



A Bridge Between Worlds



Cosmic objects like to travel in groups. Moons orbit around planets, planets orbit around stars, and galaxies sometimes orbit around other galaxies.

Our galaxy is called the Milky Way. It's a gigantic collection of stars, cosmic dust, gas and other stuff. About 50 smaller galaxies are thought to orbit around our galaxy, although we can only see two without telescopes. These two are called the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds (pronounced ma-jell-AN-ic).

Although we can see them without telescopes, studying the Magellanic Clouds in detail has always been difficult because they sprawl out over a such large area of the sky. Try looking at an entire building through binoculars and you might understand why.

With a new space telescope, we're finally able to see our galactic neighbours in fabulous detail and we've found something very exciting – the two galaxies appear to be connected by a cosmic bridge.

The bridge, made of stars and cosmic gas, stretches across 43,000 light years of space (more than four times the length of the Large Magellanic Cloud itself!).

This 'bridge' is at least partly made from stars being pulled out of the Small Magellanic Cloud by the Large Magellanic Cloud. This may have happened 200 million years ago, when the dwarf galaxies passed fairly close by each other.

The rest of stars and gas might have been pulled out from the Large Magellanic Cloud by our Galaxy, the Milky Way. It's almost like a parent teaching a lesson to siblings for fighting over their toys!

The picture above shows the arch of the Milky Way galaxy stretching across the night. Underneath you can see the two dwarf galaxies: the brighter blob of the Large Magellanic Cloud and the dimmer Small Magellanic Cloud below.

COOL FACT

The new space telescope has also revealed that the Large Magellanic Cloud is four times bigger than we thought!



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