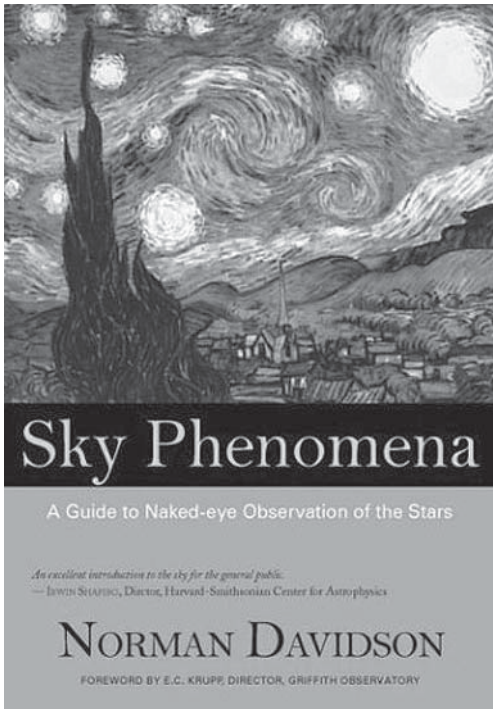




## Sky phenomena



by Norman Davidson

Lindisfarne Books, 2004 (revised). ISBN 1-58420-026-X. Pp xvi + 207, £13.40 (pbk).

In his introduction to this book, Dr E. C. Krupp (Director, Griffith Observatory, Los Angeles) reminds us that we have lost much of the sky, and welcomes the fact that 'Norman Davidson has given us the bootstraps we need to pull ourselves back up to heaven'. Certainly, *Sky Phenomena* holds an enormous amount to catch the interest of the 'beginner or teacher', at

whom, the author tells us, the book is aimed. As a journalist and long-time educator, Davidson has the experience to spark that interest.

Here is a good, no-nonsense guide to the motions and phenomena of the Sun, other solar system objects, and constellations. There are 186 figures and 16 plates, all black-and-white.

Several unexpected aspects await the reader of *Sky Phenomena*. Fully 42 of the 159 pages in the body of the text are devoted to astronomical poetry, from sources as varied as the *Rig Veda* and the Egyptian *Book of the Dead* to twentieth-century verse such as Sidney Keyes' evocation, in *The Cruel Solstice*, of the Royal Observatory at Greenwich. Davidson's blending of the cultural element with the technical ensures that mythology and history are also found in good measure.

What really sets this work apart, though, are occasional gems of interest of a kind unlikely to be found in many 'basic sky manuals': make a nocturnal to find the time of night by sighting on the Plough, as medieval people did; demonstrate the Celestial Sphere and heavenly motions with a flask of copper sulphate solution (!)... In how many other books might you find a discussion of lunar phases in Shakespeare accompanying an imaginative description of the night sky as seen from the Moon? How did the planetoid Sedna get its name? What use did Captain Cook make of Harrison's chronometer?

There is a welcome list of future astronomical events (elongations of Mercury and Venus, eclipses, oppositions, etc.) and

several pages of technical data about all kinds of celestial objects. A 16-page guide to the skies of the Southern Hemisphere rounds off this wide-ranging book.

If you seek a coffee-table ornament full of glossy colour photos from high-tech telescopes, look elsewhere. If you want a thoroughgoing basic guide to what goes on up there, and how it is seen from down here – and you are not averse to verse – buy this book.

**Bob Mizon**

Bob Mizon, a former teacher, operates a travelling planetarium. He co-ordinates the BAA's Campaign for Dark Skies.

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