

THE STARRY SIDE

Telling the future

BY GREELEY WELLS

The nighttime starry sky is a wonder to me, just as the daylight sky is with its mysterious clouds and blazing sunrises and sunsets. Just as the daytime skies look different in spring, fall, winter, and spring, the starry night sky of the Applegate, with its predictable constellations that represent each of the four seasons, presents marvelous visions, stories, and surprises for the awake to see.

But there's something interesting that the night sky *always* does with the seasons that the daytime sky does not. Because of the earth's rotation, the stars during the first half of the night correspond with the season we are actually in—winter stars in a winter sky—but after the middle of the night, the stars of the next season appear! So each predawn morning sky is telling the future. In effect, we get to see two seasons in one night if we wake up early enough to see that beautiful predawn sky. What a sweet gift!

This season, arching straight overhead is one of my favorite constellations: Auriga. It's a pentagram (five sides) whose brightest star is Capella. Next to it, quite visible, is a small triangle with another triangle, even smaller and dimmer, across from it at the bottom. I've never heard this little one mentioned, but I see it and love it! It

has the same shape and angle of the larger triangle, and it's pointing in the opposite direction! That's symmetrical and beautiful to me.

Auriga is a shepherd. The main triangle is the kids (baby goats) he holds with his arm. It's an almost circumpolar constellation

and is in our sky about three-quarters of the time, so it's easy to see most of the year, depending on how big the mountain is north of you. This season Auriga follows north over Orion's head, and while Orion is south-ish overhead, Auriga is *directly* overhead and goes through the zenith.

Of note

Gemini d meteor showers, from December 7 to 17, have almost no moon and will be good this year. They peak December 13-14 mid-evening to dawn. They'll radiate from the Gemini twins and, at best, could produce up to 120 meteors per hour.

The winter solstice on December 21 marks the longest night of the year and the first day of winter.

Jupiter is in our dawn sky for months this season. Venus is out of sight behind the sun for months. Mars is in our dawn continuously.

The blue moon on January 31 simply means a somewhat-rare occurrence of two full moons in one month. The blue moon on March 31 is the second one next year, making it even more rare.

A total lunar eclipse on January 31 will be at its maximum at 5:30 pm around moonset. The moon gradually turns rusty then blood red. It's caused by the earth's shadow falling over the moon.

Greeley Wells
greeley@greeley.me

Note: Be sure to read Greeley's article on page 4 about the devastating loss by fire that he personally experienced.

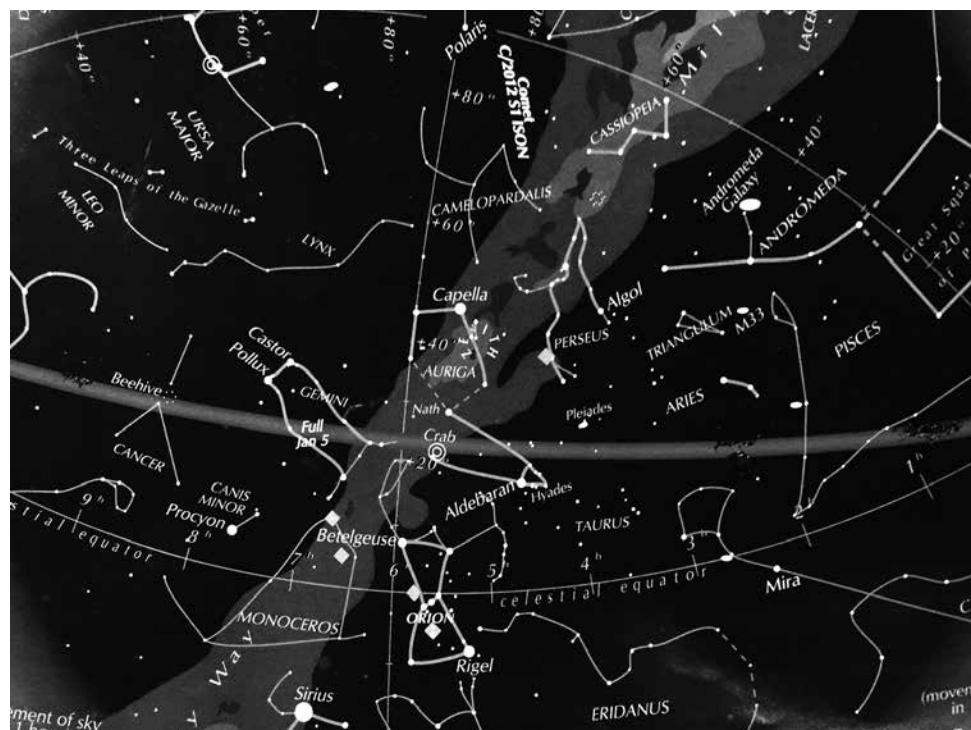
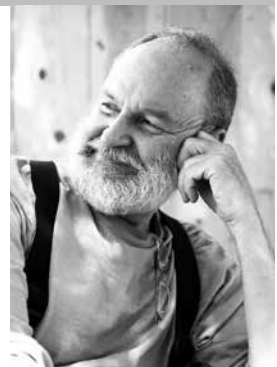


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Greeley Wells

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