

April Skies

To paraphrase a goofy old childhood poem; Spring has sprung the grass has riz, Letís use the Moon to find where the planets is! The Moon will be full on the 2nd, last quarter on the 10th, new on the 17th and first quarter on the 24th. On various dates this month the Moon will pass near Jupiter, Mars, Venus and Saturn. Talk about a handy dandy planet finder!

About one hour before dawn on the 8th the waning Moon will pass below the planet Jupiter. At about 45 minutes before sunrise on the 13th and 14th the Moon will be close to Mars, the ìRed Planet.î Just after dusk on the 19th the crescent Moon will pair up with brilliant Venus in the western sky. Finally, if you havenít managed to find Saturn yet, mark April 24th on your calendar. Looking to the southwest, the Moon will be just to the right of the ringed planet.

Reaching 40 degrees above the horizon Venus will continue to shine like a bright beacon in the western sky. On the 11th it will pass about 2 degrees south of the famous Pleiades (Subaru in Japanese) star cluster. On the 18th it will pass to the north of the Hyades cluster. This cluster is much larger and includes the familiar ìVî of the head of Taurus, The Bull.

Saturn will continue to prominently shine high in the south just after dark. At 15 degrees, the ring tilt will now begin to be less each month. We wonít see them this open for another 5 years! So, this will be a good time to get out that telescope or go to a star party to see its beautiful rings before they begin to close.

Owing to daylight savings time Jupiter rises at about 1 AM at the beginning of the month and by 11 PM at months end.

Mars continues to be an elusive object in the early morning sky. Look for it low in the east-southeast about 45 minutes before sunrise. On the 13th and 14th the Moon may be of great help in locating the ìRed Planet.î

This month there are 4 star parties scheduled for the Campus Observatory. On Friday the 13th no less, there will be a star party in conjunction with the State Science Fair at New Mexico Tech. On the 18th, 19, and 20th there will also be star parties. On the 20th our special guests will again be the students, parents and staff of Zimmerly Elementary School. This is a reschedule for Zimmerly to make up for the ìcloudî party we had last month! All star parties this month will begin at 8:30 PM. To reach the Etscorn Campus Observatory take Canyon Road past the golf course. At the 4-way stop turn right on Buck Wolfe Drive and follow the signs to the observatory.

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