

The Asteroid called Atalante

By Greg Morgan

Atalante was one of November's fastest moving asteroids. I have always wanted to catch some pictures of the relative motion of an asteroid against the background stars. On November 7th 2001, I started a sequence of images. The asteroid was at magnitude 10.6 in the constellation Andromeda. I grabbed a 10 second integration every 30 seconds. After one hour, I had a stack of new images to play with. The next day, I did some post processing and co-registered the images and made a little movie of the motion of the asteroid. The image in fig 1 is the start of the series. The image in fig 2 was taken one hour later. The asteroid moved westward (to the right) 50 arcseconds. The images are 6 arcminutes tall by 4 arcminutes wide. North is up and East is to the left. The coordinates of the asteroid in fig 2 are 01 58 26.6 +41 01 16. The separation of the pair in the lower right corner is also 50 arcseconds. The images were shot at prime focus with the 10" f/6.3 and ST-7 unfiltered.

Any given night, there are a dozen or so asteroids that are bright enough to be easily picked off with almost any scope. In the month of December, all the asteroids in the Eastern sky after twilight are moving in a pattern that appears to converge on the constellation Aries. By January, the ones moving west like Atalante, will have finished their retrograde and will join the others to continue their Eastward march. GM

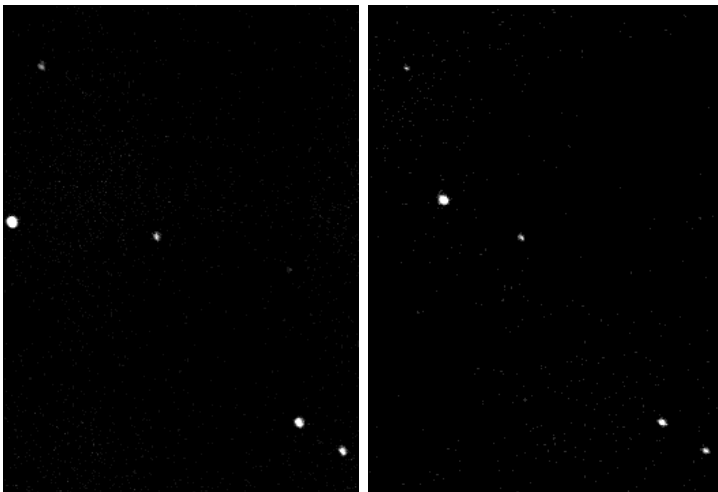


Figure 1. 09:05 PM PST
Asteroid #36 Atalante is
centered on the left edge at
magnitude 10.6.

Figure 2. 10:05 PM PST
Atalante has moved to the right
(Westward) 50 arcseconds in 1
hour.