

# Mountaineer Skies

## From the Editor's Desk

It is that time of year again when **Daylight Saving Time** is upon us. We set our clocks ahead one hour (**spring forward, fall back**) on Sunday, April 6. This is also an excellent time to provide protection for you and your family by changing the battery in your smoke detector.

This month there are two meteor showers of note, the **April Lyrids** and the eta-Aquarids. Only the former is visible in the northern hemisphere.

The **April Lyrids** occur between April 16 and 25 with its maximum on Tuesday, April 22. You can expect about 15 meteors an hour with the possibility of as many as 90.

In this issue we have part 1 of two articles about **crop circles** as promised last month. You might want to read this on April 1, April Fool's Day. The concluding article, part 2, will be in the May issue.

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## In The Sky This Month

### Visible Planets in the Night Sky

#### Beginning of April, 2003

	Const	Rise	Transit	Set	Mag
Sun		6:00	12:24	18:47	- 26.8
Mercury	Psc	6:27	13:04	19:43	- 1.3
Venus	Aqr	4:41	10:14	15:46	- 4.0
Mars	Sgr	2:12	6:57	11:42	0.5
Jupiter	Ccn	13:11	20:23	3:35	- 2.3
Saturn	Tau	9:43	17:12	00:38	2.5

#### Middle of April, 2003

	Const	Rise	Transit	Set	Mag
Sun		6:38	13:20	20:01	- 26.8
Mercury	Ari	7:19	14:32	21:45	0.1
Venus	Aqr	5:29	11:22	17:15	- 3.9
Mars	Sgr	2:50	7:39	12:29	0.3
Jupiter	Cnc	13:17	20:29	3:41	- 2.3
Saturn	Tau	9:53	17:22	00:48	2.5

#### End of April, 2003

	Const	Rise	Transit	Set	Mag
Sun		6:18	13:17	20:16	- 26.8
Mercury	Ari	6:36	13:54	21:07	3.6
Venus	Psc	5:14	11:30	17:45	- 3.9
Mars	Cap	2:23	7:18	12:14	0.0
Jupiter	Cnc	12:22	19:33	2:44	- 2.1
Saturn	Tau	8:59	16:29	23:55	2.5

Aqr	Aquarius, The Water Bearer
Ari	Aries, The Ram
Cap	Capricornus, The Goat
Psc	Pisces, The Fishes
Sgr	Sagittarius, The Archer
Tau	Taurus, The Bull
Cnc	Cancer, The Crab

## About: Crop Circles, part 1

**"You can fool too many of the people too much of the time."**

James Thurber



Photo used with kind permission of Peter Sorensen

This story begins in jolly olde England. **Crop circles**, those apparently mysterious geometric figures, first began to appear in southern England about 1976, usually in corn fields. Clearly, it was said, these patterns were of extraterrestrial origin. This phenomenon, as these phenomena frequently do, spawned a new discipline called **cereology**, named for the Roman goddess of the Harvest - Ceres, to study the origins and meanings of these figures. By the end of the 1980's many books, most notably cereologists Colin Andrews and Patrick Delgado's bestseller *Circular Evidence*, similar to those one can find about the Bermuda Triangle or Big Foot, had been offered to the public, trying to explain how these circles came to be. Some attributed them to the aforementioned extraterrestrial beings, some to wind vortices, others to the supernatural, and some even to amorous hedgehogs. The theories were limited by imagination but never by the facts.

Seeing an economic opportunity, enterprising farmers began charging admission for those who wished to view the most recent manifestation on their farm. Every new crop circle was duly reported by the press in terms that led the reader to believe that they were indeed of some vague, mysterious origin whose meanings were unknown.

### How did they really get there?

The spotlight falls on the Percy Hobbs pub located in Winchester, Hampshire, England. Two old friends, Doug Bower and Dave Chorley, while sipping the superb local ale, came up with an idea to amuse themselves which would, strangely enough, perpetrate the greatest hoax since the Piltdown Man.

They wanted to play a practical joke on their village and, after some thought, they decided to make geometric figures in local fields hoping that these figures would be thought to be messages left by alien beings. That is exactly what happened.

After a little experimenting, the boys found that crop circles, as they came to be called, were very easy to make. Doug, who was an artist, would draw a sketch of the figure they wanted to make, and then, using only a piece of rope, a plank, and a baseball cap with a hole in it that was used to keep their lines straight, they went forth into the night to fool the world. At first there was surprisingly little interest in their creations which, of course, disappointed the two friends, but finally their efforts were rewarded. Newspapers, locally, then nationally, and, finally, internationally, reported that mysterious geometric figures were appearing in English farm fields. What they meant was not clear.

**Continued next month.**

## 2003 Planetarium Shows



**MARSQUEST**

**Narrated by Patrick Stewart**

[http://www.as.wvu.edu/~planet/mars\\_quest.htm](http://www.as.wvu.edu/~planet/mars_quest.htm)

April 11 & 25, 2003 <i>MarsQuest</i>	May 9 & 23, 2003 <i>MarsQuest</i>	June 13, 2003 <i>MarsQuest</i>
	July, 2003 <b>Closed</b>	

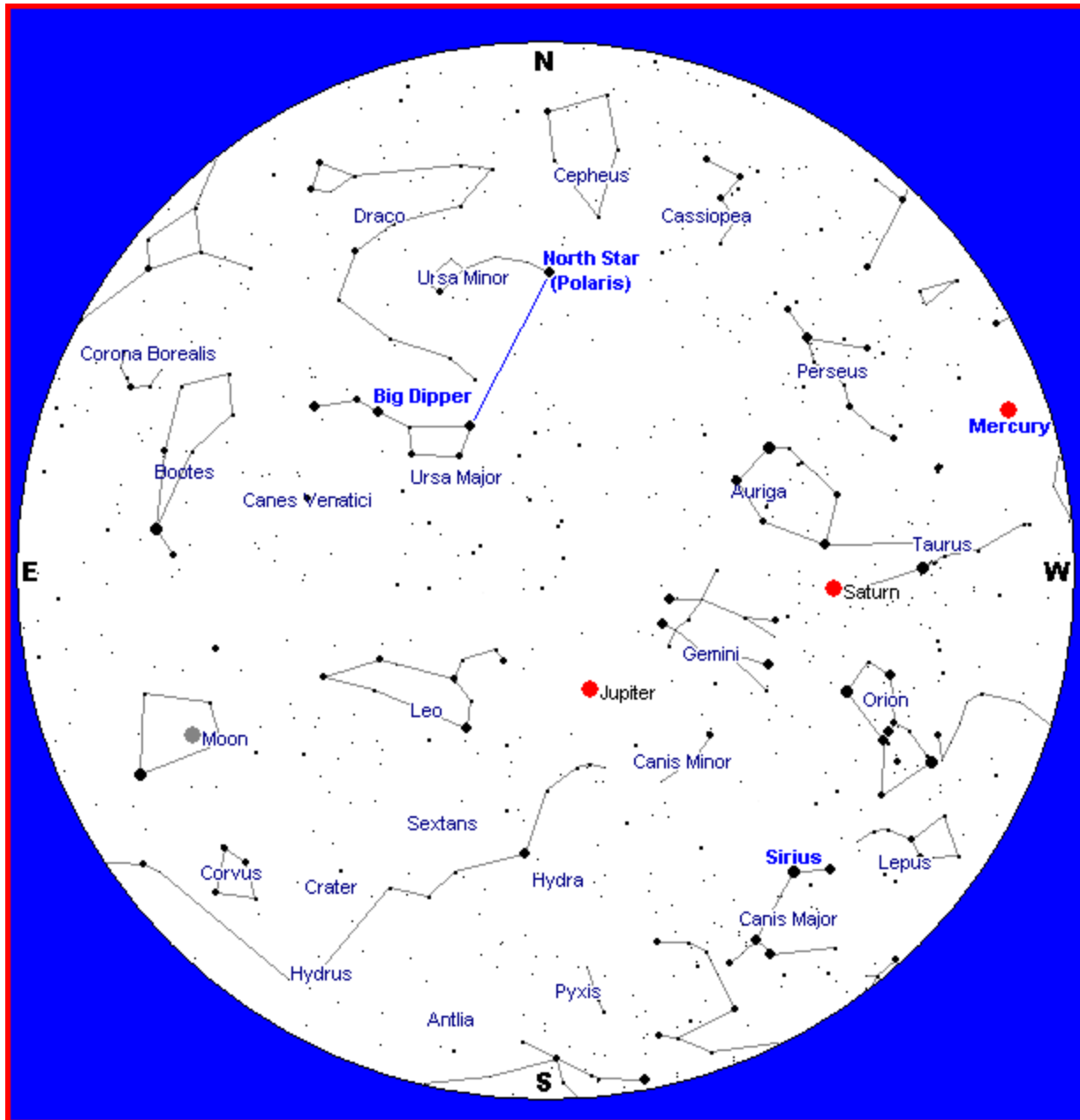
For those who are interested in bringing a group, such as schools or scouts, during the day, please call for more information. These shows are usually given on Tuesday or Thursday mornings.

For further information or reservations, please call John Hopkins at (304)293-3422, extension 1443 or by email at: [jhopkins@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:jhopkins@mail.wvu.edu)

### Selected Sunrise/Sunset and Moon Rise/Moon Set Times

Date	Sunrise	Sunset	Moon Rise	Moon Set	Moon Phase
Apr 1	6:05 A.M.	6:42 P.M.	6:19 A.M.	6:43 P.M.	New Moon
Apr 9	6:52 A.M.	7:50 P.M.	11:43 A.M.	2:35 A.M.	First Quarter
Apr 16	6:41 A.M.	7:57 P.M.	8:04 P.M.	6:47 A.M.	Full Moon
Apr 23	6:31 A.M.	8:04 P.M.	2:58 A.M.	12:23 P.M.	Last Quarter

April 2003 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](http://www.heavens-above.com/) at <http://www.heavens-above.com/>

The TOMCHIN PLANETARIUM is named in honor of the late Harold Tomchin, of Princeton, W.Va., who made a generous donation to ensure its continuing operation, and whose family continues to support the planetarium for the educational benefit of WVU students, staff, and faculty members, as well as the local community. Contributions can be made in support of the planetarium through the WVU Planetarium Project at the WVU Foundation, Inc., phone (304)284-4000. Thank You.



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