Earth to receive flashy shower

By Greg Wees

The next time you see a meteorite flashing across the sky, think of Ivan Burr. He watches meteorites for a living.

As director of the Lincoln Meteorite Recovery Project, Burr will be at his job tonight and through tomorrow morning when the most spectacular of the meteor showers sprays Earth.

Called the Geminids, the meteors radiate from the constellation Gemini and will peak over the Lincoln area at about 6 a.m. Saturday, Burr said.

Between 50 and 60 meteors an hour will be visible during peak viewing, he said. After 6 a.m. the number of meteors will begin to diminish.

Sky watchers advice

Burr offered the following advice to would-be sky watchers:

—Get away from the city. The glare from lights that illuminate Lincoln blot out the faint glow of all but the most brilliant meteors.

—Lay flat on your back. It's the most comfortable position that also will give you the best look at the largest portion of the sky.

—Friday evening viewers should see the most meteors in the eastern part of the sky while early morning watchers should see more in the western sky.

The Meteorite Recovery Project is sponsored by the Smithonian Institute in Washington, D.C. and has worldwide outposts, Burr said.

In Nebraska, every night, automatic cameras at Neligh, Republican City and Steinauer click on the photograph the sky from horizon to horizon.

Every morning, assistants go out to the three camera sheds, collect the film and send it to Burr to be developed.

Film betrays meteor

If a thin streak of light appears on the film, he knows that somewhere in Nebraska, a meteorite has fallen.

Using the data from three stations, he can calculate the approximate position of the fallen meteorite and hopefully recover its.

However, in the six years that Burr has headed the Lincoln station, located at 1600 N. 10th St., he said he has recovered only one meteorite, most of which are made of stone and contain small amounts of metal, usually iron.

The federal government established the Meteor Recovery Project in 1954 and placed it under the direction of the Smithonian Institute. The program is funded by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).