



# STARRY TRAILS

APRIL 2016

It is great to step out on a warm April evening and hear the sound of spring peepers filling the air!! The planet Mercury returns to our evening sky for a brief visit from April 8<sup>th</sup> thru April 25<sup>th</sup>. Mercury will be visible in the west, northwest sky about 40 minutes after sunset. On the evening of April 8<sup>th</sup>, check out Mercury and the Crescent Moon (Illustration 1). Saturn, Mars and the star Antares continue to put on a show in the predawn sky. On the morning of April 20<sup>th</sup> Mars and Saturn will be at their closest (Illustration 2)!! On April 25<sup>th</sup>, the Moon joins the trio (Illustration 3).

In the meantime, let's get out and enjoy a clear spring night! Our sun sets later now, so our hike will begin around 9:00 pm. You may still need to grab your jacket, hat and gloves. Don't forget your Starry Trail Map and binoculars. It is time to say farewell to the magnificent Hunter, Orion. Orion will return to our night sky once again in early winter. Our first stop is the western sky or direction of the sunset. There you will find the beautiful star cluster, Pleiades or the Seven Sisters. One last view of our lovely sisters until fall. To the left of the Pleiades you will see a bright red-orange star, Aldebaran, the eye of Taurus, the Bull.

Hike to the left of Taurus and there you will see Orion's magnificent star pattern. The three stars in a row make up the belt of Orion. The bright red-orange star up and to the left of the belt is Betelgeuse. The bright blue-white star down and to the right of the belt is Rigel. Now with your binoculars scan just below the belt. You will notice a small fuzzy area. That is the Orion Nebula (M42). New stars are forming in that hydrogen gas cloud! We call this a stellar nursery. Trek down and to the left from Orion's Belt. One last visit with Orion's friend Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest star in our night sky! Farewell until early winter.

Now let's make a clockwise loop up from Sirius. We will check out the bright star Procyon, next to the two stars that look almost identical, Gemini the Twins and finally to Capella (Illustration 4). Fantastic star hopping in this part of the sky! Turn left or direction south. Look directly overhead. Do you see the bright planet, Jupiter? Pick up your binoculars and focus in on Jupiter. If you are steady, you may see a few pinpoints of light around Jupiter. These would be the largest moons of Jupiter! When you view Jupiter through a telescope, you will clearly see the four Galilean moons. Right of Jupiter, look for the shape of a backwards question mark. This is the head of Leo, the Lion. How about a challenge? Take your binoculars and scan to the right of Jupiter and Leo. Do you see the beautiful Beehive Star Cluster (M44)?

Journey to the opposite part of the sky, or north. You will see the Big Dipper, high overhead, pouring water out of the cup like the spring rains! Take the two stars at the end of the cup and draw an imaginary line to the next bright star. You have reached the North Star! The North Star, or Polaris, is at the end of the handle of the Little Dipper. Queen Cassiopeia, the sideways w-shape, is very low in the north (Illustration 5).

For the last part of our hike, turn right or east. The bright yellow - orange star is Arcturus. Look down and to the right of Arcturus and you will see a blue star, Spica, in the constellation Virgo (Illustration 6). Virgo hosts the sky's richest zone of galaxies. Great telescope viewing!

**Next month, the close approach of Mars and the greatest and strongest hero, Hercules!**

**Take one last deep breath of fresh spring air and head inside. So glad spring is finally here!**

### Highlights

**April 7** – New Moon.

**April 8 & 9** – Mercury and the Crescent Moon together in the western sky 40 minutes after sunset.

**April 13** – First Quarter Moon.

**April 18** – The Moon passes south of Jupiter.

**April 20** – Closest pairing of Saturn and Mars in the predawn southern sky.

**April 22** – Full Moon. According to folklore, it is called the Pink Moon or the Egg Moon.

**April 22** – Lyrid Meteor Shower peaks.

**April 25** – Moon, Saturn, Mars and Antares together in the predawn southern sky.

**April 29** – Last Quarter Moon.

**Brightest Stars: West** – Sirius, Betelgeuse, Rigel, Aldebaran, Procyon, Capella, Castor, Pollux. **Overhead** – Regulus. **East** – Arcturus, Spica.

**Binocular Highlights** The Moon, Jupiter, Pleiades, Orion Nebula M42, Beehive Cluster M44, Deep sky objects around Capella (M36, 37, 38).

**Telescope Highlights** The Moon, Jupiter, M51, M42, M44, M81, M82, M35, 36, 37, 38 (near Capella).

[Starry Trails](#) is a fun & easy way to explore the night sky as it appears from your own backyard! Journey over to [StarryTrails.com](#) & get everything you need to navigate the night sky! Starry Trails is a free publication & your able to make copies to pass along to your friends & family so they can learn and enjoy the night sky with you!

**You can Follow [Starry Trails on Facebook](#) for weekly discussions and special sky events!**

*Written by Suzie Dills – Remember to download your Illustrations & Star Map!*