



STARRY TRAILS

MAY 2018

Spring has finally sprung, and our four brightest planets are blooming!! Whether you are a night owl or early bird, when you look up, you should spot a planet or two! For the next four months, our brightest planets will be at their best! May belongs to the king of the planets, Jupiter. Jupiter rises in the southeast as the Sun sets, so it rules the night sky from dusk to dawn! (Illustration 1) Venus continues to shine brilliantly in the west, early evening sky. Saturn and Mars rise after midnight (Illustration 2).

For our hike, we will begin around 9:30pm. Let's grab our jacket, Starry Trail Map and binoculars. We can still enjoy a few more hikes without mosquitoes! We will start by facing west. Without a doubt, dazzling Venus will catch your eye! Above Venus, the two stars that look almost the same are Gemini, the Twins. The bright red-orange star to the right of Gemini is Capella. To the left of Gemini is the star Procyon (Illustration 3).

Trek to the right and you will find 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 of the Big Dipper 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 (Illustration 4). Queen Cassiopeia, the W shape, is very low in the north or below the Little Dipper. Head back to the Big Dipper. Up and to the left, 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 left of Leo, almost to Gemini, the Twins. Do you see the beautiful Beehive Star Cluster (M44)?

Turn to the right or east. Look high, almost overhead, and arc off the handle of the Big Dipper to the bright yellow-orange star, Arcturus. Just below Arcturus and to the left, you will come upon a semi-circle of stars. It looks almost like a necklace, but actually it is the Northern Crown or Corona Borealis. I think it looks like a smiley face! Hike down and to the left from Corona Borealis. There you will see a keystone shape. This is the body of Hercules, the bravest and strongest hero! Binocular time! Take your binoculars and scan around the part of Hercules that faces Corona. Do you see the fuzzy object? This is the finest globular Star Cluster (M13) in the northern skies! If you head down and to the left, you will spot the bright star, Vega (Illustration 5).

Journey back to Arcturus. Look right and you will see a bright blue, white star. This is Spica, part of the constellation Virgo. By the way, Virgo hosts the sky's richest zone of galaxies! It is simply great telescope viewing in this part of the sky. Now for the highlight of the May skies, look below Arcturus and Spica. There you will find brilliant 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.

Wow! Another great night of Stargazing! Take one last breath of fresh spring air and head inside.

Next month, signs of summer and our first views of Saturn!!

Highlights

May 4 – The Moon passes north of Saturn after midnight.

May 6 – The Moon passes north of Mars after midnight.

May 6 – Eta Aquarid Meteor Shower peaks. The Waning Gibbous Moon will fade out fainter meteors.

May 7 – Last Quarter Moon.

May 8 – Jupiter at opposition, rises as the Sun sets and present in the night sky from dusk to dawn.

May 15 – New Moon.

May 17 & 18 – The Crescent Moon & Venus put on a show in the western sky after sunset.

May 21 – First Quarter Moon.

May 27 – The Moon passes north of Jupiter.

May 29 – Full Moon. According to folklore it is the Full Flower Moon.

May 31 – The Moon passes north of Saturn after midnight.

Brightest Stars: **West** – Procyon, Castor, Pollux, Capella. **Overhead** – Regulus. **East** – Arcturus, Spica, Vega.

Binocular Highlights The Moon, Jupiter, Beehive Cluster M44, Deep sky objects around Capella (M36, 37, 38), Hercules Globular Star Cluster M13.

Telescope Highlights The Moon, Jupiter, Venus, M10, M12, M51, M35, M44, M13, M57, M3, M81, M82, M92, M104, M35, 36, 37, 38 (near Capella).

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