

THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE



With Glenn Dawes

Explore a stellar tribute, some usually hidden areas of the Moon and the unassuming constellation Pictor

When to use this chart

- 1 Mar at 00:00 AEDT (29 Feb, 13:00 UT)
- 15 Mar at 23:00 AEDT (12:00 UT)
- 31 Mar at 22:00 AEDT (11:00 UT)

The chart accurately matches the sky on the dates and times shown for Sydney, Australia. The sky is different at other times as the stars crossing it set four minutes earlier each night.

MARCH HIGHLIGHTS

The Moon slowly wobbles on its axis, allowing us to see slightly more than half of its surface. However, those revealed areas are often still in shadow. The two maximum librations in March are both visible. One occurs during the last quarter Moon on 5 March, where the western limb shows the dark crater Grimaldi more face-on. The other, on 17 March, has the first quarter Moon displaying great views of Mare Crisium, with Mare Marginis now peeking over the eastern limb.

STARS AND CONSTELLATIONS

Argo, the ship of Jason and the Argonauts fame, and one of Ptolemy's original 48 constellations, today exists as Vela, Puppis and Carina. They retain many links to Argo, including Arabic star names, but Gamma Velorum (in Vela) is also known as 'Regor', which is Roger backwards. Gus Grissom inserted this into NASA's star charts as a joke on his fellow astronaut Roger Chaffee. When they were both killed in the Apollo 1 fire, the name remained to honour their memory.

THE PLANETS

You need to start early to see planets this month, for Jupiter and Uranus are setting around 21:00 (mid-month). A drought then sets in until Mars arrives in the predawn. This is followed by brilliant Venus, which quickly moves away from the

Red Planet, as it drops into the dawn glow heading towards conjunction. By month's end this 'Morning Star' is a dawn object only. Saturn returns to the morning, rising out of the Sun's glow, and passes Venus, being closest on 22nd, only 0.6° apart.

DEEP-SKY OBJECTS

This month, a trip to the Pictor constellation, just west of Canopus, home to impressive double stars such as Eta (η) Pictoris (RA 5h 02.8m, dec. -49° 09'). Binoculars show a colourful wide pair, with mag. -5.4 white Eta¹ (η¹) making a great contrast to mag. +5.0 orange Eta² (η²) 0.5° away. Here's a real challenge requiring dark skies and large aperture (20cm-): in the same field with Eta² (0.1° east) is the faint (12th-magnitude) galaxy NGC 1803,

showing an oval halo (1.0 x 0.5 arcminutes) with a stellar nucleus.

Just 0.6° west of Eta² lies double star HD 32278, with mag. +7.3 and +9.0 yellow companions 10 arcseconds apart. A true showpiece is Theta (θ) Pictoris (RA 5h 24.8m, dec. -52° 19'). With matched mag. -6.8 stars a comfortable 38 arcseconds apart, Theta stands out in the field of view like brilliant white headlights.

Chart key

GALAXY	DIFFUSE NEBULOSITY	ASTEROID TRACK	STAR BRIGHTNESS: ● MAG. 0 & BRIGHTER ● MAG. +1 ● MAG. +2 ● MAG. +3 ● MAG. +4 & FAINTER
OPEN CLUSTER	DOUBLE STAR	METEOR RADIANT	
GLOBULAR CLUSTER	VARIABLE STAR	QUASAR	
PLANETARY NEBULA	COMET TRACK	PLANET	

