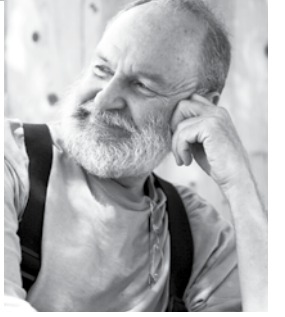


THE STARRY SIDE

Fall 2020: What's up with the stars



Greeley Wells

BY GREELEY WELLS

Hello, good folks. May you be surviving and thriving in these hard times. May we somehow eventually get back to a new and much better "normal" when it all unfolds.

These sure are difficult and different times we are in with many new good and bad possibilities for us. There's also an opening for a reevaluation of what was and what should come to be. I find myself with high hopes for a really good, fair, and kind future.

Meanwhile the stars, constellations, and planets perform overhead as they always do. Perhaps you will even have more time to enjoy them. Perhaps they can have a calming and even awakening effect on us all. They shine bright and interesting for all who delve a bit into them. Some special things are going on with our planets in the early morning, which

is also the best time for meteor viewing. Bring out your favorite chair and enjoy. Be prepared to wrap up when it gets chilly!

Here's what you'll see up there this fall season. Our favorite Summer Triangle has just made it to the top of the sky and will slowly slide westward each night this season. Notice how it not only moves west but turns in the sky. Altair, with its three stars in a row, is the last to rise in the east and will eventually be the first to set in the west! Deneb, the top of the northern cross, will eventually, in winter, stand upright on the west-north-west horizon line, having pulled the whole Milky Way to an east-west orientation, from its present north-south one. Vega (in Lyra), the brightest star in the Summer Triangle, follows along instead of leading the parade now.

The great square of Pegasus will rise to the zenith of the sky. The Big Dipper will slip under Polaris, the north star (unfortunately for me, out of sight at my place because of northern mountains). The "W" of Cassiopeia will swing counter-clockwise gracefully over Polaris. And one of my favorite stars, Capella, will rise in the northeast and work its way to the zenith in winter. It's the brightest star in the constellation Auriga, which is a pentagon. It has a beautiful triangle in its left-hand corner, right next to Capella. Just opposite and below it is another smaller triangle in the

same orientation inside Auriga. It's a bit dim but definitely there in a good dark sky. See if you can find it.

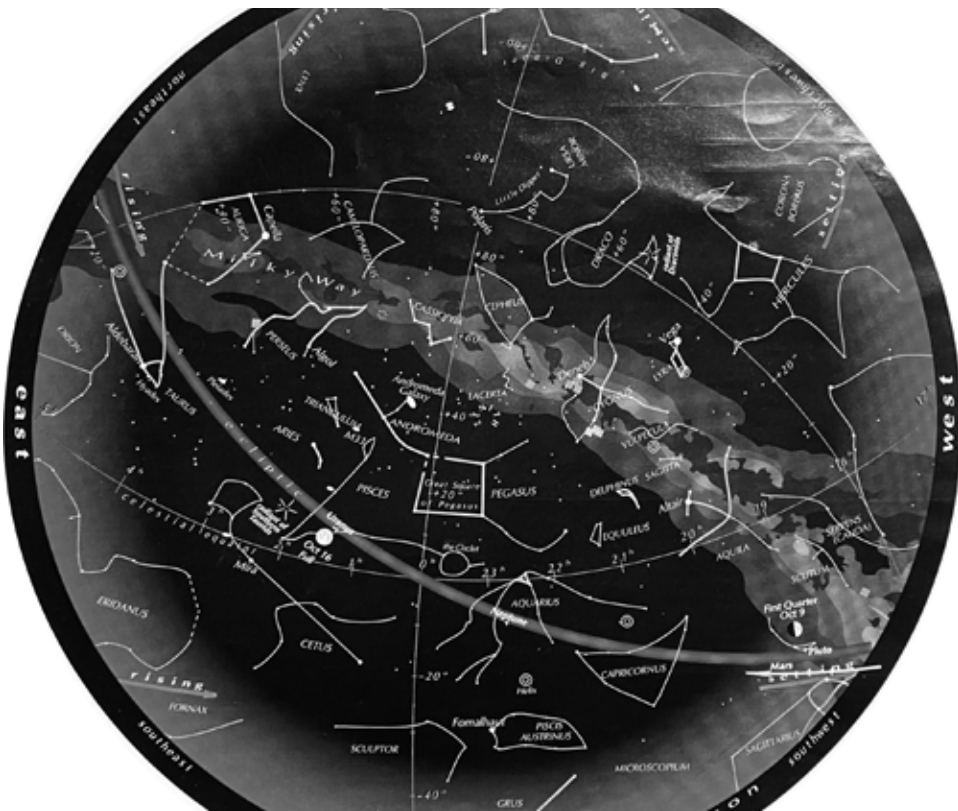
It's all part of the sweet sights at this time of year.

September 12 is my birthday, and it's usually one of the last warm days of the year. So get out there quick!

Enjoy all these many exciting things to look at in the night sky,

Greeley Wells
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Guy Ottewell's Astronomical Calendar.



Of Note

September 22 is the equinox: The sun rises and sets directly in line with the equator. And it will shine all over the world with the same length of day and night! Equinox occurs at 13:30 UTC (Greenwich Mean Time), which is 6:30 am for us here in southern Oregon. That's the moment the sun will shine directly overhead above the equator.

Mercury is a dim morning planet only in November this season.

Venus is very bright and high in the east at dawn all through September, October, and November, when she's highest and farthest from the sun. We've been seeing Venus as a day star—hard to find but amazing!

Red Mars rises in the east at mid-to-late evening, lighting the nighttime until dawn. Then in October, Mars will become brighter than Venus! In November he dims a bit but is still very impressive. How can he do this? It's his closeness to earth as we both orbit the sun. For a whole month or more he becomes the third brightest object in the sky after the sun and moon! (OK, the space station *is* brighter!)

Jupiter is up all night with Saturn close behind. In September, October, and November they are both low in the southern sky and making their way steadily west.

Meteors: Early morning is usually the best viewing, but other times work too.

Draconids: Oct. 7-8. Best viewing is actually early evening. Up to 10 per hour.

Orionids: Oct. 20-21. They can be seen for many days on either side of these peak dates. Only a crescent moon for a good show. Twenty per hour!

Leonids: Nov 16-17. No moon to spoil the viewing! Fifteen per hour at its peak.

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