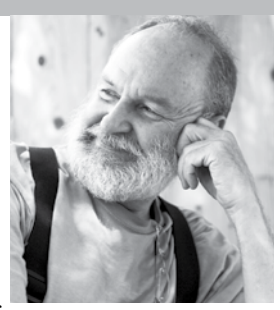
THE STARRY SIDE

The galaxy twists counterclockwise!

BY GREELEY WELLS



Greeley Wells

I have always been fascinated by the complicated movements of stars, shapes, and constellations across our sky. For instance, the Summer Triangle has risen till it is now overhead, almost halfway to the western horizon. The Milky Way, which was horizontal on the eastern horizon, is now overhead. Both the triangle and the galaxy travel southwest to northeast and will continue to rotate as they go west to set. By December they will have shifted almost 90 degrees again, east to west. You'd think they would move in a simple east-west movement, but they twist!

With fall starting soon, here are some more favorites to consider. In the east, where Summer Triangle rose, is a wonderful, equally big, square shape. This is the body of Pegasus, the horse. A curve of stars above and to the right of the square makes the head; the rest is more vague. A sweep of stars extends from the star directly opposite Pegasus's head, moving left, getting bigger and bigger as it goes. It sweeps near and just below the W of Cassiopeia.

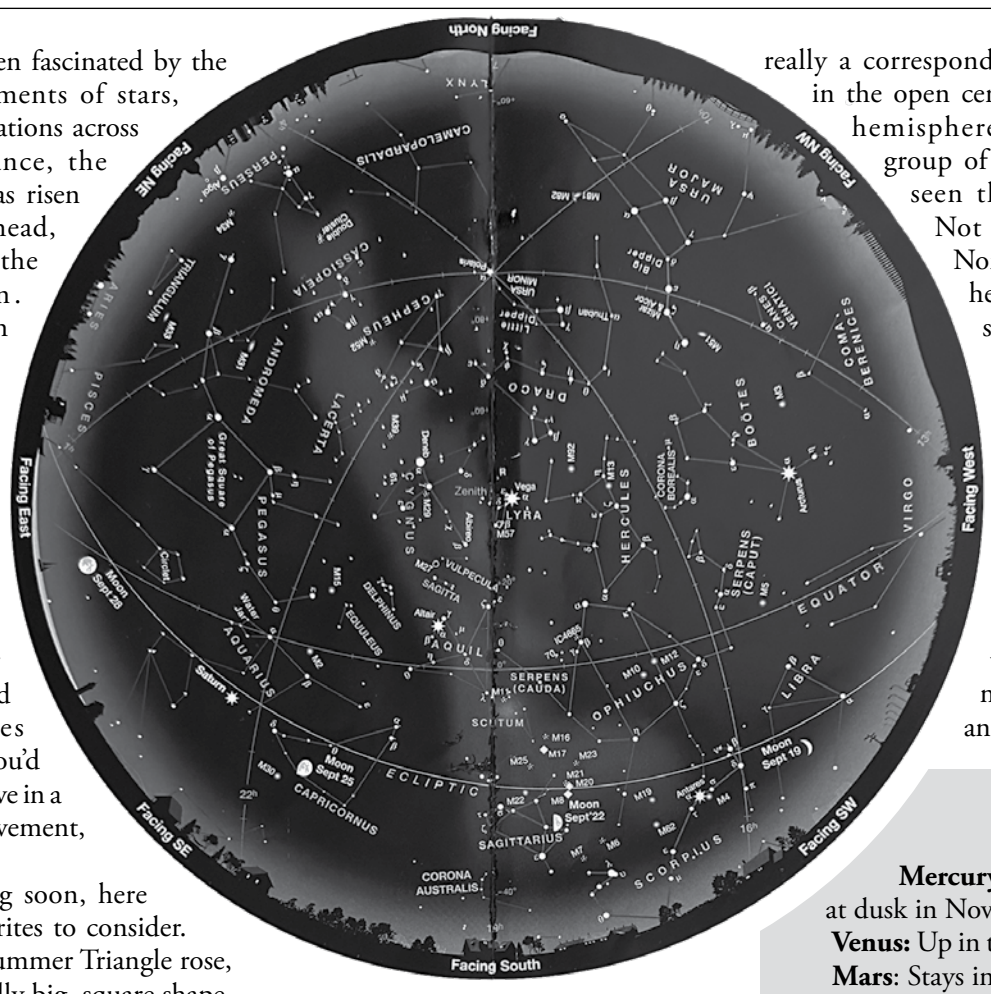
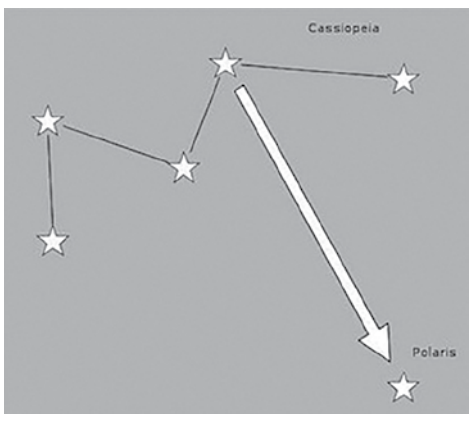


Image: Sky & Telescope (skyandtelescope.org).

From Cassiopeia we can find the north star. Divide the lower, wider V of the W into three equal pie shapes. Extend the lower line you just imagined straight to Polaris—okay, not exactly straight, but close—and you'll land on the north star.



How to find the North Star from Cassiopeia. Image: preppingtosurvive.com.

The north star is important because it's the only star that *does not move*. It's at the center of all the movements of all our northern hemisphere stars. There's not really a corresponding "southern star" in the open center of the southern hemisphere sky, but a small group of spinning stars. I've seen them from Hawaii. Not as cool as our sky! Northern and southern hemisphere skies share some stars—their northern ones are our southern ones.

From the North Star, turn and look south. To the right, close to the horizon, are two sets of three stars. The first set is almost horizontal, with Antares in the middle, so bright and red it rivals Mars. To the right of those three stars, almost vertical, is the other set of three stars, making the head of the scorpion in the constellation Scorpio. A line of stars, perpendicular to those, curves to the left (the body and beginning of the tail), dips below the horizon, and rises up again, even farther left, almost due south. Now the scorpion's tail shows as a smaller curve, from lower left to upper right, ending in a bright star, Shaula, and a tiny mate, Lesath, close together—the scorpion's stinger. Watch out!

It amazes me how much goes on in our quiet, dark sky just above us each night. For all the 81 years of my life I've loved and been attracted to the night sky. There's always something new or old to marvel at.

Wishing you warm, dark, clear skies.

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— OF NOTE —

Planets

Mercury: Up at dawn in September, invisible in October, and up again at dusk in November.

Venus: Up in the dusk in September, in the evening for the rest of the season.

Mars: Stays in our early mornings all season, when most of us are asleep.

Jupiter: Up early each morning when, again, most of us are asleep.

Saturn: Visible all night in September but only in the evening the rest of the season.

Meteor Showers

Perseids: Only visible in August.

Draconids: Peak on October 8-10. Watch all evening, to the north near Vega. There are normally around ten meteors an hour, but sometimes there are floods of meteors. We might be lucky!

Orionids: September 26-November 22. Best on October 20-21, midnight to dawn, with a maximum of 10-20 meteors an hour. Avoid the full moon on October 17. The radiant is off Orion's raised arm.

South and north Taurids: October 13-December 2, peaking on November 5. Just right of Taurus, with as many as ten meteors an hour.

Leonids: November 3-December 2. In Leo, which looks like a backwards question mark in the east. Watch all night on November 17, but avoid the full moon on either side of November 15. The Leonids can have 10-15 meteors per hour and sometimes create meteor showers. In November 1966 there were thousands of meteors per minute, like rain.

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What's going on around you? Let us know! Send your write-up and photos to gater@applegater.org.

Thanks! See you in the *Applegater*....