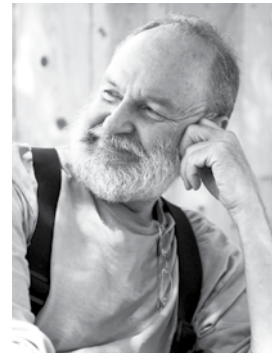


THE STARRY SIDE

What a summer season!

BY GREELEY WELLS



Greeley Wells

Now, rather than huddle around the fire for warmth, it's outside and into the sun. What a difference! What a season!

Seasons rise and fall with clockwork predictability...well, almost. There's just enough suspense to make it interesting. Down on the equator, it's all the same year-round: same amount of day and night, light and dark, and temperature—very few differences. The similarity between winter and summer temperatures was one of the things that drove me from Los Angeles. Things were predictable and boring, night and day.

I love the changes we have, these "extremes." Did you notice the temperature swings this spring? The other day it was 32 degrees at night and 70 degrees during the day! That's a huge difference in half a day: almost 40 degrees. I found myself tucking in around the fire at night and early morning, then running out for the sun's warmth during the day. What a rush.

And then there's the predictable swing of the Milky Way in our night sky, coming up from the east with the stalwart Summer Triangle. We also spin in our galaxy in a predictable way, so the Milky Way is high and visible in summer and winter and low and below us in spring and fall.

As we leave spring and enter warm summer, we've already left Orion out

in the west. Now the Summer Triangle shines with the Milky Way in our wonderful, warm, easterly summer sky.

Between spring and summer appear two dimmer, but rewarding, constellations: Lyra with its bright star Vega (the brightest and first rising star in the Summer Triangle), and Leo the Lion with the bright Jupiter still within it. Other constellations that appear from east to west include the hourglass-shaped Hercules and the crown-shaped Corona

Borealis. Note the illustration. This whole configuration inches along to the west during the season.

Other events of note

June 20 is a full moon and the summer solstice! Actually, it's (1) the longest day, (2) the shortest night, (3) the fullest moon, (4) the most golden moon, (5) the lowest, most southerly moon, (6) the summer solstice, and (7) all of these at once! The full moon is so low it has a lot of atmosphere to go through, making it

appear golden. Pretty cool (warm?), eh?

The Delta

Aquarids meteor showers should peak around July 30-31 and will have no moon, so there should be a good showing. Early morning is the best time, but there will be some meteors all night.

The night of August 12 (and the early morning of August 13) is the Perseid meteor shower, almost always the best of the year. Viewing should be good for this, too, because there will be almost no moon. This one is always best in early morning.

After sunset on August 20, Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter gather together in a nice bright triangle in the west.

Watch planets Mars and Saturn play around together with Antares. They actually come together and drift apart several times, while bright Antares maintains its steady westerly drift in their company. (Remember that the word "planets" comes from the Greek word for "wanderers," and that's what they are.)

Jupiter, which goes around the sun in 12 of our years, is still visiting Leo the Lion at this time of year. He's left or east of the not-as-bright star Regulus.

Here's to clear dark night skies and bright stars for you.

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Illustration: Guy Ottewell's Astronomical Calendar 2016.



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