide good celestial gazing opportunities. Every once in awhile a new kind of shining object appears in the night sky like nothing else you could ever imagine. This weekend is no exception. Astronomy buffs will be turning their eyes toward Jupiter in anticipation of the comet Shoemaker-Levy 9.

The comet, Shoemaker-Levy 9 was named after astronomers Eugene and Carolyn Shoemaker and David Levy who were the first to spot broken pieces of the comet last March. Up until now the comet has spent most of its existence in orbit beyond the planet Pluto. Sometime in the past few decades or centuries it entered Earth's solar system and fell into orbit around Jupiter. About two years ago it's orbit took it to within 15,000 miles of Jupiter's cloud tops. So near, that tidal forces tore the weakly- cemented snowball of ice and frozen gases apart. We will see pieces of this cometary debris that have been left in orbit that on the next pass, are expected to hit the planet.

Within days the leading chunk of the broken comet will burst through Jupiter's cloud tops at a speed of 133,000 MPH. This speed could pack a tremendous punch with the energy equivalent of a trillion tons of TNT.

No one knows what will be visible when the comet makes its appearance starting July 16, 1994. One thing is for certain, this Saturday July 16, 1994, at 8:00 p.m. you may join the local Andromeda Astronomical Society as they host this week's Star Party in the Hidden Valley Nature Trail parking area. Visitors and local folks are invited to attend this event. Perhaps the most spectacular event since the invention of the telescope.

For Joshua Tree National Monument, this is park ranger Debbie Ohlfs returning you back to Z107.7