PF191012 Myszyniec - highest Orionid meteor ever recorded

A. Olech1, P. Żołądek2, M. Wiśniowski2,3, K. Fietkiewicz2, M. Maciejewski2, Z. Tymiński4, T. Krzyżanowski2, M. Krasnowski2, M. Kwinta2, M. Myszkiewicz2, K. Polakowski2, and P. Zaręba2

1 Copernicus Astronomical Center, Polish Academy of Sciences, ul. Bartycka 18, 00-716 Warszawa, Poland
2 Comets and Meteors Workshop, ul. Bartycka 18, 00-716 Warszawa, Poland
3 Central Office of Measures, ul. Elektoralna 2, 00-139 Warsaw, Poland
4 Narodowe Centrum Badań Jądrowych, Ośrodek Radioizotopów POLATOM, ul. Soliana 7, 05-400 Otwock, Poland

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ABSTRACT

On the night of Oct 18/19, 2012 at 00:23 UT a –14.7 mag Orionid fireball occurred over northeastern Poland. The precise orbit and atmospheric trajectory of the event is presented, based on the data collected by five video and one photographic Polish Fireball Network (PFN) stations. The beginning height of the meteor is 168.4 ± 0.6 km which makes the PF191012 Myszyniec fireball the highest ever observed, well documented meteor not belonging to the Leonid shower. The ablation became the dominant source of light of the meteor at a height of around 115 km. The thermalization of sputtered particles is suggested to be the source of radiation above that value. The transition height of 115 km is 10-15 km below the transition heights derived for Leonids and it might suggest that the material of Leonids should be more fragile and have probably smaller bulk density than in case of Orionids.

In this paper we report a detection of the PF191012 Myszyniec fireball belonging to the Orionid shower, which is one of the highest meteors ever observed.

Key words. techniques: photometric - meteors, meteoroids

1. Introduction

For many years it was commonly accepted that meteor ablation starts at a height of around 130 km. It was justified by the trajectories obtained from photographic and video double station observations which indicated that the vast majority of meteor events emit their light at heights between 70 and 120 km (Ceplecha 1968).

The television and photographic observations of the Leonid shower in 1995 and 1996 carried out by Fujiwara et al. (1998) showed that the fastest meteors could start at heights of 130-160 km. It was quickly confirmed by Spurný et al. (2000a) who reported several 1998 Leonid fireballs with beginning heights at 150-200 km. Spurný et al. (2000b) analyzed the radiation type of highest Leonid meteors and suggested that light emitted over 130 km might be due to the processes not connected with ablation. All high-altitude meteors from their sample showed comet-like diffuse structures above 130 km which evolved into typical moving droplets at normal heights. Spurný et al. (2000b) divided the light curves of high-altitude meteors into three distinct phases: diffuse, intermediate and sharp. The sharp phase was connected with well known ablation process. The light emitted during the diffuse phase cannot be explained by standard ablation theory and a new type of radiation has to be taken into account.

The source of the meteor radiation above 130 km was not recognized until mid 2000s. At that time Hill et al. (2004), Popova et al. (2007) and Vinković (2007) suggested that thermalization of sputtered particles can be the source of diffuse radiation from high altitude meteors. Both model light curves and theoretical shapes of the moving bodies were in very good agreement with observations.

Up to that date the extreme heights of meteors were recorded only for Leonid fireballs. It was not surprising due to the fact that Leonids are characterized by one of the highest entry velocity among all meteor showers. However, Koten et al. (2001, 2006) found that high-altitude meteors could be found among sporadic meteors and Lyrid, Perseid and η-Aquariid showers. Still, among the highest meteors (with beginning height $h_b > 160$ km), almost all events were recognized as Leonids. There was no single high-altitude Orionid meteor in that sample, which was surprising due to the fact that Orionids are characterized with high geocentric velocity.

In this paper we report a detection of the PF191012 Myszyniec fireball belonging to the Orionid shower, which is one of the highest meteors ever observed.

2. Observations

The Polish Fireball Network (PFN) is the project whose main goal is regularly monitoring the sky over Poland in order to detect bright fireballs occurring over the whole territory of the country (Olech et al. 2005, Żołądek et al. 2007, 2009, Wiśniowski et al. 2012). It is kept by amateur astronomers associated in Comets and Meteors Workshop (CMW) and coordinated by astronomers from Copernicus Astronomical Center in Warsaw, Poland. Presently, there are 18 video and 3 photographic fireball stations belonging to PFN which operate during each clear night.

On the night of Oct 18/19, 2012, at 00:23:12 UT, five video and one photographic stations of the PFN recorded bright, –14.7 magnitude fireball belonging to the Orionid shower. Basic properties on the stations contributing the data to this work are listed in Table 1. Fig. 1 shows images of the fireball captured by the photographic station in Siedlce and video station in Błonie.

All video stations contributing to this paper work in PAL interlaced resolution (768 × 576 pixels) with 25 frames per sec offering 0.04 sec temporal resolution. The photographic station in Siedlce works in reduced resolution of 2496×1664 pixels with 30 sec exposure times at ISO 1600. The frequency of rotating shutter is 10.68 Hz.
Table 1. Basic data on the PFN stations which recorded PF191012 Myszyniec fireball.

| Code  | Site       | Longitude [°] | Latitude [°] | Elev. [m] | Camera               | Lens               | Remarks               |
|-------|------------|---------------|--------------|-----------|----------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| PFN42 | Błonie     | 20.6223 E     | 52.1888 N    | 86        | Tayama C3102-01A1    | Computar 4 mm f/1.2 | flash saturated       |
| PFN32 | Chełm      | 23.4982 E     | 51.1355 N    | 194       | Mintro MTV-12V8HC    | Computar 3.8 mm f/0.8 | end not detected      |
| PFN06 | Kraków     | 19.9425 E     | 50.0216 N    | 250       | Mintro MTV-23X11C    | Ernitec 4 mm f/1.2  | low altitude          |
| PFN38 | Podgórzyn  | 15.6817 E     | 50.8328 N    | 369       | Tayama C3102-01A1    | Computar 4 mm f/1.2  | low altitude          |
| PFN43 | Siedlce    | 22.2833 E     | 52.2015 N    | 152       | Canon EOS 350D       | Samyang 8 mm f/3.5  | photo with shutter     |
| PFN20 | Urzędów    | 22.1456 E     | 50.9947 N    | 210       | Tayama C3102-01A1    | Ernitec 4 mm f/1.2  | short path            |

Table 2. Orbital elements of the PF191012 fireball compared to the mean orbit of Orionid shower and orbit of comet 1P/Halley. All values are in J2000.0 equinox.

|         | α_⊙ [deg] | δ_⊙ [deg] | V_⊙ [km/s] | 1/a [1/AU] | e | q [AU] | ω [deg] | Ω [deg] | i [deg] | D′ [
|---------|-----------|-----------|------------|------------|---|-------|--------|--------|--------|------|
| PF191012 | 92.5      | 15.7      | 66.8       | 0.0689     | 0.961 | 0.576 | 81.90  | 27.70  | 164.00 | 0.0283 |
| Orionids | 92.5      | 15.7      | 66.8       | 0.0689     | 0.961 | 0.576 | 81.90  | 27.70  | 164.00 | 0.0283 |
| 1P/Halley | -         | -         | 65.9       | 0.0550     | 0.967 | 0.582 | 111.80 | 58.10  | 162.26 | 0.0587 |

3. Calculations

The astrometry in the photographic image recorded at PFN43 Siedlce station was performed using Astro Record 3.0 software (de Lignie 1997). The accuracy of the meteor path determination reached 10 arcmin. In the case of the video data the modified Turner method was used as described in Olech et al. (2006). For the video images the accuracy of the astrometry varied from 9 arcmin for PFN42 Błonie station to 11 arcmin at PFN32 Chełm station. The stations at Kraków, Podgórzyn and Urzędów were located too far from the meteor for using their data in the final calculations.

The trajectory and orbit of the PF191012 Myszyniec fireball was computed using PyFN software written by P. Żołądek (Żołądek 2012). PyFN is written in Python with usage of SciPy module and CSPICE library. For trajectory and orbit computation it uses the plane intersection method described by Ceplecha (1987).

PyFN accepts data in both MetRec (Molau 1999) and UFOANALYZER (SonotaCo 2009) formats and allows for semi-automated search for double-station meteors. Once the trajectory and orbit is computed, it can be compared to the other orbits in the database using Drummond criterion D′ (Drummond 1979). Moreover it allows to compute mean D′ value in the vicinity of the meteor, which can be used for searching for new meteor showers as was demonstrated by Żołądek and Wiśniewski (2012).

4. Results

Table 2 lists the radiant parameters and orbital elements of the PF191012 fireball computed from our data and compared to the mean photographic orbit of Orionid shower and orbit of comet 1P/Halley (Lindblad and Porubcan 1999). Both the radiant and orbital elements clearly show that there is no doubt that the PF191012 fireball belongs to the Orionid shower. It is also confirmed by the value of D′ criterion, which in both cases is significantly smaller than 0.105 indicating that all discussed bodies are related.

The trajectory and radiant parameters derived from the data collected in three PFN stations are summarized in Table 3. Additionally, Fig. 2 shows the map of northeastern Poland with the location of Siedlce, Błonie and Chełm stations and the luminous trajectory of the PF191013 fireball.
Table 3. The basic trajectory and radiant data of the PF191013 Myszyniec fireball

| 2012 Oct 19, T = (00°23′12″ ± 1′) UT |
|--------------------------------------|
| **Beginning** | **Max. light** | **Terminal** |
| Height [km]    | 168.4 ± 0.6   | 77.7 ± 1.0   | 69.4 ± 0.6 |
| Long. [°E]     | 22.336 ± 0.005| 21.186 ± 0.020| 21.040 ± 0.002|
| Lat. [°N]      | 52.865 ± 0.004| 53.385 ± 0.010| 53.463 ± 0.007|
| Abs. mag       | 1.5 ± 0.5     | −14.7 ± 1.0  | −1.0 ± 0.5  |
| Slope [°]      | 42.4 ± 0.5    | 41.5 ± 0.5   | 41.4 ± 0.6  |
| Duration [s]   | 2.19 ± 0.04   | —            | —           |
| Length [km]    | 148.4 ± 0.8   | —            | —           |
| Stations       | Siedlce, Błonie, Chełm |

| Radiant data (J2000.0) |
|------------------------|
| RA [°]                 | 92.71 ± 0.13 |
| Decl. [°]              | 15.08 ± 0.09 |
| Vel. [km/s]            | 68.0 ± 0.7   |
| Observed Geocentric Heliocentric |

Fig. 2. The luminous trajectory of the PF191013 fireball over northeastern Poland and the location of three PFN stations which data were used in calculations.

The meteoroid entered the atmosphere at a height of 168.4 ± 0.6 km which makes it the highest Orionid meteor ever observed. The initial velocity and absolute magnitude were 68.0 ± 0.7 km/s and 1.5 ± 1.0, respectively. These data come from PFN32 Chełm station where the beginning of the meteor was recorded. The earliest phase of the luminous path was located outside the field of view of the images from PFN42 Błonie station. The meteor entered this field at height of 162.8 ± 0.6 km.

Although some kind of diffuse structure of the meteor shape at high altitude is visible in both Błonie and Chełm data, it can be explained by combination of high angular velocity of the bolide and interface effect on 0.04 sec temporal resolution data.

The first trace of the path of the meteor in the photo taken by PFN43 Siedlce station is located at height of 152.0 ± 0.5 km. Due to the lack of shutter breaks on the green path recorded in the heights range 128-152 km, we conclude that this part of the recorded light comes not from the meteor itself but from its persistent train.

The first clear shutter break is detected at height of 128 km. At this point the color of the meteor changes from green to white-yellow. Below the height of 100 km color again changes and meteor starts to show white-blue hue.

After initial oscillations, the magnitude of the meteor was monotonically increasing. At a height of 87 km the first, small flare occurred. The second and main flare with the maximum absolute magnitude of −14.7 ± 1.0 was observed at a height of 77.7 km. The third and final flare occurred at 74 km. The final flare did not cause the complete disintegration of the body. Small fragment with brightness of −1.0 ± 0.5 mag was observed over the next three video frames and disappeared at a height of 69 km.

The appearance of the flares is concluded not from the light curve of the fireball but from the shape of the train recorded in the images from Błonie station (see upper panel of Fig. 3).

Koten et al. (2006) derived the empirical relations between beginning height of the meteor and its photometric mass. The relations differed in slope between all meteors in their sample and high altitude meteors from Leonid shower. They suggested that for high altitude meteors the steeper relation should be taken into account. However, all points for high altitude Perseids, which are slower than Leonids, are located clearly below the steeper relation. Knowing that Orionids are also slower than Leonids we decided to use traditional relation given by their equation (1). According to this, the photometric mass of the PF191013 Myszyniec fireball is 360 ± 110 grams.

The empirical relations of Koten et al. (2006) are only rough estimations, thus we decided to calculate the initial mass of the meteoroid using the radiation equation of meteors (Ceplecha 1996). For determination of the luminous efficiency we used ReVelle and Ceplecha (2001) approximation for fast meteors. The resulting photometric mass is around 1500 grams. Due to the ~ 1 mag error in brightness determination it is only rough estimate. The real value of the initial mass should be in 600-3500 grams range.

The meteor left an extremely bright persistent train. Its peak brightness reached −13 magnitude. During the first phase the brightness of the train was decreasing at a rate of 2 magnitudes per second. Evolution of the train was recorded on 38 images (30 seconds exposure each) captured by the Siedlce station and is shown in Fig. 3. Additionally, the light curve of the train is presented in Fig. 4.

The evolution of the absolute magnitude of the meteor in the function of height is presented in Fig. 5. The oscillation of the magnitude of the meteor at high altitude was already reported by Spurný et al. (2000a,b) and Koten et al. (2006) and is typical for high-altitude meteors. Clear change of the slope of magnitude increase is evident at a height of around 115 km. At this point the ablation process becomes the dominant source of light.

Detailed inspection of the light curve shows some differences between the Orionid fireball light curve and those obtained for faster Leonids. Vinković (2007) derived the theoretical light curves for high altitude meteors for the beginning heights of 200 and 171 km. In both cases, at high altitude of 145-160 km, one can see slight change of the slope from the steeper to gentler one, however this change is more pronounced in the lower meteor. In our case such a change is only barely visible at height of slightly below 150 km. It can be understood taking into account the fact that amount of generated light in the sputtering process depends on the number of collisions and this number is lower for slower meteors. The light curve of the Orionid fireball should resemble Leonids light curves obtained for higher meteors.

Additional and more pronounced change of the slope of the brightness of PF191013 Myszyniec fireball is recorded at height of 115 km. It can be interpreted as transition from the intermediate phase (where both sputtering and ablation work together)
to final (sharp) phase where only ablation process is responsible for generating the light. What is interesting, obtained value of 115 km is 10-15 km below the transition heights derived for Leonids by Šterny et al. (2000b) and Koten et al. (2006). It may suggest that the material of Leonids should be more fragile and have probably smaller bulk density. It is in agreement with recent results of Borovička (2007) or Babadzhanov and Kokhirova (2009).

5. Summary

In this paper we presented an analysis of the multi-station observations of a bright fireball belonging the Orionid meteor shower. Our main conclusions are as follows:

– the meteor started on 2012 Oct 18/19 at 00:23:12 UT over the northeastern part of Poland and was detected by five video and one photographic stations of Polish Fireball Network,
– the orbital elements and radiant parameters of the meteor clearly show that it belongs to the Orionid shower,
– the fireball started at a height of 168.4 ± 0.6 km which makes it the highest Orionid meteor ever observed and one of the highest meteors known,
– the initial brightness of the meteor was 1.5 ± 1.0 mag and was oscillating,
– the ablation became the dominant source of light at a height of around 115 km, where we have noticed a clear change of slope of the magnitude increase,
– the fireball reached its maximum absolute magnitude of −14.7 ± 1.0 at height of 77.7 ± 1.0 km,
– the persistent train left by the fireball had a maximum absolute magnitude of around −13 and was observed over the next 20 minutes both in video frames and photographic images.

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