

STARRY TRAILS

APRIL 2015



Although I am looking forward to warmer spring nights and the sounds of spring peepers filling the air, I will miss stepping out on a clear night and seeing our magnificent Orion, the Hunter! As we head into April, Jupiter and Venus continue to put on a dazzling show and there will be a partial lunar eclipse early on April 4th! Check out the highlights section for full details.

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 is so much to see! Without a doubt, brilliant Venus will catch your eye! To the right of Venus 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 Venus 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 1). Fantastic star hopping in this part of the sky! Turn left or direction south. Look directly overhead. Do you see 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. Left 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. 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 2).

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 3). Virgo hosts the sky's richest zone of galaxies. Great telescope viewing!

Next month, beautiful Saturn 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!

Note: Jupiter and Venus continue to move together. At the beginning of April they are 80 degrees apart.

On May 1 they are 50 degrees apart.

Highlights

April 4 – Full Moon. According to folklore, it is called the Pink Moon or the Egg Moon.

Partial lunar eclipse beginning at 6:16am. However, the Moon will set before totality for viewers east of the Mississippi.

April 10 – 12 – Venus passes the beautiful Pleiades star cluster in the western sky.

April 11 – Last Quarter Moon.

April 18 – New Moon.

April 21 – The waxing Crescent Moon is next to Venus in the western sky.

April 22 – Use binoculars to find Mars & Mercury low in the west-northwest 40 minutes after sunset.

April 22 – Lyrid Meteor Shower peaks.

April 25 – First Quarter Moon.

April 25 – National Astronomy Day.

April 26 – The Moon passes south of Jupiter.

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, Venus, 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 very 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!

Written by Suzie Dills -- Night sky illustrations can be found following **Starry Trail Map**