

Subject: Thursday's Cloud
From: "Cloud Appreciation Society" <hello@cloudappreciationsociety.org>
Sent: 09/05/2019 13:29:27
To: "Dr Bernadette Brady" <bnbrady@astrologos.co.uk>;



This substantial, brightly coloured band of light below the Sun is known as a circumhorizon arc. It is a treat limited to summertime for skywatchers based in the higher latitudes, but can be seen year-round if you live near the equator.

The optics of this dramatic light effect mean it can only appear when the Sun is at an angle of least 58° above the horizon. This is when its rays can refract at just the right angle through horizontal plate-shaped ice crystals in Cirrus or Cirrostratus clouds. As a result, it can't form at latitudes greater than 55°, and it is rare even above 40° latitude since the Sun is only above required altitude during the summer months. A dramatic extended circumhorizon arc is quite rare since it depends on the right sort of ice crystals being distributed across a large part of the sky. More often than not, only a small streak of Cirrus is in the right part of the sky to refract the sunlight in the right way – then the result is not a huge band of colour like this but a gentle prismatic jewel of the summer sky.

A large circumhorizon arc in Cirrostratus cloud over Lehi, Utah, US spotted by Mikell Johnson.



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