

Our Corner of the Universe
AST101, Fall 2007
STAR DIARY
Week of September 4

The night sky has fascinated Man since the dawn of consciousness. It served as a source of information, reassurance, beauty and fear. The invention of electric lights has turned our eyes away from the sky and has diluted its beauty. One goal of this course is to make you familiar with the night sky and (maybe) to re-awaken the fascination and awe experienced by endless generations of our ancestors. To this end, you will be required to keep an astronomical diary. During the course of the semester I want you to observe the night sky on at least 6 different evenings. One of these evenings should include sessions run by the T.A.'s observations. The other five should be spaced at least one week apart.

Because of the frequency of bad weather, which will obscure the stars, you should start as soon as possible in order to guarantee enough good nights to observe. The first time you look at the sky should take the longest time, as you will become more familiar with the major landmarks in the sky. Subsequent observations will be shorter, but you may linger and enjoy the view!

Besides the weather, the major obstacle to observing the sky is the background electric lights. You can minimize this (somewhat) by looking straight up and blocking the light from the section you are observing with your hands (or other objects) or by finding a clearing through the trees. It takes about 10 minutes for your eyes to become dark adapted.

Before you start your diary, become familiar with the star charts at the back of your text— (Summer) and (Fall)— and those handed out in class.

OBSERVING LIST

Use the list of objects below as the minimum to observe and sketch, unless otherwise modified by your TA.

- Big dipper
- Little Dipper
- Cassiopeia
- Pegasus
- Polaris
- A planet (Jupiter is your best bet this year)
- Moon
- Summer triangle (Including Cygnus)

How many zodiacal constellations can you see? In what "sign" were the evenings you performed this observation?

OBSERVATION AND DIARY ENTRY

For each diary entry you should make a sketch of the constellations, planets, and any other objects you observe. Your sketch should include the general location in the sky where you observe the object, how far above the horizon it is, date and time of observation, and how far east or west it is in the sky. You should emphasize any changes you notice from previous observations.

For each observation you should state the DAY, TIME, LOCATION AND OBSERVING CONDITIONS.

Due Week of October 30 or earlier

This is an extra credit lab. If you hand it in it will replace your lowest score or a missed lab.