

Stargazing at Forest Lake

Woods blacker than night and skies filled with a million glittering stars, this is what it was like back in the 70's when Forest Lake was new. Few cottages and lack of street lights made one depend on a flashlight or the moon's soft glow if you wanted to walk after dark. Nevertheless, the skies always seemed more beautiful, the moon much larger, and the stars and planets brighter when you observed them from Forest Lake.

One thing our family liked to do was shut off all lights in our cottage then lie on our deck and look up at the night sky. On other evenings, we would park our folding chairs at the front of our cottage near the road. We were always able to follow satellites moving across the sky. Even today, with many more lights scattered around the Lake, it's quite easy to track satellites.

I can recall, quite clearly, one evening back in 1997 when we arrived at our cottage with our little grandson. As soon as we got out of the car, he began pointing up at the sky. What we all witnessed was the famous comet Hale-Bopp. Each day its tail became more and more pronounced as it traveled nearer our earth. I wonder what Forest Lake will be like in the year 4530 when astronomers say Hale-Bopp will return.

A few times we even observed the "Northern Lights." This happens when protons and electrons shot from the sun, strike the earth's upper atmosphere and move toward its magnetic poles. When we first saw them, they looked like lights from the grand opening of a new store. As the sky darkened, however, the lights became more visible and they began turning into giant rolling waves of pale pink, white, and blue/green.

Late one night an announced meteor shower turned the sky into a majestic fireworks display. I remember one meteor that raced over our heads as a huge fireball. When it finally disappeared, it left a long vapor trail marking its path. Since scientists estimate that as many as 200,000,000 visible meteors enter the earth's atmosphere every day, it's not uncommon to see "falling stars" on almost every clear night at Forest Lake.

Probably the strangest phenomenon we witnessed took place in the early days of Forest Lake. One night we saw several small lights far off in the sky that rapidly changed directions, sometimes moving at right angles to each other at very high speeds. Since we had no explanation for what we saw, the strange lights were soon forgotten. It was years later that we watched a special program on television showing these same lights. Apparently they were viewed by thousands of people around the world yet no one was able to find out what they were. As far as we know, it is still a mystery today.

Most people, when recalling their fondest memories of Forest Lake, tend to think about the obvious. Maybe a big fish that got away, boating across the lake at dusk, or just sitting out on their deck and enjoying the view. What they may overlook is a completely different world to be enjoyed. Sometimes the beauty of a full moon rising over the spillway can take your breath away. This is only one of the many rewards you will enjoy when you become a stargazer at Forest Lake.