

UNA Planetarium Newsletter

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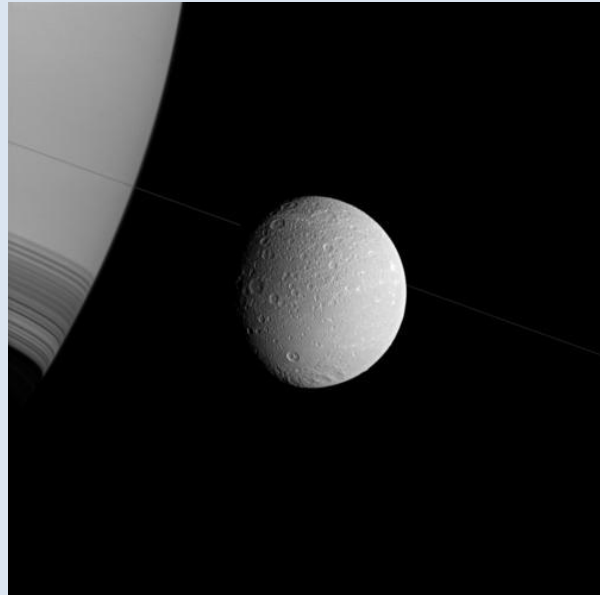
I was asked by a student recently why NASA was being closed down. This came as a bit of a surprise but it is somewhat understandable. The retirement of the space shuttle fleet last year was the end of an era. The shuttle serviced the United States' space program for more than twenty years and with no launcher yet ready to replace the shuttles it might appear as if NASA is done. This is in part due to poor long-term planning on the part of NASA. However, contrary to what some people think, the manned spaceflight program at NASA is alive and well. In fact NASA is currently taking applications for the next astronaut corps and will send spacefarers to the International Space Station to conduct research in orbit. They will ride on Russian rockets, but they will be American astronauts.

The confusion over the fate of NASA also exposes the fact that many of the important missions and projects NASA is involved in do not have the high public profile of the Space Shuttles. If you have never heard of IBEX, Swift, or GALEX you might be forgiven but they are used by NASA to study the boundaries of the solar system, exploding stars and the ultraviolet universe.. If you have not heard of ACRIMSAT, Cloudsat or GOES you are not alone, but they are studying the Earth and its environment. These and many other NASA missions are ongoing but rarely garner the headlines that blasting astronauts into space does. While riding Russian rockets into space may be a setback, NASA is far from being out of the business of scientific discovery.

Mel Blake.

UNA Planetarium and Observatory, is operated by the Dept. of Physics and Earth Science

Image of the Month



This image was obtained by the Cassini spacecraft in orbit around Saturn. It shows the small moon Dione with the limb of the planet in the background. Dione is about 1123km across and the spacecraft was about 57000km from the moon when the image was taken. Dione, like many of Saturn's moons is probably mainly ice. The shadows of Saturn's rings appear on the planet as the stripping you see to the left of Dione. **The Image courtesy NASA.**

Astro Quote: "Across the sea of space, the stars are other suns."
— [Carl Sagan](#)

Planetarium tours start at 7:00PM. Tours include a planetarium star show, a video presentation and observing through a telescope if weather allows. \$3/person, UNA students free. No reservations are required.

Observing Highlights

Look for Venus shining brightly in the southwest after sunset.

Jupiter continues to shine in the southwest before midnight.

Look for Mars rising just after sunset this month.

Calendar for Feb/Mar 2012

Feb 14 Planetarium Public Night

Feb 17 Planetarium Public Night

Feb 21 Planetarium Public Night

Feb 24 Planetarium Public Night

Feb 28 Planetarium Public Night

March 2 Planetarium Public Night

March 6 Planetarium Public Night

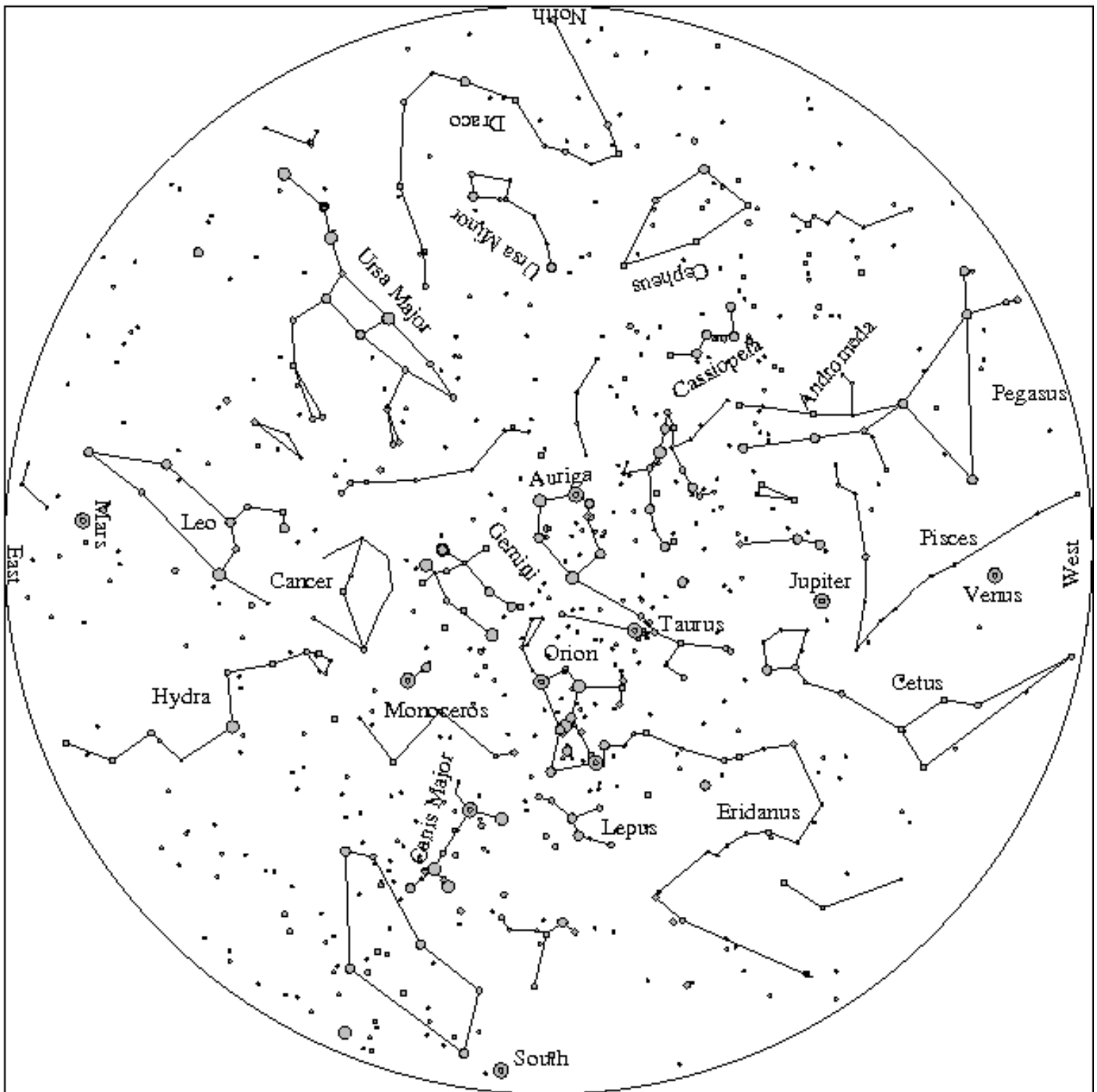
March 9 Planetarium Public Night

March 13 Planetarium Public Night

March 16 Planetarium Public Night

March 20 Vernal Equinox. First day of spring.

The February 2012 Sky for North Alabama



How to use this Chart: The sky is shown for 8:00PM, February 15th for Florence, Alabama. It will appear this way one hour earlier for each week difference in time. The stars brightness's are represented by different sized dots. The faintest stars you can see are the small dots; the brightest ones are large dots. Hold the chart with the direction you are facing down. So if you are facing north, hold the chart with north down. The circle represents the horizon and the center of the chart the point directly over your head. So an object half-way between the center and edge of the chart is half-way up in the sky. This chart was prepared using the SkyNow software of R. M. Blake. This chart may be reproduced for non-commercial purposes with the following acknowledgement included: Courtesy UNA Planetarium and Observatory. <http://www.una.edu/planetarium/>.

Help Fight Light Pollution: The GLOBE at Night Project!

Calling all Earthlings! Take a few minutes to get involved in the GLOBE at Night campaign to preserve dark skies! GLOBE at Night is a citizen-science campaign open to people all over the world to raise awareness of the impact of light pollution by inviting citizen-scientists to measure their night sky brightness and report their observations to a website from a computer or smart phone. Light pollution threatens not only our “right to starlight”, but can affect energy consumption, wildlife and health. Through 2011, people in 115 countries contributed 66,000 measurements, making GLOBE at Night one of the most successful light pollution awareness campaigns to date. Please join us to participate in the 2012 campaign an hour after sunset until about 10pm January 14 through 23, February 12 through 21, March 13 through 22, and April 11 through 20. For information and resources, visit us at www.globeatnight.org.

UNA Planetarium Participates in 365 Days of Astronomy

365 Days of Astronomy is an international outreach project which teaches the public about all areas of astronomy. The subscribers sign up to receive a podcast at no charge. They then receive a “podcast” which consists of short 5 – 10 minute discussion of some topic related to astronomy. Topics range from how to pick out a telescope, the nature of stars and how galaxies form and everything in between. The podcasts are intended for all ages. UNA Planetarium will contribute for podcasts to 356 Days of Astronomy. The first will be on Runaway Stars, on February 17th. We will contribute three more, one each month in March, April and May. Work study student Deb Bailey will be helping with this project.

<http://365daysofastronomy.org/>



Runaway star Zeta Ophiuchi imaged with NASA's WISE spacecraft. It moves at 54000 miles per hour! Image courtesy NASA.

Join the Shoals Astronomy Club

If you want to learn more about astronomy and participate in observing and public educational activities, join the Shoals Astronomy Club. No experience is needed and people of all ages are welcome. Whether you just like to read about space or are an experienced observer, you are welcome to join. The club meets at the UNA Planetarium the last Thursday of most months. We are part of the Astronomical League and NASA's Night Sky Network.

NASA Radio Astronomy for Schools

NASA has turned one of its Deep Space Network radio telescopes into a research opportunity for schools. Teachers get trained in how to use the 34m Goldstone Apple Valley Radio Telescope (GAVRT) and their students then get to participate in research projects with NASA. Those interested can check out the GAVRT project homepage or the NASA website.

<http://www.lewiscenter.org/gavrt/>

<http://deepspace.jpl.nasa.gov/dsn/educ/index.html>

