



Quiet Arcs

Early in the evening, the aurora looks like a thin green curtain that stretches from horizon to horizon.

This aurora curtain is shaped like an arc, or one curved section of a circle. If the arc extended, it would circle Earth's geomagnetic pole and follow the aurora oval. These arcs hang quietly in the night sky.

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Rayed Bands

Late in the evening, a quiet arc can become active. During an aurora substorm, the arc develops folds that look like pleats in a curtain. These folds, called rays, are vertical bars of light aligned with Earth's magnetic field lines.

The folded curtain often waves around, then breaks up into rayed bands. Purple can appear on the bottom of the dancing rays and on the front edge of the bands as they move.



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Patches

After midnight, the aurora appears as patches of light. These patches often look like puffs of smoke or fluffy clouds. Patches are called pulsating aurora when they blink on and off in a regular pattern. The blinking pattern ranges from one or two seconds, up to half a minute.



Movie is contrast-enhanced and time-compressed.

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Long Aurora Rays

In the early morning, after the aurora has been active, long aurora rays sometimes appear as single, lonely columns of light. Long aurora rays are broken parts of an arc or rayed band. They appear after patches of aurora have disappeared.

After the sun rises, daylight becomes brighter than the aurora, and the northern lights can be seen no longer.

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