

ASTRONOMY

Scorpion Moves Across Sky

Venus and Saturn also shine on July evenings. Characteristic constellations of the summer nights are easily spotted in the southern sky.

By JAMES STOKLEY

▶ WITH THE coming of July, the characteristic constellations of the summer evening appear in the southern skies. The most conspicuous of these is Scorpion, the scorpion, which is directly south, as shown on the accompanying maps. These are drawn to show how the skies appear at about 10:00 p.m., your own kind of standard time (or 11:00 p. m. for daylight saving time), at the beginning of July, and an hour earlier in the middle.

Scorpius is easy to recognize because of the curved line of stars to the left that form the animal's tail, while the star Antares, distinctly red in color, is supposed to represent its heart. To the right of this group we find Libra, the scales, and then Virgo, the virgin, in which the bright star Spica appears. Farther west, in the same figure, is the planet Saturn.

Continuing still farther west, we come to Leo, the lion, present location of Venus, brightest of all the planets. Regulus, the most brilliant star in this group, is not shown on the maps because it has set by

the time for which they are prepared. However, it can be seen earlier in the evening. On July 5, Venus passes quite close to this star.

To the left of the scorpion is Sagittarius, the archer, in which the stars form an easily recognized teapot. The spout of the pot is towards the right, and the handle to the left. Some of these stars also form a little dipper, known as the "milk dipper," doubtless because it stands in the brightest part of the Milky Way. The four stars that make the handle of the teapot outline the bowl of the dipper. Its handle extends upward to the right, in two of the stars forming the teapot's lid.

Directly above Sagittarius and Scorpius is a large constellation which contains no first magnitude stars. This was shown on the old star maps as a man holding a serpent. The reptile is represented by the constellation of Serpens, part of which is on each side of Ophiuchus. Serpens is the only constellation in the sky divided into two parts. The serpent's head is to the right and the tail to the left, toward the stars of Aquila, the eagle.

Aquila contains the bright star Altair. Moving upwards, we come to Lyra, the lyre, with Vega, which is the brightest star seen these summer evenings. Of course it is not nearly as bright as the planet Venus, or Jupiter, which comes up later. Below Vega, toward the northeastern horizon, is Cygnus, the swan, with the star called Deneb.

Toward the northwest we see the Great Dipper, the bowl downwards. At the bottom are Merak and Dubhe, the so-called pointers, whose direction, to the right, shows Polaris, the pole star. This is in the little dipper at the end of the handle, which now points downwards.

Following the curve of the handle of the Great Dipper we come in the south to Arcturus, in Bootes, the bear-driver. This is the last of the stars of the first magnitude to be seen these evenings.

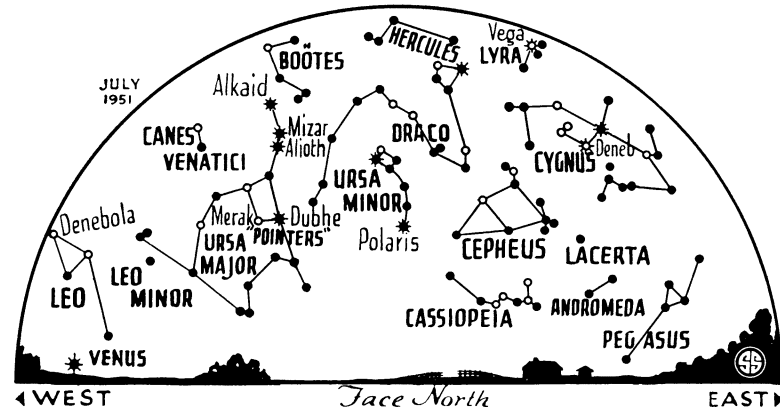
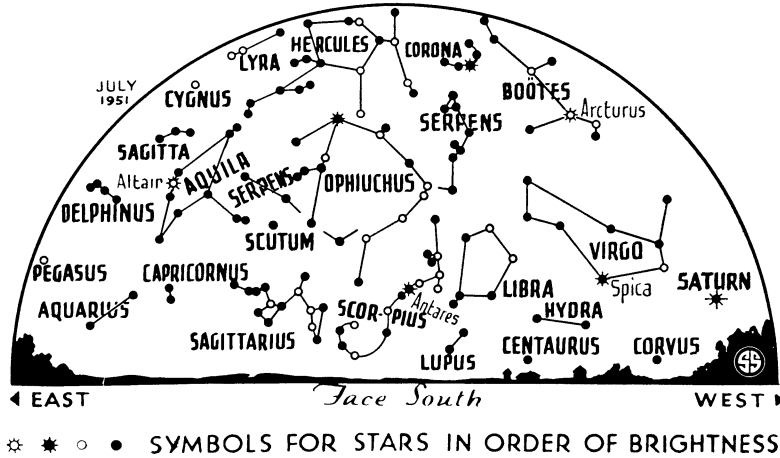
As for the other planets, Jupiter comes up around midnight, in the constellation of Pisces, the fishes. It is about a sixth as bright as Venus, though about seven and a half times the brilliance of Vega. By the end of July Jupiter will appear about three hours after the sun sets.

Mars and Mercury are not easily visible in July. Though the former is in the east just before sunrise, and the latter in the west just after sunset, both are so low that

Index, continued

Tree, Hershel G.	297
Triethanolamine trinitrate	296
Trout	348
Trulson, M.	300
Tube, Miniature	96
Tube, Self-Sealing	56
Tube tester	80
Tuberculosis 130, 175, 332, 334, 341,	391
Tucker, Howard J.	242
Tucker, Paul	295
Tularemia	25
Tulip Tree	300
Tullner, William W.	380
Tumors	137, 182
Tungsten	248
Turbojet engine	391
Turboliner	37, 209, 219
Turner, K. B.	258
Turner, T. C.	345, 387
Truman, President	145, 149
Trytten, M. H.	205, 235, 366
Tyler, Paul M.	114
Type cleaner	288
Typhus	105
Typing ribbon re-inked	262
UNIVAC	389
Ultrasonic wave pictures	103
Ultraviolet antidote	244
Underwater valley	88
Universe	194, 403, 411
VHF Receivers	57
Vacuum	152
Vacuum Bottle, Improved	247
Van Arx, William	139
Van Biesbroeck, G.	409
van de Kamp, Peter	115
Vanderboom, Katherine	364
Van der Kloot, William	14
van Overbeek, Johannes	43
Vansell, George H.	136
Vehicle speed counter	213
Vent tube	224
Vermiculite filling	272
Veterinary Medicine	4
Viability	180
Viomycin	130
Virchow, Rudolph	69
Viruses, Helpful	165
Visher, Stephen S.	201
Vitamin, New	124, 262
Vitamin A manufacture	200
Vitamin C	51, 72
Vitamins	167
Voice recorder	368
Voitle, Dorothy	283
Vonderlehr, R. A.	120
von Neumann, John	106, 183
Vonnegut, Bernard	182, 269
Vroom, A. H.	24
Wacc, Alan J. B.	276
Wagner, Donald J.	172
Waksman, S. A.	46, 179, 355
Wainer, Amos S.	387
Walford, Lionel A.	26
Walker, Eric A.	5, 130
Walkie-Talkie, Small	205
Wallace, Graham	339
Wallace, H. D.	206
Wallace, P. C.	214
Wallace, Robert L., Jr.	408
Wallach, Irving D.	365
Wallboard, interior	352
Wallets, Vinylite	192
Walters, H. J.	50
Wapner, S.	223
War	333
Warburg, Otto	99
Warburton, Ray W.	392
Ward, A. H.	269
Ward, H. C., Jr.	325
Warne, William E.	182
Warning, Low Underpass	338
Wash, Arthur W.	297
Washbasin	320
Washing machine	412
Waste, Oil	313
Water	322
Water, Fresh from sea	168
Water-cloud pickup	89
Water-Flow table	85, 87
Water gas	264
Water needs	73
Water pollution	126
Water protection	296
Water purification	117, 302
Water resources	6
Water re-use	211
Waterless season	212
Waterman, Alan T.	181
Watson, Virginia	34
Watts, H. M.	88
Watts, Lyle F.	71
Wave, Third earthquake	72
Wax from lignite	102
Weather	50, 87, 125, 153, 189, 220,
Weather control	198
Weed control	43
Weedkillers	56
Weed seed viability	34
Weeds	104
Weiner, Richard	247
Weinstock, B.	219
Weiss, Allen	296
Weiss, David	355
Weiss, H. G.	30
Weiss, Molly A.	364
Wellington, W. G.	258
Wender, Irving	136
Wendler, Norman L.	3
Went, F. W.	34
Werner, C. A.	130
Werner, H.	223
Werthessen, N. T.	197
Westall, R. G.	249
Westmore, Alexander	46, 277
Weyl, Hermann	183
Wexler, Aaron	247
Wexler, Milton	319
Wheat Stem Rust	3, 245
Wheeler, Douglas E.	37
Whipple, Fred L.	339
White, Donald R.	21
White, Gilbert F.	6
White, Wayne E.	264
Whitelaw, M. James	40
Whistling jar	190
Whitney, Leon F.	251
Whitzel, Raymond T.	206
Wichelhausen, Ruth H.	373
Wiebe, Richard	252
Wiener, Alexander S.	248
Wiener, Norbert	106
Wiggers, Harold C.	249
Wild greens	254
Wildcats	380
Wildlife survives fire	147
Wile, Udo J.	265
Williams, C. B.	377
Williams, Carroll M.	14
Williams, Ferd E.	393
Williams, Guy H. Jr.	242
Williams, Gwendolyn M.	313
Williams, Howel	296
Williams, J. H.	374
Williams, Jonathan M.	278
Williams, Roger J.	6
Wilson, Charles E.	50, 118
Wilson, J. F.	87
Wilson, May G.	51
Wind tunnel	164, 337, 342
Windle, W. F.	199
Windpipe	329
Windshield hood	208
Wingate, David B.	139
Winkler, C. A.	24
Winnek, Douglas F.	159
Winternitz, M. C.	105
Winzler, Richard J.	263
Witschi, Emil	297
Wittson, Cecil L.	244
Wives Older	290
Wobble stoppers	412
Wolf, Stewart	25
Wolf	184
Wolf, George	169
Wolfson, M. L.	331
Wolgamot, John R.	46
Wolves	153
Wood, J. W.	40
Wood, John R.	262
Wood alcohol	136
Wood drying process	216
Woodbury, Robert L.	72
Woodcock, Alfred H.	116
Woodward, Edward R.	392
Woodward, Robert B.	282
Worry localized	263
Wounded, Diet for	343
Wragg, L. E.	380
Wrapping, Meat	192
Wright, F. H.	325
Wright, Fred E.	277
Wright, G. R.	260
Wright, Irving S.	381
Wright, Quincy	268
Wright, T. P.	220
Writing case	224
Writing guide	32
Wyngaarden, J. B.	95
X-4 research airplane	151
XF4D	121
X-Rays, Fast	165
Xenon	215
Yagi, Kenzo	278
Yakovlev, Paul I.	265
Yale Radiocarbon Laboratory	56
Yellow Jackets	349
Yo-Yo	320, 351
Young, A. H.	393
Zabarenko, Ralph N.	238
Zappasodi, Peter	175
Zenczak, Piotr	243
Zirconium	55
Ziskind, Eugene	390
ZoBell, Claude E.	350
Zubin, Joseph	328
Zwicky, Fritz	194





the light of dawn and dusk makes it hard to locate them.

The next few months afford us the best opportunity of the year to see the Milky Way, which extends high across the eastern sky, through the constellations of Sagittarius, Aquila, Cygnus, and Cassiopeia. Unfortunately, it cannot be seen in competition with the glare of city lights, but summer vacationers are able to discern it from vantage points in the country or mountains. To them it appears as a luminous trail well justifying the lines of Milton, which describe it as a "broad and ample road whose dust is gold and pavement stars."

From ancient times the Milky Way was a subject of speculation, much of it fanciful. The Egyptians regarded it as the heavenly Nile, which flowed through the land where the dead live in perpetual happiness. Much later, the Norsemen knew it as the path of the ghosts going to Valhalla. The American Indians had a similar idea, according to Longfellow, who has Nokomis teaching the young Hiawatha and showing him "the broad white road in heaven . . . crowded with the ghosts, the shadows, to the Kingdom of Ponemah, to the land of the hereafter."

The Greeks speculated more scientifically about its nature. One of their philosophers, Parmenides, who lived in the 5th Century

B. C., considered that the sun and moon were formed of matter detached from the Milky Way. But a century later Democritus hit upon its correct explanation when he said it was caused by a great multitude of faint stars.

This speculation was not confirmed, however, until the invention of the telescope, and its application to astronomy by Galileo in 1610. His own observations showed that it was not made of nebulous material, as many had believed, but that, as he wrote, "it is nothing else but a mass of innumerable stars planted together in clusters."

Although Galileo showed what it was, he did not explain why the stars should be so crowded together in that direction to give such an effect. That was not to come until a century or more later, as astronomers began to learn the structure of the star-system of which we are part. According to modern ideas this system—the galaxy—has the shape of a watch, and includes something like 30,000,000,000 stars, as well as approximately an equal mass of dark material between them. Its diameter is about 100,000 light years. That is, light which travels 186,000 miles a second, would take a thousand centuries to go completely across. Its thickness is something of the order of 10,000 light years.

Our solar system is not at the center of

the galaxy, but about two-thirds of the way out to the edge. The center is toward the constellation of Sagittarius. Thus, we are surrounded in all directions by stars, but when we look towards the edge of the galaxy, we can see into a much greater depth than if we look out toward the sides. Therefore, we find a great many more stars in those directions. Since they are so distant that we cannot distinguish them separately with the naked eye, they seem to merge into the Milky Way. Thus, the stars are not necessarily more closely packed in those directions, but they are far more numerous.

Moreover, since the center of the watch-shaped system is toward Sagittarius, we see the greatest aggregation of stars in that direction. This explains why that is the brightest part of the Milky Way. Indeed, we would see even more were it not for the dark material, also most concentrated in that direction. Photography by infrared rays cuts through these clouds to some extent, and such pictures show many more stars toward Sagittarius than are revealed in photographs taken by rays similar to those to which the eye is sensitive.

Celestial Time Table for July

July	EST	
2	11:00 p. m.	Moon farthest, distance 252,600 miles
4	2:48 a. m.	New moon
	5:00 p. m.	Sun farthest from earth, distance 94,459,000 miles
8	3:27 a. m.	Moon passes Venus
10	10:36 a. m.	Moon passes Saturn
11	11:56 p. m.	Moon in first quarter
17	6:00 p. m.	Moon nearest, distance, 222,600 miles
18	2:17 p. m.	Ful moon
24	7:19 a. m.	Moon passes Jupiter
25	1:59 p. m.	Moon in last quarter
28	Early a. m.	Meteors visible radiating from constellation of Aquarius
29	1:00 a. m.	Venus at greatest brilliancy, magnitude minus 4.2
30	7:00 a. m.	Moon farthest, distance 252,000 miles

Subtract one hour for CST, two hours for MST, and three for PST.

Science News Letter, June 30, 1951

INVENTION

Sonic Device Aids Towing Glider in Heavy Overcast

► SAFETY TO a glider plane being towed in deep overcast by a powered plane is aided by a sonic device which brought patent 2,557,900 to Robert L. Wallace, Jr., Coolidge, Texas, and Harold L. Ericson of Los Angeles. Rights are assigned to the Secretary of the Navy.

The towing plane emits special sound signals picked up in the glider by a device converting them into visual meter readings. Noise signal will carry to the glider in spite of noise conditions in the air.

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