



*Our 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary*

# **STARRY TRAILS**

**FEBRUARY 2021**

Even though our weather is still cold in February, there is nothing like stepping out on a clear night and being greeted by the dazzling stars of winter! Mars continues to shine brightly high in the southwest (Illustration 1) and moves into the constellation, Taurus on February 23 and ends the month 3 degrees southwest of the blue stars of the Pleiades (Illustration 2).

Now, let's grab our winter coats, hat, gloves, warm socks and boots and enjoy our hike. As we head out around 7:30, make sure to have on hand your Starry Trail Map and binoculars. Orion is only one of the phenomenal celestial treats that we will see on our hike. If you are having trouble finding Orion, start by facing west or where the sun set. Turn left, or south. You will see three stars in a row, which 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! Now let's find Orion's best friend. Journey back to the belt of Orion. Draw a line down and to the left, to the brightest star in that part of the sky. You have reached Sirius, the Dog Star. Sirius is the number one brightest star in the night sky. Sirius always follows Orion through the night!

Head back to Orion's Belt. Hike up and to the right and you will see a bright red-orange star. This is Aldebaran, the eye of Taurus, the Bull. Continue to the right and you will notice a small cluster of stars. These stars are the Pleiades or the Seven Sisters (Illustration 3). The Pleiades has to be my favorite group of stars to gaze at through my binoculars. Take a look! What a treasure!! We are going to continue a counterclockwise loop while looking overhead. Next stop, up and to the left, is another bright star, Capella. Swing to the left to the two stars that look almost identical, Gemini, the Twins.

Hike to the opposite part of the sky, or north. You will notice the Big Dipper up on its handle. By the way, look at the second star in the handle, with binoculars. It is a double star! Head to the cup of the Big Dipper. 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.

Trek to the left and you will see a group of stars that are in the shape of a "W". This is the constellation Cassiopeia (Illustration 4). Grab your binoculars again. From the top point of the W shape, scan slowly up and to the left. You will come upon the Double Cluster in Perseus. Find the bottom point of the W. Scan once again to the left. Do you see a fuzzy circular shape? That is the Andromeda Galaxy (M31). It is 2.5 million light years away!

Finally, we will skip over to the cup of the Big Dipper. Locate the flat part of the cup. Look slowly to the right for the shape of a backwards question mark. This is the head of Leo, the Lion (Illustration 5), a sure sign of

spring! How about a challenge? Take your binoculars and scan between Leo and Gemini. Do you see the beautiful Beehive Star Cluster (M44)?

Wow what a fabulous night of stargazing! So, remember... with a little practice, you can see so many awesome sights!! Head in to warm up and enjoy some hot chocolate!

### **Highlights**

**February 4** – Last Quarter Moon.

**February 10** – The Moon passes south of Saturn in the predawn sky.

**February 11** – Venus passes south of Jupiter in the predawn sky.

**February 11** – New Moon.

**February 17** – The Moon passes south of Uranus.

**February 18** – The Moon passes south of Mars.

**February 19** – First Quarter Moon between Hyades & Pleiades.

**February 20** – Mercury, Jupiter & Saturn form a triangle in the southeastern sky 30 minutes before sunrise.

**February 24** – The Moon passes a few degrees north of the Beehive Cluster.

**February 27** – Full Moon. According to folklore it is the Full Snow Moon or Hunger Moon.

**February 28** – Mars passes south of the Pleiades.

**Brightest Stars: South** – Sirius, Betelgeuse, Rigel, Aldebaran, Procyon **Overhead** – Capella, Castor, Pollux  
**East** – Regulus

**Binocular Highlights:** The Moon, Andromeda Galaxy M31, Double Cluster near Perseus, Pleiades, Orion Nebula M42, Beehive Cluster M44, Deep sky objects around Capella (M36,37,38) thru the Milky Way to Cassiopeia

**Telescope Highlights:** The Moon, Mars, Uranus, M1, M31, M41, M42, M44, M51, M81, M82, M35,36,37, 38 (near Capella), NGC869 & 864.

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Night Sky Illustrations created by Suzie Dills using Starry Night Backyard & Stellarium.

*Illustrations courtesy of Cassandra Dills*

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