

The Dumbbell Nebula



Isaac Newton Telescope + Photographic Prime Focus Camera



Planetary nebulae are shells of gas thrown out by some stars near the end of their lives. Our Sun will probably produce a planetary nebula in about 5 thousand million years. They have nothing at all to do with planets; the terminology was invented because they often look a little like planets in small telescopes. Planetary nebulae are formed in the process of mass loss during which red giant stars ultimately become white dwarfs. The nebula shown here is the Dumbbell Nebula (also called M27 or NGC 6853). It was the first planetary nebula ever discovered. We happen to see this one approximately from its equatorial plane; from near one pole, it would probably have the shape of a ring.

Photograph by David Malin (AAO).

1992