Announcement of news conference 11/12/73 on the comet Kahoutek

November 7, 1973

The comet Kohoutek, soon to be visible to the naked eye in the pre-dawn hours, is receiving a great deal of attention from scientists throughout the world.

Dr. Hannes Alfven, Nobel laureate in physics and UCSD Professor of Applied Physics in residence, and Dr. D. Asoka Mendis, lecturer in Applied Physics and Information Sciences at UCSD, two of the world's leading authorities on the formation of comets and the creation of the earth and the universe will explain the physics of comets where they come from; what they are made of - and the significance of Kohoutek to their work at UCSD and the work of other scientists.

Monday, November 12, 1973 10:30 a.m. Room 4218 Applied Physics & Mathematics Bldg. Muir College campus, UCSD

For your background, a few significant facts:

* According to Dr. Mendis, Kohoutek should be visible in San Diego to the naked eye as early as November 1S. It will first be visible in the eastern sky, before dawn, and then, late in December after it has passed behind the sun, it will be seen after sunset in the western sky.

* The early sighting of Kohoutek some 10 months before perihelion (point nearest the sun) has given scientists ample time to coordinate a program of observation. Mendis says this will be the most well-observed comet in history.

* Comets should not be confused with meteorites that enter the Earth's atmosphere, bum themselves out as shooting stars, and sometimes, if they are massive enough, reach the earth as solid bodies.

* Essentially, it is a common view that a comet can be described as a dirty snowball but this may be controversial. Its main component would be water ice, with a good deal of other ices such as carbon dioxide and ammonia mixed with a lot of non-volatile components like dust.

* Comets are the most primitive material in the solar system and probably the finest clues to the origin of the solar system. Earth and the other planets have lost most of the record of their early formative process through such geological forces as heat, gravity, and weather. Comets probably voyage through space, now as in eons past, undisturbed and unaltered by such forces.

Photos and biographies of Dr. Alfven and Dr. Mendis will be available at the news conference.

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