

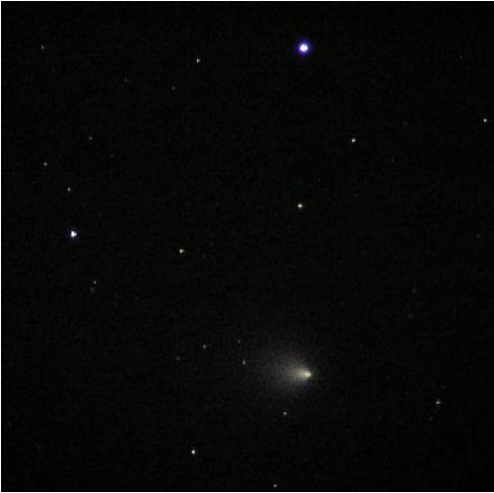
Caithness Skies

(Comet Holmes Outburst - October 2007)

Once in a while a bright [comet](#) appears in the night sky and catches the interest of people that wouldn't normally look skyward at night. The sight of these heavenly wanderers with their flowing tails can be a truly glorious sight and a few good examples have graced Caithness skies in recent times.



Comet Hale-Bopp (1997)



Comet 73P/Schwassmann-Wachmann 3
(May 2006)



Comet McNaught (Jan 2007)

Some comets however do not exhibit these glorious tails, but instead appear merely as fuzzy blobs in the sky. One such comet has unexpectedly and very suddenly increased in brightness and is now easily visible to the naked eye in our evening sky. On the 24th October 2007, [Comet 17P/Holmes](#)

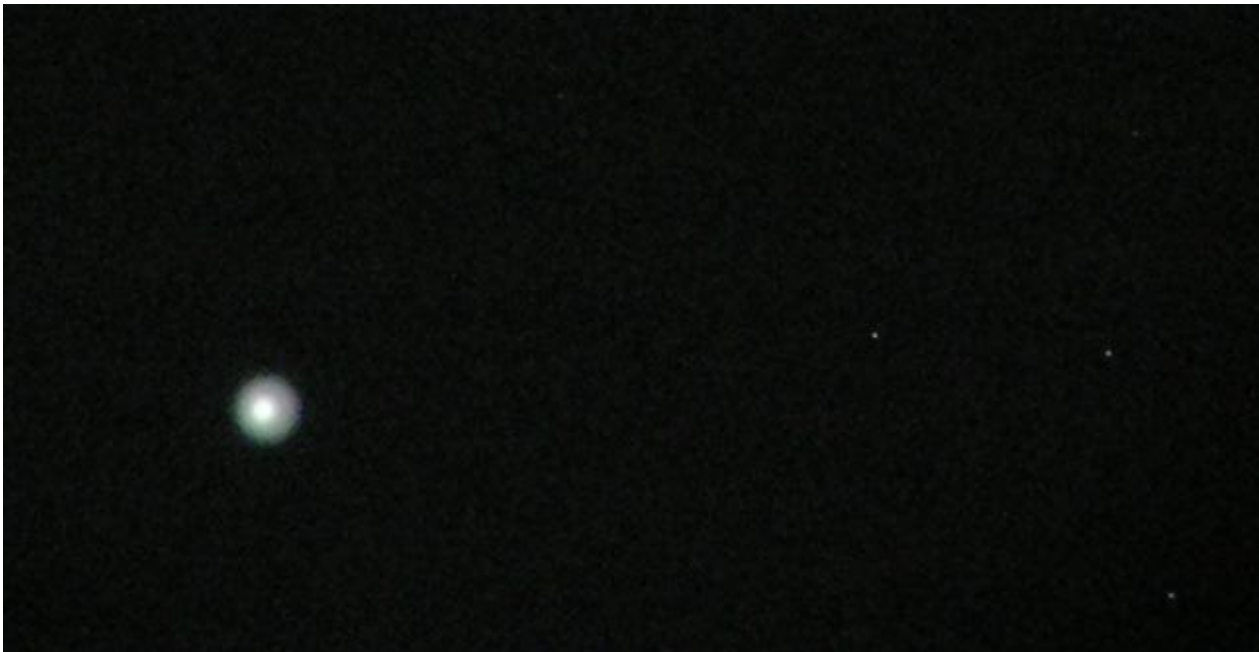


Naked eye view to NE shortly after sunset on the 25th Oct.
Comet 17P/Holmes is indicated by the arrow.

brightened a million-fold over a period of a few hours. It can be seen high above the [NE horizon in the constellation Perseus](#) shortly after the sky darkens and is so bright that even the light from the [biggest and brightest Full Moon this year](#) could not mask it.

To the naked eye it looks like a bright yellow star. When viewed through binoculars it takes on the appearance of a small fuzzy blob that is clearly not star-like.

Any small telescope will afford a [clear view](#) of its bright nucleus and the coma surrounding it.



View of Comet 17P/Holmes through a small telescope on 25th October

The size of the coma appears to be increasing from one night to the next so it's worth keeping an eye on how the view develops. Lets hope the skies stay clear and give the opportunity to view this unusual event.

G Mackie, October 26th 2007