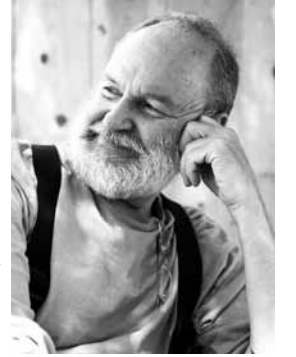


THE STARRY SIDE

A tetrad of eclipses just for us

BY GREELEY WELLS



Greeley Wells

What a year—an incredible freeze and insufficient rain and snow. Mt. Ashland did not open; Applegate Lake is not full. (It is, however, dramatically improved over its previous state, when it was comparable to little more than a creek in a field of mud and rock.) Will we be without snowmelt and rain this summer? What we will have, though, are warm nights and stars galore. So, lean back in your favorite lawn chair and enjoy the night skies.

Did you see the moon's eclipse? It was a treat! I stayed up late with coffee, binoculars, two movie cameras and my grandson. I had fun, and my grandson was at least a little interested. The experience was good preparation for the October lunar eclipse, which I recommend seeing, especially if you missed this recent one. I'll shed more light on that eclipse once we are closer to the event.

Next year there will be two more—a tetrad of eclipses! This rare alignment of eclipses, visible from our corner of America's northern hemisphere, is an opportunity of a lifetime!

I was recently asked an interesting eclipse question: why was the moon so red? Well, imagine yourself on the moon, looking back at earth. Now imagine that the sun has just disappeared behind the earth. When the earth covers the sun, the *only* light that reaches the moon is the red hue of sunset and sunrise. From the vantage point of the earth during a lunar eclipse, you would see a red illuminated moon surrounding the earth!

THE NIGHT SKY

Now, on to summer's sky. The Milky Way has risen from its disappearing act of spring in the east with the Summer Triangle, the main "stars" of the summer (Vega, Deneb and Altair). The three corresponding constellations are Lyra (the harp), Cygnus (the swan or the northern cross) and Aquila (the eagle).

In the north, around Polaris, the Big

Dipper has swung over the top and is sliding down on the western side as Cassiopeia rises in the east. Like all constellations and stars, these constellations are circumpolar, meaning they seem to spin around the pole. The closer they are to the pole, the smaller the circle they scribe in the sky and the more of them we see.

As Cassiopeia swings up, she brings the Milky Way and the Summer Triangle with her. As the Big Dipper travels over and down around the pole, Arcturus, Spica, Mars, Saturn and Leo the Lion swing up and over through the sky to sink in the west.

THE PLANETS

Jupiter sets three hours after sunset; by June's end it will set one hour

after. Slowly, it drops farther west each day till it sets with the constellation Gemini, which Jupiter has been in for more than a year. On July 24, Jupiter sets into the sun and is gone till August when it will begin rising higher and higher in the dawn.

Saturn is southeast of Mars and Spica. The red Antares, in Scorpio, is the next bright star along that line of celestial bodies. By the end of July, Saturn will be setting before midnight.

Venus is currently rising two hours before the sun in the east. For a time it will be nicely bright, but will slowly dim as it passes through its cycle. Venus is only 5.7 degrees from the Pleiades in the pre-dawn sky on June 23. And on June 24, it's only 1.3 degrees from the moon. (A degree

is approximately a thumb's width held at arm's length up into the sky.)

Mars is close to Spica at the moment. Follow the arch of the Big Dipper's handle to Arcturus and on to Spica. The Earth and Mars are at their closest point to each other during our independent paths around the sun. This, in effect, makes Mars very bright—comparable to Jupiter! On July 6, the moon passes Mars within a degree of separation. On July 14, Mars passes one degree north of Spica. Mars also passes Saturn on August 25, roughly three hours after sunset.

Mercury starts in June high in the sunset. It will experience a rapid descent into the sun by June 19. In July, Mercury is about 15 degrees above the rising sun in the east. It disappears into the sun to rise low in the sunset by the end of August.

OF NOTE

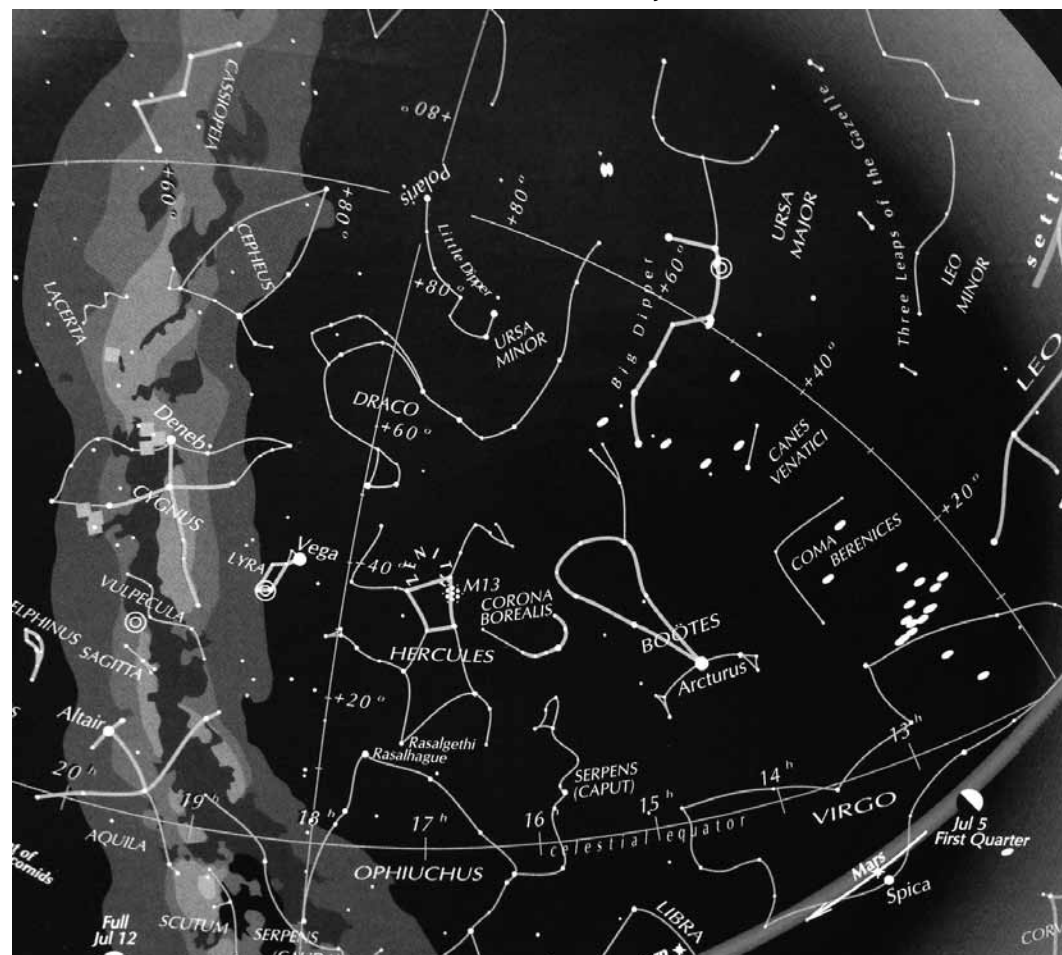
Summer Solstice falls on June 21, when the days are longest and the nights shortest. However, the latest sunset is actually on June 27, so that day may *feel* like the longest day.

There's a full moon on Friday, June 13, which is the only "unlucky" day this year. Does that mean that it's an unlucky full moon too?

The Perseid meteor shower on the night of August 12 is always worth watching. Unfortunately, it will be hampered this year by an almost-full moon. Sorry about that. The moon rises around 9 pm so maybe there will be some meteors visible beforehand. Look to the north-northeast.

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Illustration: Guy Ottewell's Astronomical Calendar 2014.



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