



STARRY TRAILS

MAY 2023

Eleven months until the Total Solar Eclipse on April 8, 2024!!!

Venus is putting on its best show of the year, dazzling in the northwest, hours after sunset. Venus is in between the bright stars Procyon and Capella (Illustration 1). Mars continues to fade in brightness and can be found to the left of Castor and Pollux, two stars in Gemini, the Twins. The Moon will be near Mars, Venus and the Beehive Cluster on May 24 (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. 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 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 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.

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

Next month, signs of summer!!

Highlights:

May 5 – Full Moon. According to folklore it is the Full Flower Moon.

May 6 – Eta Aquarid Meteor Shower peaks.

May 12 – Last Quarter Moon.

May 13 – The Moon passes south of Saturn in the predawn sky.

May 17 – The Crescent Moon passes north of Jupiter & Mercury in the predawn sky.

May 19 – New Moon.

May 23 – The Crescent Moon passes north of Venus after sunset.

May 24 – The Crescent Moon passes north of Mars after sunset.

May 27 - First Quarter Moon.

May 29 – Mercury is at its greatest western elongation in the predawn sky.

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

Binocular Highlights: The Moon, Beehive Cluster M44, Deep sky objects around Capella (M36, 37, 38), Hercules Globular Star Cluster M13, Coma Berenice Cluster (in between Leo & Arcturus).

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

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

Illustrations courtesy of Cassandra Dills.