

THE STARRY SIDE

Two nights—all the year’s stars

BY GREELEY WELLS

If you were to stay awake all night long, you would see the stars for the season that you’re in, and then in the morning sky you’d see next season’s stars. And if, exactly half a year later, you again stayed up all night looking first at the evening sky and then the morning sky, you would see all the stars from the other two seasons. In other words, in only two nights you could see every star in our northern hemisphere’s night sky! That’s pretty magical: in just two nights you would experience all four seasons of stars.

Of course, you don’t actually have to stay up all night. You can comfortably watch the winter sky one evening, then

go to bed setting your alarm for 4 or 5 am. When you get up before dawn, all of the spring season’s stars will be laid out for you. Dawn will then treat you to a wonderful sunrise. Bring warm blankets, warm liquids, and comfortable leaning-back chairs.

Since my own personal discovery of this fascinating night sky, I’ve had such fun looking at it and studying it. I’ve tried to describe it and to show many, many people over the years what it is that so deeply impresses me and gives me such joy in those dark skies. This joy is the main thing for me. Of course, before TV and lighting, that sky *was* the night’s entertainment. A repository of

stories and history and lore, the sky we look at every night connects us to our human ancestors and is reflected in our oldest literature.

Maybe it was some huge meteor or Halley’s comet or some other incredible skyward happening that made the first human look up into the sky. I even imagine that the first upward look at that unknown sight might have begun humans’ flirtation with language. Maybe our first words were an attempt to describe what we had just seen to someone who hadn’t seen it! It must have been fascinating for people then, as it is today for those of us who spend some of our moments gazing up at that amazing starry sky.

What you will see in the sky

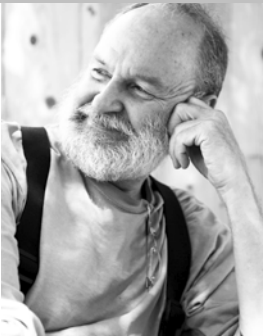
What will you see when you take your comfortable chair and warm blanket outside on winter evenings? The brightest star in the night sky is Sirius, the faithful dog star of the hunter, who rises in the east in late fall. Look in the dusty whitish spread of the Milky Way in

the northeast for the very bright star Capella, part of the five-sided constellation Auriga (the charioteer carrying kid goats), which takes the uppermost sky position in winter nights. Capella is not far from Cassiopeia, who is now high up over the north star, Polaris. Cassiopeia is centrally located in the Milky Way, as it now goes mostly east-west.

In spring, the Big Dipper and Leo the Lion dominate the sky; in summer, the Summer Triangle comes up from the east, eventually dominating the sky. The Milky Way, which was basically oriented north-south in summer and fall, slowly turns to an east-west orientation in winter. Orion, with his three-in-a-row belt, is the emblem of the winter sky (just as the Summer Triangle is the emblem of the summer sky).

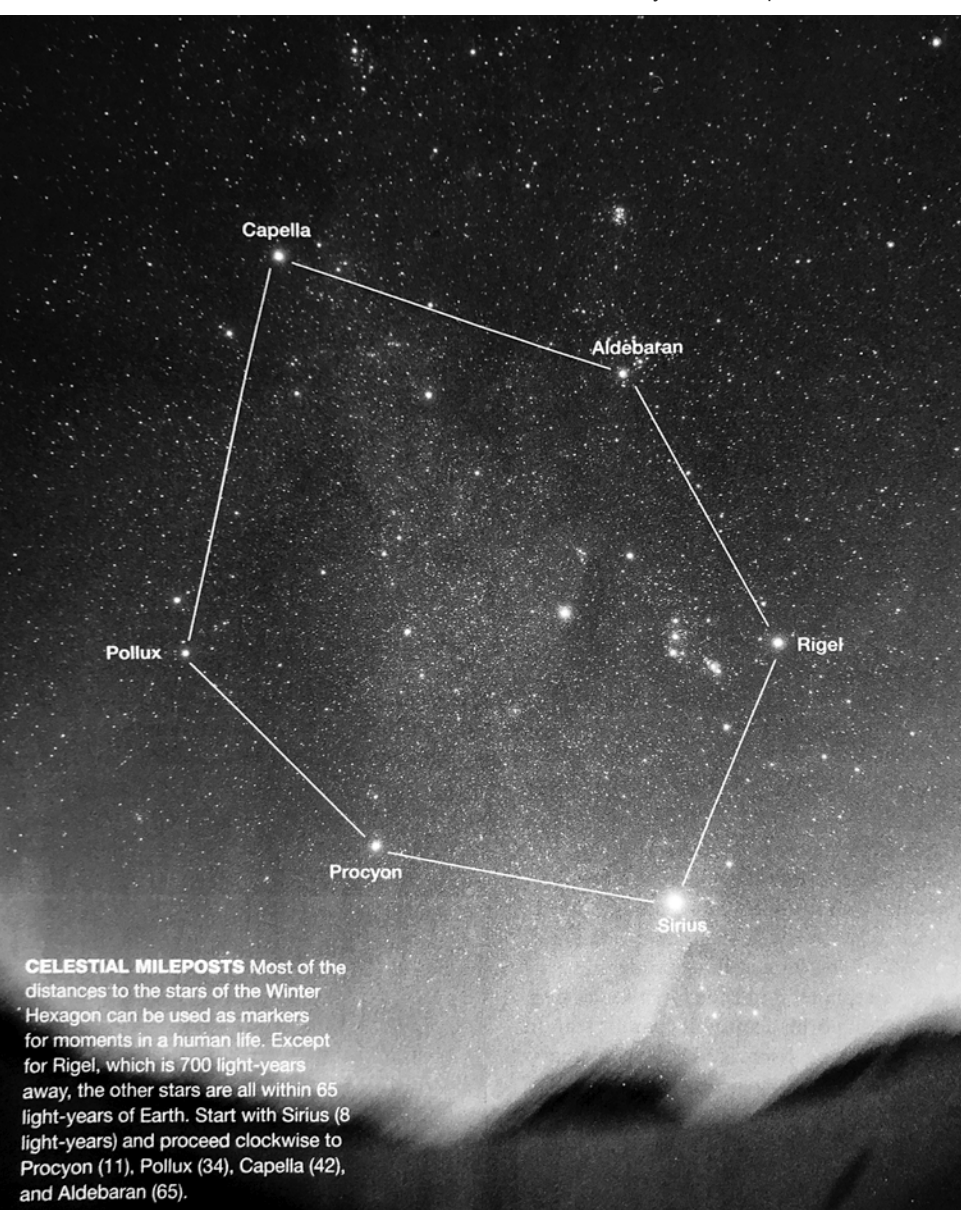
Glorious clear skies and bright stars for you!

Greeley Wells
greeley@greeleyme.com



Greeley Wells

Photo: Sky & Telescope December 2018



CELESTIAL MILEPOSTS Most of the distances to the stars of the Winter Hexagon can be used as markers for moments in a human life. Except for Rigel, which is 700 light-years away, the other stars are all within 65 light-years of Earth. Start with Sirius (8 light-years) and proceed clockwise to Procyon (11), Pollux (34), Capella (42), and Aldebaran (65).

Greeley’s Sky Calendar

Venus comes up in the dawn in December and throughout the season. She’ll be at her highest above the horizon on January 6, slowly descending after that.

Jupiter also rises in the dawn in December, working his way above the horizon as the season goes on. Venus and Jupiter have a 2.4-degree conjunction on January 22. A degree is about a thumb’s width (held at arm’s length), so they’re pretty close together!

Mars works his way west towards the sunset all season, getting lower and lower and dimmer and dimmer.

Saturn also falls into the sunset in December and won’t rise in the dawn till February.

Mercury, the hard-to-find-and-see planet, is in the dawn in December; he then disappears and shows up in the dusk on February 27, when he’s at his highest above the horizon.

Geminids meteor shower will peak the night of December 13 - 14; best viewing is after midnight, as there’s no moon.

Winter solstice is December 21, the first day of winter.

The Quadrantid meteor shower peaks on the night of January 3. A crescent moon will not interfere with viewing.

A total lunar eclipse comes to the US on January 20 - 21 (the full moon is January 21). The eclipse will be visible to us in the Applegate on the night of January 20; the “total” phase will occur between 8:40 and 9:40 pm. During the eclipse, the moon turns blood red in the night sky due to sunlight filtering through the earth’s atmosphere. For more information, go to timeanddate.com/eclipse/lunar/2019-january-21.

...BIZBITS...

PenniesWorth Acres Nursery is family operated and owned by Jedediah Jester and Christin Bryk, offering a wide selection of trees, landscape shrubs, and ground covers. For the holiday season, potted conifers suitable for living Christmas trees are available, as well as holiday candles and other gifts at the farm stand. PenniesWorth Acres is open to contractors and the general public Monday through Saturday, 8 am - 5 pm. Winter hours (December 23 - February 17) are Monday through Friday, 8 am - 5 pm. Closed Christmas Day and New Year’s Day. 7016 New Hope Road, Murphy • 541-761-1908 • info@penniesworthacres.com.

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Pennington Farms is anticipating a busy holiday season and encourages customers to preorder holiday pies and baked goods. Their jams make delicious gifts, and bundles of rose hips (currently available) add a touch of nature’s beauty to the holiday decor. Stop by the farm store and country bakery at 11341 Williams Highway, between Murphy and Provolt. Open Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, and Saturday, 10 am to 4 pm. 541-846-0550 • penningtonfarms.net.

Wilderville Store, on the banks of Slate Creek, is still the busy community hub it has been since 1921. The old-fashioned country store and historic post office strives to provide a “one-stop shopping experience,” offering all the staples of a convenience store, as well as out-of-the-ordinary items like notary services and American Carports. They also sell gas, diesel, and propane. Owner Laura Avants likes making the store a community gathering place and hosts a summer concert series, Trunk or Treat for Halloween, and a Christmas Caroling Hay Ride in December, sponsored by Dinsdale Farms. When the carolers return from the ride, Santa will be at the store waiting to visit with the children. Store hours are 7 am - 8 pm Monday through Saturday and 8 am - 8 pm Sunday. 7845 Old Redwood Highway, Wilderville • 541-476-3924.

BizBits highlights businesses new to the area, holding special events, or offering new products. If you are a business owner, let us know when you move into the area or to a different location, hold a special event, expand your business, or mark a milestone. Email gater@applegater.org.

Happy Holidays