

February's night sky features winter arc

February 2012 Night Sky Events

Held at arm's length, the width of your fist is 10°. and the width of your index finger is 1°. The width of a full Moon is 1/2°.

2 Thursday evening: The gibbous Moon is in Taurus the Bull, between the Pleiades star cluster and the star Aldebaran, the bull's red eye, high overhead.

7 Tuesday: The full Moon is called Wolf Moon, Snow Moon, and Hunger Moon.

9 Thursday evening: Brilliant Venus passes less than a moonwidth to the right of fainter Uranus low in the west; seeing Uranus requires at least binoculars.

9 Thursday evening: After they rise about 8 p.m., the Moon is one fist-width (held at arm's length) to the right of red-dish Mars which has brightened notably since the beginning of the year.

12 Sunday late evening: After they rise about 11 p.m., the Moon is six moon-widths to the upper right of the star Spica which itself is twice that far to the upper right of slightly brighter Saturn; by morning the trio will high in the south.

14 Tuesday morning: The Moon is at third quarter.

15 Wednesday morning: The Moon is one-half a fist-width above the reddish star Antares low in the south southeast.

21 Tuesday: The Moon is new – between the Earth and Sun.

22 Wednesday early evening: Soon after sunset, the thin crescent Moon is one-half a fist-width to the right of Mercury very low in the west with brilliant Venus looking down from three fist-widths above; binoculars will help with Mercury.

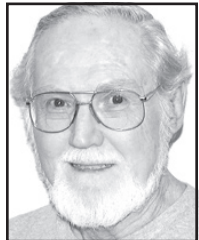
25 Saturday evening: The crescent Moon passes to the upper right of Venus in the west.

26 Sunday evening: The Moon passes to the lower right of Jupiter in the west.

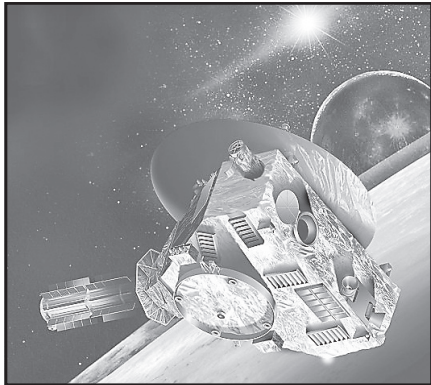
29 Wednesday: Leap Day is inserted every four years to account for the fact that a year is actually 365 1/4 days, thus 2012 has 366 days rather than the usual 365.

29 Wednesday evening: The Moon is at first quarter.

Under clear, dark, moonless skies, late February is a good time to see the zodiacal light in the west for a couple of hours after evening darkness, and gegenschein



Paul Derrick ● Stargazer



NASA artist
New Horizons spacecraft to fly by
Pluto in 2015

(counter-glow) high above around midnight. Both appear as soft glows resulting from sunlight reflected off meteoric dust in the plane of our solar system.

Naked-eye Planets

The Sun, Moon and planets rise in the east and set in the west due to Earth's west-to-east rotation on its axis.

Evenings: Venus, Jupiter, Mars (late evening), Mercury (latter part of month)

Mornings: Saturn, Mars

• Mercury starts Feb. in the Sun, then emerges in the evening low in the west by mid-month.

• Venus is the brilliant "evening star" in the west setting three hours after the Sun.

• Mars is up at 9 p.m. and is high in the southwest in the morning.

• Jupiter, in the west in the evening, sets by midnight.

• Saturn is up by midnight and high in the south southeast in the morning.

Great Winter Arc Region

The Great Winter Arc region, prominent in the evening from December through April, contains more bright stars than any other comparable region seen from our mid-northern latitudes. But on those seemingly quiet, cold winter evenings, the region is far from tranquil. Its centerpiece, the great arc spanning more than 80 degrees (eight fist-widths held at arm's length) from the star Sirius to the star Capella, is separating two combatants from some other hostile critters.

Within the arc are Orion the Hunter and Taurus the Bull, both looking ready for combat. Orion, with a raised club and shield, is face-to-face with the angry red-eyed, long-horned Taurus who, one can easily imagine, is snorting fire.

Accompanying the hunter are his two canine companions, Canis Major and Minor. Their howls and snarls pierce the night as the big dog, reared up on his hind legs, is attempting to attack poor Lepus the rabbit hiding beneath Orion.

The arc shields Orion and Taurus from some of the region's other not-so-gentle creatures. Lynx the wildcat is perched in a tree waiting to pounce from above while Hydra the water snake slithers up from behind, intending to devour the small dog. Above the snake, Cancer the crab wants to sink its sharp pinchers into someone, and hidden within Cancer the Beehive star cluster is swarming with killer bees.

Just inside the arc seemingly observing all the action with a cautious eye are Gemini the Twins and Auriga the Charioteer. Two final guys seem totally out of place given all the region's hostilities. Cowering between the dogs, virtually invisible, is the usually playful Monoceros, the mythical unicorn. And below the rabbit is Columba the Dove facing what must seem like a Sisyphean challenge of bringing peace to the region.

Bet you had no idea this part of the winter sky was so full of activity.

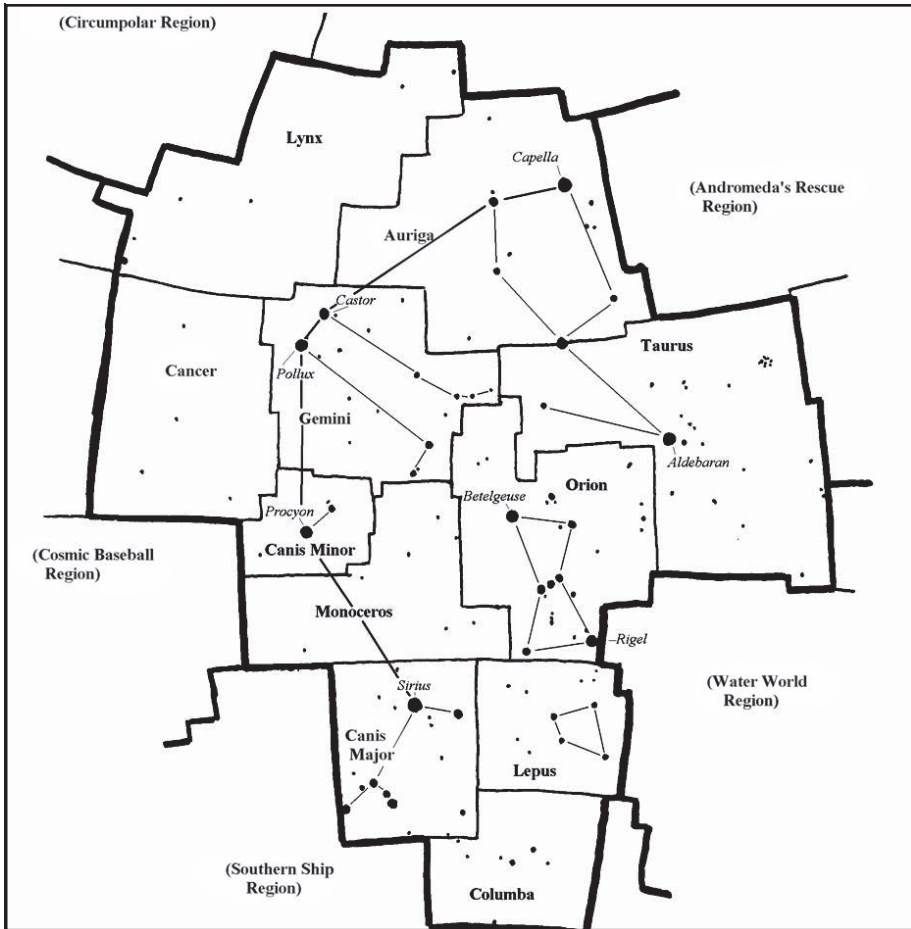
Astro Milestones

• Feb. 4 is the birthday of American astronomer Clyde Tombaugh (1906-1997) who discovered Pluto.

• Feb. 15 is the birthday of Italian mathematician and astronomer Galileo Galilei (1564-1642).

• On Feb. 17, 1600, Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake by the Inquisition for espousing heretical cosmological and religious views.

• Feb. 19 is the birthday of Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) whose thesis that the Sun rather than the Earth is at the center of the universe revolutionized scientific and theo-



AUTHOR'S DIAGRAM

Great Winter Arc Region

logical thinking in the western world.

• Feb. 20, 1962, astronaut John Glenn became the first American to orbit Earth in his Mercury spacecraft named Friendship 7.

Discovery of Pluto

On Feb. 18, 1930, 24-year old Clyde Tombaugh discovered Pluto from Lowell Observatory near Flagstaff, Ariz. Using two photographic plates he had taken Jan. 23 and 29 of the exact same area of the sky, he noted a tiny point of light had moved from one location to another on the images taken a week apart. Upon further analysis, he realized he had discovered what was regarded as the ninth planet – a designation it held until August 2006 when the International Astronomical Union redefined "planet" and Pluto was reclassified as a dwarf planet, comparable to a large asteroid.

Pluto is the only traditional planet

never visited and studied up close by our spacecraft, but that's about to change as NASA's New Horizons, launched Jan. 19, 2006, is on its way to a Pluto rendezvous in 2015. (Ironically, Pluto was still a planet when New Horizons left Earth.) Tombaugh died in 1997, and many who hold him in high regard, myself included, are deeply pleased that he will posthumously visit his beloved Pluto as some of his ashes are on board the New Horizons spacecraft. Bon voyage, Mr. Tombaugh.

Paul Derrick is an amateur astronomer who lives in Waco, Texas. His website (www.stargazerpaul.com) contains an archive of past Stargazer columns and other basic stargazing information. Contact him at paulderrickwaco@aol.com or (254) 723-6346 or write 918 N. 30th St., Waco, Texas, 76707.

On the Beat

COLBY POLICE

Monday

8:04 a.m. – Two dogs at large in the 1500 block of W. Fourth. Not found.

8:09 a.m. – Dead cat in roadway. Contacted owner.

10:04 a.m. – Making false writing: employee called about a counterfeit \$10 in a bank bag. Report filed.

10:21 a.m. – Report filed on incident that began in Logan County.

11:50 p.m. – Caller reported subjects in a vehicle turning on water hydrants inside of Friendly Acres. Unable to locate.

Tuesday

7:26 a.m. – Abandoned vehicle at Range and Pine. Vehicle moved.

10:07 a.m. – Caller reported theft. Report filed.

10:18 a.m. – Caller advised of vehicle damage. No report.

1:28 p.m. – Caller requested officer watch for vehicle going from Garden City to Colorado.

1:47 p.m. – Sherman County called about runaway in Colby. Subject brought to station; Sherman County notified.

1:55 p.m. – Officer from Wichita Police Department requested we contact subject about recovered wallet. Not found, message left to call.

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and some like
to shop the
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ad way!!

The Colby Free Press - 462-3963

Fruit topic of meeting

Grapes to raspberries, high tunnels to marketing – all of these topics and more will be covered at a conference for specialty crop growers in Washington, Kan., on Saturday, Feb. 25.

The North Central Kansas Commercial Enterprises: Production-Marketing-Management Conference, sponsored by K-State Research and Extension, is planned for Saturday, Feb. 25, at Washington High School, 115 North D St. in Washington.

"This is a professional development opportunity for anyone who's either growing fruits and vegetables as a business or who is considering such an enterprise," said David Coltrain, horticulture agent with the K-State Research and Extension River Valley District.

The conference begins with registration at 8:30 a.m., with the program starting at 8:50 a.m. The cost to attend, which includes lunch, is \$25 if paid by Wednesday, Feb. 15, or \$35 after that date. Students may attend at a reduced rate.

The day features three general session presentations.

• Direct Marketing Strategies – Mykel Taylor, K-State agricultural economist.

• Move Your Hobby Enterprise to a Business – David Coltrain, K-State River Valley Extension District agent.

• Produce Auction: Could it Work Here? – Tim Baker, University of Missouri Extension.

Participants can also attend breakout sessions. Speakers include growers, and university specialists and extension agents.

Information is available at www.rivervalley.ksu.edu or by contacting Coltrain at (785) 325-2121 or coltrain@ksu.edu.

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