

Two 'moons' on Aug. 27? Alfred University astronomer says we'd better hope not

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There's an item making the Internet rounds, saying that at 12:30 a.m. Aug. 27, Mars will come so close to Earth that it will look as though Earth has two moons. It's a once-in-a-lifetime event, according to rumor. If it's true, it would be an end-of-a-lifetime event instead, says Dr. David Toot, professor of physics and director of the Stull Observatory at Alfred University. The rumor about Mars being so close to earth that it appears "as large as the full moon," has been "circulating for a few years now," said Toot. "It is based on a partial truth about Mars" about four or five years ago. "At that point, we were extra close to Mars," and it appeared to be very bright. "However, it will NEVER look as big as the moon," said Toot, adding "If it does, I'll have to decide between looking at it - or hiding in the deepest cave on Earth because it will be very bad news for life on Earth." The tidal influences alone, should Mars ever come that close, "would pretty much wreck the place, and it means we would be likely to collide with it," said Toot. Nonetheless, the rumor comes up every August, said Toot. He noted Earth will be close to Mars the week of Christmas this year. Mars will appear to be bright, "but only in the sense of almost as bright as Venus, just an extra bright star." The Stull Observatory is open to the general public on the following schedule: September - November and February - April, clear Friday evenings, from 9 to 11 p.m. Some parking is available immediately at the site, with more approximately 100 yards away. The facility is marginally handicapped-accessible, although some facilities will not be available to the physically impaired. For small groups no reservation is necessary. Larger groups are asked to make arrangements by calling the Division of Physical Sciences, Alfred University, at 607-871-2208, during regular business hours. For more about Stull Observatory: <http://merlin.alfred.edu/...>