

Mountaineer Skies

Volume 13, Issue 4

<http://planetarium.wvu.edu/>

October - December, 2013

Comet ISON (International Scientific Optical Network), coming from the Oort cloud, could be a spectacular apparition during this coming holiday season. Russian scientists Vitali Nevski and Artyom Novichonok at the Kislovodsk Observatory (Russia) discovered the comet during the night of September 20/21, 2012. Its eccentricity was found to be 1.0000015 which means its orbit is parabolic or hyperbolic, not an ellipse, so this will be our only chance to see it.

The comet will reach perihelion (closest to the Sun) on Thanksgiving Day, **November 28**. It is just possible that it may be bright enough to be seen during the day. That is very bright.

Should there be any significant change in Ison's passing, I will send out a special note to newsletter subscribers.

On **December 21**, the **Winter Solstice** occurs. This is the first day of winter and the day with the shortest amount of daylight.

The day after Christmas, December 26, Comet Ison will come closest to the Earth. Do not worry; the distance will be 40 million miles. If I am wrong and the comet does hit the Earth, you can complain in January.

In The Sky This Quarter

Visible Planets in the Night Sky

Beginning of October, 2013

	Const	Rise	Transit	Set	Mag
Sun		07:17	13:09	19:02	-26.8
Mercury	Vir	09:25	14:37	19:50	0.0
Venus	Lib	11:10	15:59	20:49	-4.2
Mars	Leo	03:19	10:14	17:11	1.6
Jupiter	Gem	00:34	07:54	15:19	-2.2
Saturn	Lib	09:48	15:11	20:30	0.7

Beginning of November, 2013

	Const	Rise	Transit	Set	Mag
Sun		07:50	13:03	18:18	-26.8
Mercury	Lib	07:44	13:04	18:13	5.6
Venus	Oph	11:56	16:19	20:43	-4.4
Mars	Leo	02:50	09:23	15:58	1.5
Jupiter	Gem	22:41	06:01	13:25	-2.4
Saturn	Lib	08:04	13:23	18:38	0.5

Beginning of December, 2013

	Const	Rise	Transit	Set	Mag
Sun		07:23	12:09	16:56	-26.8
Mercury	Lib	06:10	11:10	16:10	-0.7
Venus	Sgr	10:37	15:13	19:48	-4.6
Mars	Vir	01:15	07:26	13:41	1.2
Jupiter	Gem	19:38	02:59	10:19	-2.6
Saturn	Lib	05:24	10:35	15:50	0.6

Vir	Virgo, The Maid
Oph	Ophiuchus, The Serpent Holder
Lib	Libra, The Scales
Sgr	Sagittarius, The Archer
Gem	Gemini, The Twins
Leo	Leo, The Lion

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About: Abraham Lincoln and the Almanac Defense

During most of the month of August, 1857, a famous anti-slavery Methodist circuit rider, the Reverend Peter Cartwright*, then known as America's most colorful country preacher, conducted a three week revival in Mason County, Illinois. As with most revivals during this time, it was expected that entrepreneurs would make up temporary bars to help slake the thirst of the attendees. Additionally, gambling establishments were not unknown. With these ingredients and nearly three weeks of interminable sermons, it would not be surprising that occasionally tempers would flare and lead to various levels of violence. One of the worst for this camp meeting period happened on the night of August 29, 1857, around 11:00 P.M. and involved William "Duff" Armstrong and an acquaintance of his, James H. Norris, in one corner and in the other corner a somewhat inebriated man, James Preston "Prez" Metzker. As the fight ensued, it was later claimed that either Armstrong or Norris struck Metzker over the head with some weighted instrument. Seemingly unaffected by the blow, the injured Metzker mounted his faithful steed and rode to the home of a friend where he hoped he could sleep off his dizziness. Sadly, this was not to be and three days later he succumbed to his injuries.

James H. Norris was tried first. As he had no real financial resources, the court appointed an attorney for him. Ultimately, he was found guilty, and sentenced to six years in prison. With his cohort having been found at fault, things did not look very encouraging for Mr. Armstrong. However, he had an ace up his sleeve; his family was well acquainted with a tall, lanky lawyer by the name of Abraham Lincoln. Despite what recent movies have shown, he was a not a vampire hunter (*Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*) or a zombie hunter (*Abraham Lincoln vs. Zombies*), but he was a very, very sharp defense attorney. (By the way, the two movies mentioned are terrible and not recommended. *Lincoln*, 2012, on the other hand, was much better.)

Armstrong's trial began on Friday, May 7, 1858, six months after Norris was found guilty. The primary witness for both trials was a certain Charles Allen. He claimed to have seen both Armstrong and Norris assault Metzger with some sort of weighted stick or club at a distance of 150 feet. Allen testified under oath that he was able to see that far at 11:00 P.M. because the full moon was out. "Shining real bright" were his own words. Lincoln, after asking Allen several times that he was indeed sure it was bright enough for him (Allen) to have seen the event, produced an almanac** that showed that at 11:00 P.M. on that date, the moon would have been too low to have allowed Allen to have seen what he claimed. The introduction of the almanac's data deflated Allen completely and crushed the prosecution's case.

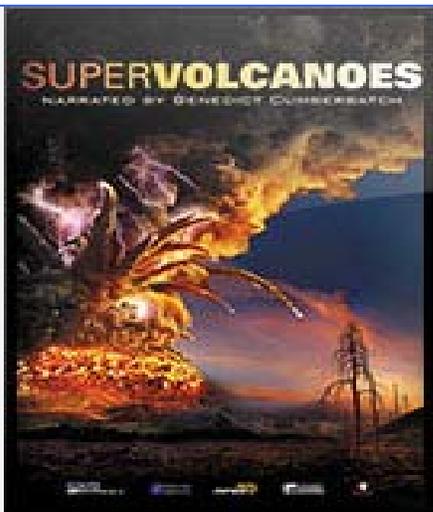
Clearly, either Lincoln had fabricated the almanac or Allen had perjured himself. The judge and, more importantly, the jury sided with Lincoln's client against Allen's testimony, and Armstrong was exonerated. The case became a cause célèbre at the time because of Lincoln's clever introduction of the almanac.

To some, it did seem a bit contrived, even suggesting that "Honest Abe" Lincoln had had a fake almanac printed that supported his client. However, after years of looking into this by many learned people, it has been conclusively demonstrated that the facts support Lincoln and his famous almanac, though it was never clear which almanac it actually was, as there were many published in 1857. Supposition suggests it was indeed volume forty of the famous *Farmer's Almanac* which is still being published. But, of course, it primarily shows how clever and resourceful the future 16th president of the United States was during his time as a lawyer.

*A very interesting man in his own right. His colorful autobiography called *Autobiography*, first published in 1856, is still said to be a good read for people interested in the conditions on the American frontier of that time. There is a free copy of this on-line at <http://www.cblibrary.org/biography/cartwright.htm>

** An almanac is a publication that contains astronomical and meteorological information for farmers and other interested persons.

2013 Planetarium Shows



October 11 & 25

7:00 P.M. Supervolcanoes
8:00 P.M. Impact Earth

November 1 & 22

7:00 P.M. Supervolcanoes
8:00 P.M. Impact Earth

December 6, 13, & 20

7:00 P.M. Season of Light
8:00 P.M. Season of Light

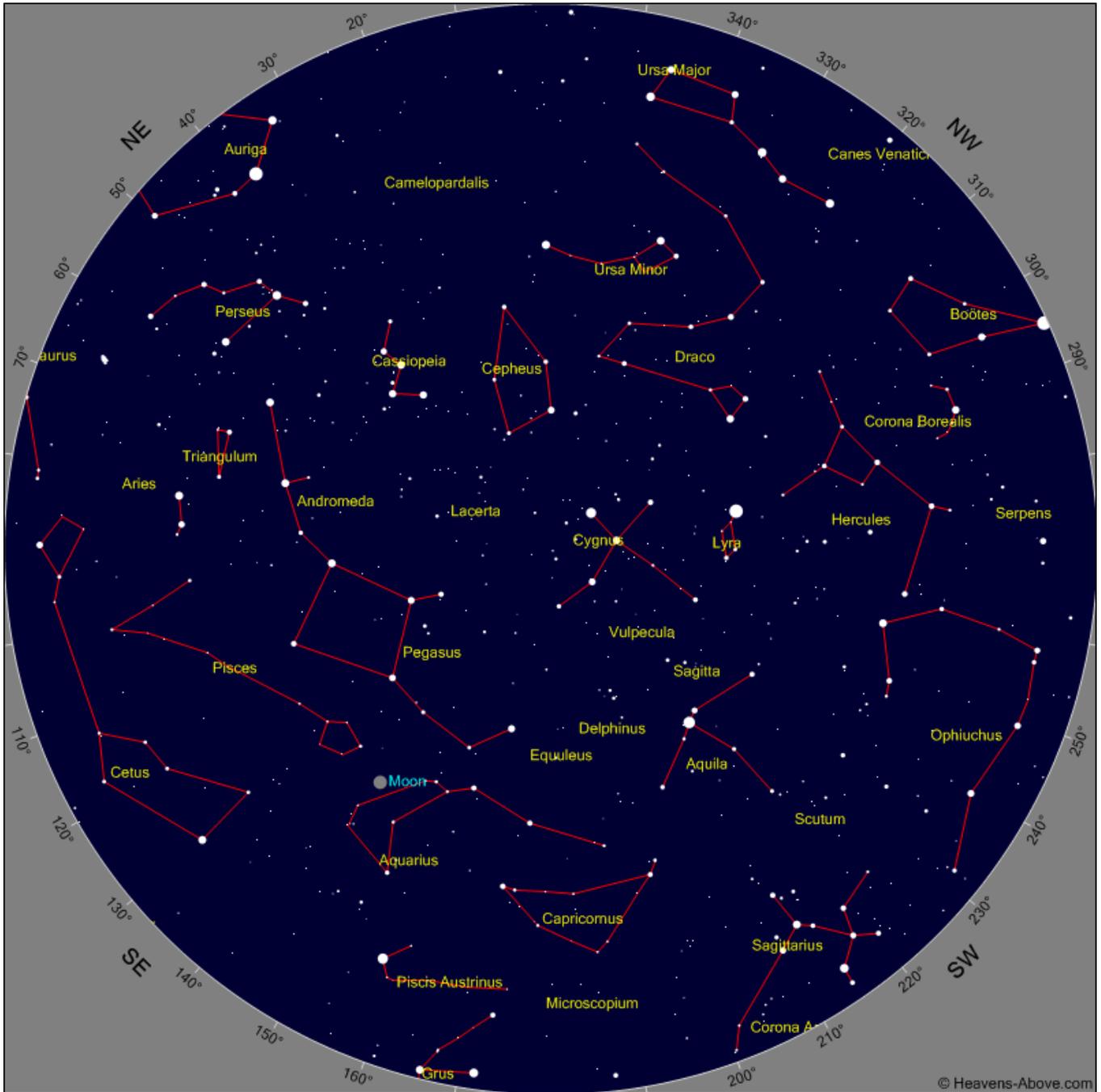
For those who are interested in bringing a group, such as schools or scouts, during the day, please call for more information. These shows are usually given on Tuesday or Thursday mornings.

For further information or reservations, please call John Hopkins at (304)293-4961, or by email at: jhopkins@mail.wvu.edu

Selected Sunrise/Sunset and Moon Rise/Moon Set Times

Date	Sunrise	Sunset	Moon Rise	Moon Set	Moon Phase
Oct 4	7:19 A.M.	6:59 P.M.	6:53 A.M.	6:39 P.M.	New
Oct 11	7:26 A.M.	6:48 P.M.	2:07 P.M.	NA	First Qtr
Oct 18	7:33 A.M.	6:37 P.M.	6:25 P.M.	7:08 A.M.	Full
Oct 26	7:41 A.M.	6:26 P.M.	NA	1:57 P.M.	Last Qtr
Nov 3	6:50 A.M.	5:17 P.M.	6:53 A.M.	5:30 P.M.	New
Nov 10	6:58 A.M.	5:09 P.M.	1:12 P.M.	NA	First Qtr
Nov 17	7:06 A.M.	5:03 P.M.	5:19 P.M.	7:00 A.M.	Full
Nov 25	7:15 A.M.	4:58 P.M.	NA	12:33 P.M.	Last Qtr
Dec 2	7:22 A.M.	4:56 P.M.	6:47 A.M.	4:58 P.M.	New
Dec 9	7:29 A.M.	4:55 P.M.	12:33 P.M.	NA	First Qtr
Dec 17	7:35 A.M.	4:57 P.M.	5:36 P.M.	7:31 A.M.	Full
Dec 25	7:39 A.M.	5:01 P.M.	12:07 A.M.	12:04 P.M.	Last Qtr

October 2013 Sky Chart* for:
10:00 P.M at the beginning of the month
9:00 P.M in the middle of the month
8:00 P.M at the end of the month



*Sky Chart used with the kind permission of **Heavens-Above** at <http://www.heavens-above.com/>

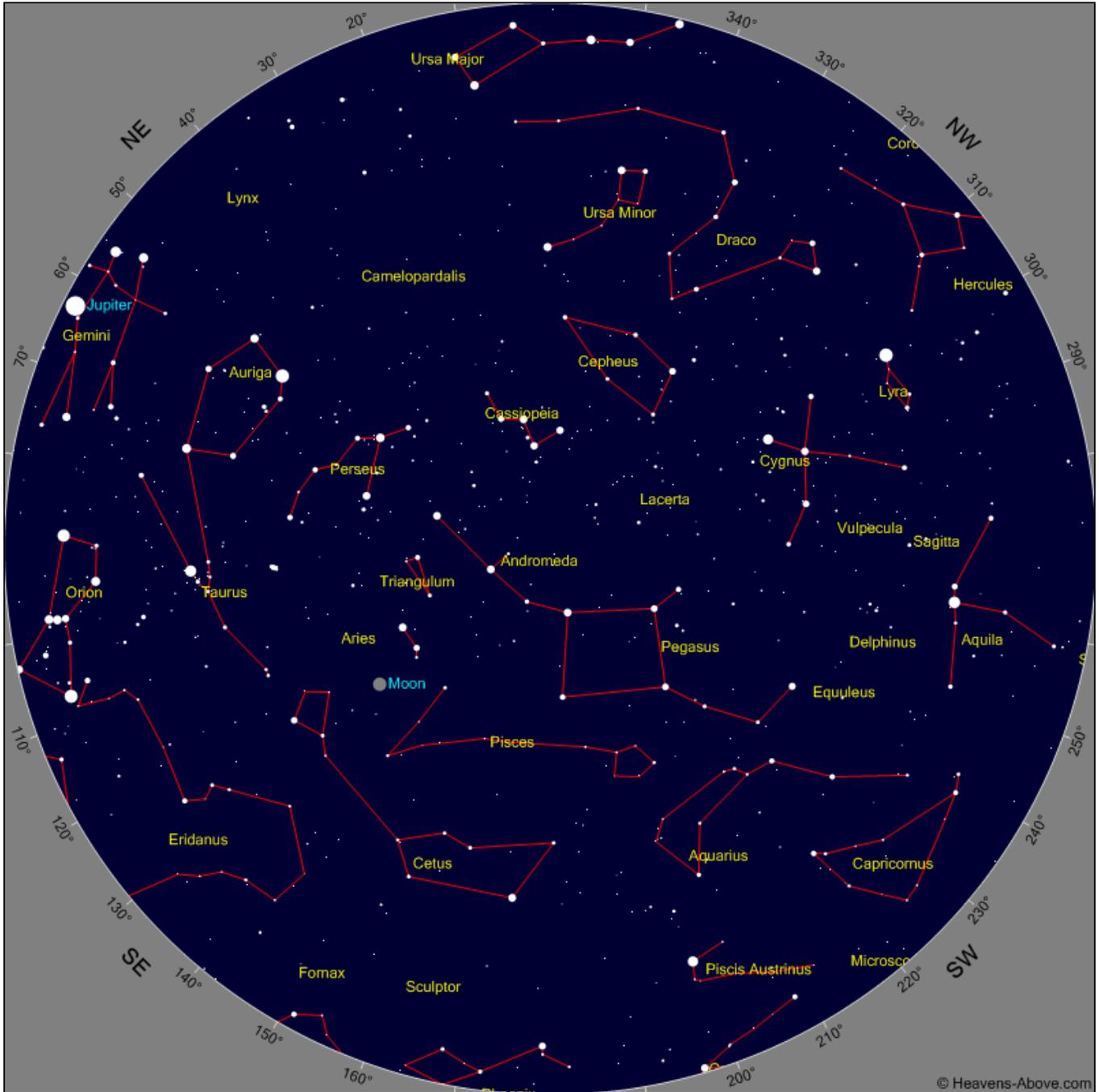
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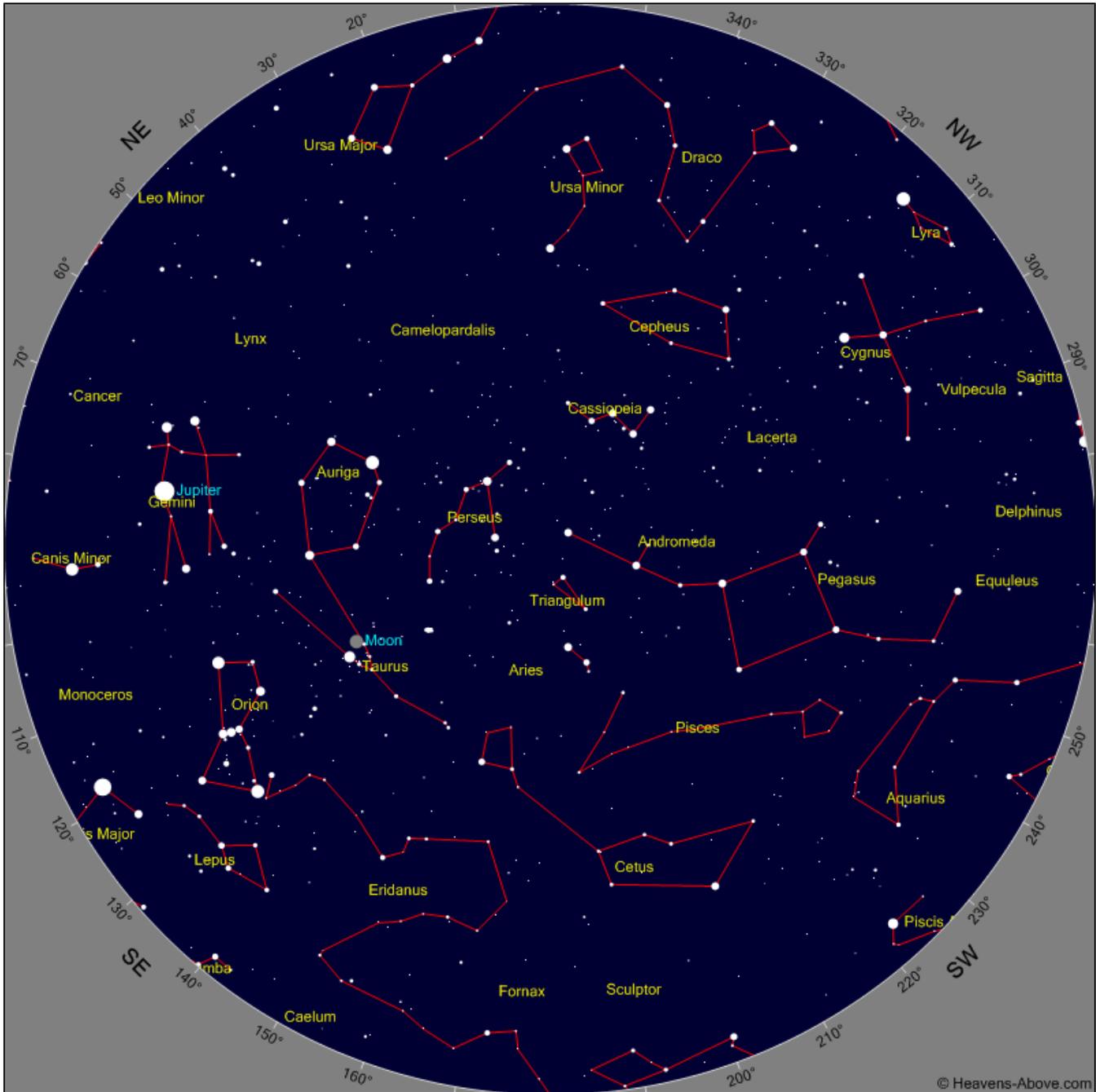
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