

“ $\Omega > 1$ ”

“Sky-Notes” of the Open University Astronomy Club.

December 2017.

Seasonal Greetings to all our readers!

Forthcoming Meetings.

OUAC Clubnight.

OUAC “Clubnight” on Tuesday 5th December.

BAA meetings.

Details of BAA meetings at: www.britastro.org

Highlights of the Month.

13th/14th Peak of the **Geminids** meteor shower. **Very favourable conditions if clear!**

16th Asteroid **Phaethon (3200)** makes close approach to Earth. **See notes below!**

23rd Peak of the **Ursids** meteor shower. **Favourable conditions if clear!**

31st Lunar occultation of Aldebaran.

Mercury is at Inferior Conjunction on 13th and then becomes a morning object.

Venus may just be glimpsed very low in ESE dawn sky at the beginning of the month.

Mars is slowly gaining height in the ESE predawn sky.

Jupiter is gaining height in the ESE predawn sky.

Saturn is not observable as it heads towards Conjunction with the Sun on 21st.

Uranus is well placed for evening observation.

Neptune is well placed for early evening observation.

Recent Events.

If you have any images and/or reports of recent events please contact Sheridan so that he can put them on the Club website.

If you wish to present them at a Clubnight meeting please contact Sheridan or myself before the meeting starts.

Software.

A very useful item of Planetarium software is “Stellarium” and it’s FREE!

Go to their website and download it and the associated user manual.

1. The Solar system.

Note all times shown are UT.

Earth.

Winter (N Hemisphere) Solstice 21^d 16^h 29^m.

Aurora.

Long hours of darkness improve the opportunity for observing potential aurora.

Keep tuned to the www.spaceweather.com site for updates.

Subscribe (free!) to the UK AuroraWatch website to receive alerts.

ISS.

Continues a series of evening apparitions during the first three weeks of the month.

Go to the “spaceweather” website and click the “Flybys” button and follow the instructions to set-up forecasts for your location. Alternatively go to the “Heavens Above” website and set-up for your location. Add to your “favourites”.

Iridium Flares.

These satellites produce short lived “Bright events”. Some are very bright in the order of magnitude -8. Take a wide-field image of with an exposure of 20 – 30 seconds to capture an event.

Regular observing of events brighter than -4 will provide useful practice for estimating the magnitude of very bright meteors and Fireballs.

Go to the “Heavens Above” website and set-up for your location for predictions.

Sunrise and Sunset.

Bedford.

Latitude 52° 6.9’N Longitude 0° 28.1’W

Date.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
01	07 ^h 48 ^m	11 ^h 51 ^m	15 ^h 53 ^m
08	07 ^h 57 ^m	11 ^h 54 ^m	15 ^h 50 ^m
15	08 ^h 04 ^m	11 ^h 57 ^m	15 ^h 50 ^m
22	08 ^h 09 ^m	12 ^h 01 ^m	15 ^h 52 ^m
29	08 ^h 11 ^m	12 ^h 04 ^m	15 ^h 58 ^m

Produced using “Starry Night Pro”.

The Sun.

Observing.

To prevent permanent damage to your eyes avoid looking at the Sun directly and never with binoculars or a telescope unless special (expensive!) filters are used. The safest way is the simplest – project the image of the Sun onto grey or white card.

Take care if your telescope has any plastic components.

Relatively quiet with one developing sunspot group AR2689 at the time of completing these *Sky-Notes* (27th November).

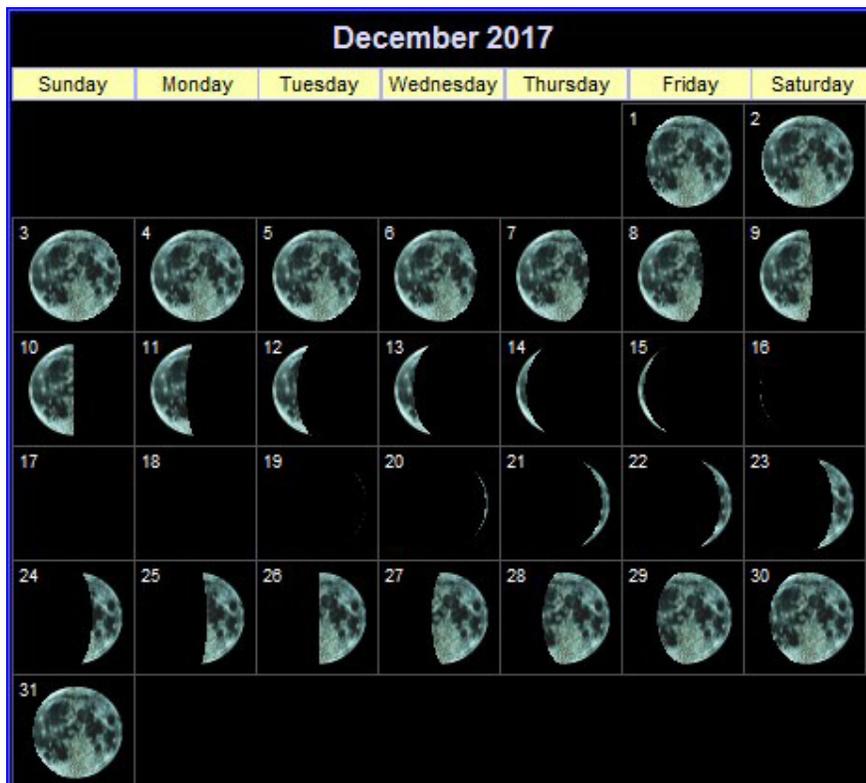
Keep in touch with the Solar Dynamics Observatory satellite at <http://sdo.gsfc.nasa.gov/>

Add the “Spaceweather” and the “Soho” websites to your “favourite” websites.

The Moon.

Phases:

Full	03 ^d 15 ^h 47 ^m	A “Big One” near perigee on 4 th .
Last quarter	10 ^d 07 ^h 10 ^m	
New	18 ^d 06 ^h 30 ^m	
First quarter	26 ^d 09 ^h 20 ^m	



Produced using “LunarPhase Pro”.

The Moon continued.

Apsides:

Perigee	04 ^d 08 ^h	Diameter. 33' 25"	Distance. 357,495km.
Apogee	19 ^d 01 ^h	Diameter. 29' 53"	Distance. 406,606km.

For northern observers:

- The waxing crescent Moon is becoming better placed.
- The waxing gibbous Moon is very well placed.
- The Full Moon is very well placed.
- The waning gibbous Moon is very well placed.
- The waning crescent Moon is becoming less well placed.

Observing.

Observe the regions along the terminator (sunrise and sunset on the Moon) where the low angle of the Sun highlights lunar topography. A basic lunar map is all you need to get started. *Sky & Telescopes* "Lunar 100 Card" is another good starting point. If you are starting out on astronomical photography and/or imaging the Moon provides an excellent target.

Observing and Imaging opportunities.

On 15th and 16th try locating the very thin crescent Moon very low in the SE dawn skies **before sunrise**.

On 19th and 20th try locating the very thin crescent Moon low in the SW evening twilight **after sunset**.

If you can take images of the above so much the better.

Lunar Occultations.

Unlike the gradual disappearance of a planet (small disc) a star vanishes instantly demonstrating that it is a point source of light as viewed from the earth. For all occultation events start observing 10 to 15 minutes before the predicted time to identify the required star and to allow for slightly different time if you are not at Greenwich. Use an accurate watch to record the time that *you* observe the occultation remembering that times are UT not BST. Enter details in your observing log.

Lunar Occultations of Regulus and Aldebaran.

Regulus (+1.4).

08^d 22^h 13.5^m Reappears Bright Limb (RB).

Aldebaran (+0.9).

31^d 01^h 13.9^m Disappears Dark Limb (DD).

31^d 01^h 59.3^m Reappears Bright Limb (RB).

Details of occultations can be found in current *BAA Handbook* and monthly periodicals such as *Astronomy Now* and *Sky at Night*.

The Planets.

Mercury.

Difficult to spot very low in SW evening twilight at the start of the month.

Inferior Conjunction on 13th.

Watch for its reappearance low in SE dawn sky towards the end of the third week of the month.

Moon close on 17th.

Date.	Mag.	Dia.	Phase.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
01	+0.1	8.0''	0.38	09 ^h 39 ^m	13 ^h 16 ^m	16 ^h 52 ^m
31	-0.3	6.8''	0.61	06 ^h 20 ^m	10 ^h 28 ^m	14 ^h 35 ^m

Venus.

May just be glimpsed very low in ESE dawn twilight at the beginning of the month as it heads towards Superior Conjunction on 9th January 2018.

Moon close on 18th.

Date.	Mag.	Dia.	Phase.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
01	-3.9	9.9''	0.99	06 ^h 55 ^m	11 ^h 12 ^m	15 ^h 28 ^m

Mars.

Slowly gaining height in the ESE predawn sky.

Heading towards a very close conjunction with Jupiter on January 6th and 7th 2018.

Moon close on 13th and 14th.

Date.	Mag.	Dia.	Phase.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
01	+1.7	4.3''	0.95	03 ^h 36 ^m	08 ^h 54 ^m	14 ^h 12 ^m
31	+1.5	4.8''	0.93	03 ^h 26 ^m	08 ^h 08 ^m	12 ^h 51 ^m

The Mars **Curiosity** and **Opportunity** rovers continue their explorations returning excellent data and images.

Mission details and progress are available on the appropriate NASA websites.

Jupiter.

Slowly gaining height in the ESE predawn sky.

Heading towards a very close conjunction with Mars on January 6th and 7th 2018.

Moon close on 14th and 15th.

Date.	Mag.	Dia.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
01	-1.7	31''	05 ^h 09 ^m	09 ^h 56 ^m	14 ^h 44 ^m
31	-1.8	33''	03 ^h 43 ^m	08 ^h 21 ^m	12 ^h 59 ^m

Saturn.

Too close to the Sun for observation.

Conjunction with the Sun on 21st.

Moon close on 17th & 18th.

Date.	Mag.	Dia.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
-	-	-	-	-	-

Don't forget to visit the Cassini mission websites at <http://saturn.jpl.nasa.gov> and <http://ciclops.org>

Uranus.

Well placed for evening observation.

Moon on 1st and 27th.

Date.	Mag.	Dia.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
01	+5.7	3.7''	14 ^h 01 ^m	20 ^h 52 ^m	03 ^h 46 ^m
31	+5.8	3.6''	12 ^h 03 ^m	18 ^h 52 ^m	01 ^h 46 ^m

Neptune.

Moving into SW early evening skies.

Moon close on 23rd and 24th.

Date.	Mag.	Dia.	Rise.	Transit.	Set.
01	+7.9	2.3''	12 ^h 51 ^m	18 ^h 12 ^m	23 ^h 33 ^m
31	+7.9	2.2''	10 ^h 54 ^m	16 ^h 15 ^m	21 ^h 37 ^m

Dwarf Planets.

- Ceres.** A 7th mag object located in Leo brightening slowly during the month.
- Eris.** A mag +18.7 target located in Cetus.
- Haumea.** A mag +17.3 CCD target located in Bootes about 5° W of Arcturus.
- MakeMake.** A mag +17 CCD target in Coma Berenices. Low in the E predawn skies.
- Pluto.** Mag +14.5 object located in Sagittarius. Becoming lost in WSW evening twilight.

Asteroids. (Approx magnitude +10.5 or brighter).

- Vesta (4).** A 7th mag object brightening slowly as it moves from Virgo into Libra during the month
- Dembowska (349).** Located in Taurus. Mag +9.6 at opposition on 1st
- Patientia (451).** Located in Taurus. Mag +10.4 at opposition on 11th.

Asteroids cont.

Phaethon (3200).

This Apollo class asteroid (diameter of 5.1 km) makes a close fly-by of the Earth. During the month it moves rapidly through Auriga, Perseus, Andromeda, Pegasus and into Aquarius, so is well placed for northern observers. It will be closest on 16th passing about 10.3 million km away from the Earth and at about mag +10.7 should be in range of small telescopes from dark sites. Phaethon is the parent of the Geminid meteor shower which peak this month.

An observing/imaging opportunity not to be missed!

Useful articles and finder charts in the December issues of *Astronomy Now* and *Sky at Night* magazines.

Charts and details of asteroids one month either side of opposition are available at:

http://britastro.org/computing/charts_asteroid.html

See also the *BAA Handbook* and/or monthly periodicals.

Comets.

Comet 24P/Schaumasse. A morning object moving through Virgo during the month.

Charts and details of selected comets are available at:

http://britastro.org/computing/charts_comet.html

See also the *BAA Handbook* and/or monthly periodicals.

Meteor Showers.

The **Geminids** are active from 8th to 17th with peak activity on 14th at 02:00, ZHR = 100+.

A fine shower with many “bright events” possible.

Very favourable as no interference from Moonlight.

See notes above for asteroid Phaethon.

The **Ursids** are active from the 17th to 25th with peak activity on 23rd, ZHR = 10. Favourable as little interference from moonlight. An under-observed shower which has produced unpredicted outbursts in the past so worth monitoring.

There are always **Sporadic** events and the chance of a brilliant fireball. The latter should be recorded and reported.

See earlier note for using Iridium Flares as magnitude comparisons for “Bright Events”.

Near Earth Objects.

Please refer to www.spaceweather.com for updates.

Eclipses.

No eclipses this month.

2. Deep Sky.

Abbreviations used.

M = Messier object. (Shown in **bold**).

NGC = New General Catalogue. IC = Index Catalogue. (Extension of the NGC).

ds = double star. ts = triple star. ms = multiple star. vs = variable star.

gc = globular cluster. oc = open cluster. pn = planetary nebula.

en = emission nebula. rn = reflection nebula. sg = spiral galaxy.

eg = elliptical galaxy. lg = lenticular galaxy. ir = irregular galaxy.

pg = peculiar galaxy. snr = super nova remnant. ly = light year.

The magnitude of an object, excluding double, triple, multiple and variable stars, is shown in brackets e.g. (6.5).

All magnitudes are + unless otherwise shown.

2.1 Variable Stars of the month.

Beta (β) Persei, Algol. Range 2.2 to 3.4, period 2.7 days. Well placed for nightlong observation. Minima at “social hour” occurs on 3^d 23.7^h, 6^d 20.5^h and 26^d 22.2^h.

Delta (δ) Cephei. Range 3.5 to 4.4, period 5.37 days. The prototype for the Cepheid class of variable stars. Their period-luminosity relationship has led them to being used as “standard candles” in measuring distances to nearby galaxies.

Mu (μ) Cephei. Range 3.7 to 5.0, approximate period 755 days. A semi-regular variable star famous for its striking red colour being fittingly called “Herschel’s Garnet Star”. It is the reddest naked eye star visible from the northern hemisphere. Its colour may show signs of variability.

Omicron (\omicron) Ceti Mira. The classic long period variable star. Brightening from min (+9.3) in Oct/Nov 2016 towards maximum (+3.4) in Mar/Apl 2017.

U Ori. Well placed for nightlong observation. Brightening to max (+6.3) in Mar/Apl 2017.

2.2 Double Stars of the month.

Gamma And. See notes below.

Gamma Ari. See notes below.

Struve (Σ) 326 Ari. See notes below.

Alpha Cas. See notes below.

Iota Cas. See notes below.

Eta Cas. See notes below.

Sigma Cas. See notes below.

Delta Cep. See notes below.

Struve (Σ) 2816 & 2819 Cep. See notes below.

Struve (Σ) 2840 Cep. See notes below.

8 Lac. Quadruple system. See notes below.

Eta Peg. See notes below.

Pi^{1&2} Peg. See notes below.

57 Peg. See notes below.

Zeta Psc. See notes below.

35 Psc. See notes below.

51Psc. See notes below.

Iota Tri. See notes below.

Struve (Σ) 239 Tri. See notes below.

2.3 This Month's Constellations - Double Stars/Star Clusters/Nebulae/Galaxies.

Andromeda (And).

Gamma (γ) (2.2, 5.1) is a fine double star. The brighter component is golden-yellow with its companion a greenish-blue. Arguably second only to Albiro in Cygnus.

NGC205 (**M110**) (8.0) eg. A satellite galaxy of M31 visible as an elongated "smudge" in small telescopes.

NGC221 (**M32**) (8.2) eg. A satellite galaxy of M31. Visible as a fuzzy star in small telescopes.

NGC224 (**M31**) (3.5) sg. The Great Andromeda Spiral Nebula. Increasing aperture reveals more and more detail although increasingly smaller areas of the galaxy fill the eyepiece. 8" telescopes should reveal NGC206 as a hazy patch. It is a large area of star formation. 12" scopes will reveal one or two of M31's large population of globular clusters.

NGC404 (11.9) lg. Located 6' NW of β And. The 2nd magnitude star tends to drown the faint glow of the galaxy. Use high power to push the star out of the field of view for best results.

NGC752 (5.7) oc This large open cluster is located about 4 degrees south of γ .

NGC891 (10.1) sg. Located about 3 degrees east of γ is seen almost edge on. Bright central bulge. Moderate apertures will reveal a narrow dust lane bisecting the long axis. A fine object.

NGC7640 (12.5) sg. Seen nearly edge-on.

NGC7662 (8.6) pn. "The Blue Snowball". Rather small making it difficult to distinguish from nearby faint stars. High magnification on an 8" telescope will reveal an elliptical ring with a dark centre. Large apertures will show a faint second outer ring of nebulosity and the 13th magnitude central star.

Aries (Ari).

Gamma (γ) (4.8/4.8 separation 7.7") ds. Fine equally bright bluish-white pair of stars. Accidentally discovered by Robert Hooke in 1664 while searching for a comet.

Lambda (λ) (4.9/7.7 sep. 37.4") ds. Wide pair of pale yellow and pale blue stars.

Struve (Σ)326. (7.6/9.8 sep. 5.9") ds. Beautiful orange and dull red pair of stars.

NGC772 (10.3) sg. Located almost 2° ESE of γ .

NGC877 (11.9) sg.

NGC972 (11.4) sg.

Cassiopeia (Cas).

Alpha (α) (2.2/8.9 sep. 64.4") ds. Fine orange and blue pair. Part of a multiple system.

Iota (ι) (4.6/6.9/8.4 sep. AB 2.5", AC 7.2") ts. Beautiful white, yellow and blue triple system.

Eta (η) (3.4/7.5 sep. 12.9") ds. Superb gold and garnet pair. The colours are very subjective. What do you see?

Sigma (σ) (5.0/7.1 sep. 3.0") ds. Bluish white and yellow pair in a superb field.

NGC129 (6.5) oc.

NGC147 (9.3) eg. A satellite galaxy of M31.

NGC185 (9.2) eg. A satellite galaxy of M31.

NGC278 (10.9) eg. Located a few degrees SE of NGC185.

NGC457 (6.4) oc.

NGC581 (**M103**) (7.4) oc. Fine object.

NGC7654 (**M52**) (6.9) oc. Fine rich cluster.

NGC7789 (6.7) oc.

IC1805 (6.5) oc.

IC1848 (6.5) oc.

Cepheus (Cep).

Delta (δ) Cephei, 3.5 to 4.4 over a period 5.37 days, is the prototype for the Cepheid class of variable stars which because of their period-luminosity relationship has led them to being used as "standard candles" in measuring distances to nearby galaxies. Pale blue +6.1 companion.

Mu (μ) Cephei 3.7 to 5.0 approximate period 755 days is a semi-regular variable star. It is more famous for its striking red colour being fittingly called "Herschel's Garnet Star". It is the reddest naked eye star visible from the northern hemisphere. Its colour may show signs of variability.

Struve (Σ) 2816 ts (5.7/7.5/7.5, sep 12"/20"). Fine triple with Struve (Σ) 2819 ds (7.4/8.6, sep 13") in same field. All contained in the large, sparse and nebulous open cluster IC 1396!

Struve (Σ) 2840 ds (5.6/6.4, sep 18"). Very fine greenish/bluish pair.

Open clusters - NGC188 (8.1), NGC6939 (7.8), NGC7510 (7.9), NGC7762 (10.0). Planetary Nebula NGC40 (10.7).

Spiral galaxy NGC6946 (8.9) in the same 1° field as oc NGC6939. Two types of object for the price of one!

The faint reflection nebula NGC7023 and emission nebula IC 1396 provide a challenge to the observer. A dark clear sky is essential.

Lacerta (Lac).

Struve (Σ) 2876 (7.8, 9.3 sep 11.8") ds. Fine blue and white double.

Struve (Σ) 2894 (6.1, 8.3 sep. 15.6") ds. Yellow primary, blue secondary.

Struve (Σ) 2902 (7.6, 8.5 sep. 6.4") ds. Yellow and white double.

8 Lacertae = Struve (Σ) 2922 (5.7, 6.5 sep. 22.4") Multiple star. Brightest four components are white/blueish white. Has been described as a poor open cluster.

O Struve (Σ) 475 (6.8, 10.8 sep. 15.5") ds. White primary with faint blue companion.

BL Lacertae (14 to 17). Prototype for class of quasi-stellar object (QSO).

Pegasus (Peg).

Eta (η) 2.9/9.9 separation 90.4". Binocular object. Yellow and blue components but telescope required to see colour of secondary. Herschel's "Pendulum Star" - tap telescope gentle for the effect.

Pi⁻¹/Pi⁻² (π^{-1}/π^{-2}) 5.6/4.3 separation 7'). Fine binocular object. Pi⁻¹ is a multiple system with 4 companions of 10th to 12th magnitude.

57 Pegasi. 5.1/9.7 separation 32.6". Beautiful orange primary with blue companion.

NGC7078 (M15) (6.3) gc superb object.

NGC7331 (9.5) sg. Seen almost edge on. Strange as to why it is not in Messier's catalogue?

About half a degree south is the fascinating group of galaxies "Stephan's Quintet". The brightest member of the group is NGC7320 (12.7).

Many happy hours can be spent wandering around "The Square" to locate many moderately bright galaxies. Use a star atlas such as the excellent "Sky Atlas 2000" to plan your journey.

Continued on next page.

Pisces (Psc).

Alpha (α) (4.2/5.1 sep. 1.5") ds. Requires a large aperture telescope using high magnification to split this pair of bluish-white stars.

Zeta (ζ) (5.6/6.2 sep. 23") ds. Fine white and yellow pair of stars.

35 (6.0/7.6 sep 7.6") ds. Fine yellow and blue pair.

51 (5.7/9.5 sep. 27.5") ds. Glorious bluish and greenish pair of stars.

65 (6.3/6.3 sep 4.4") ds. Fine matched pair of pale yellow stars.

Wolf 28 (12.3). Van Maanen's Star. One of the few white dwarf stars visible in amateur telescopes.

NGC128 (11.8) sg. Brightest of a group of five galaxies.

NGC488 (10.3) sg. Elongated halo with brighter core.

NGC628 (**M74**) (9.4) sg. Seen face on and hence low surface brightness.

NGC7541 (11.7) sg. Elongated oval with bright core. 3' to the SW is NGC7537 (13.0)

Sculptor (Scl).

Unfortunately this constellation never rises very high for UK observers so that only brief opportunities are presented to track down some deep-sky gems which unfortunately are not seen at their best even from a dark site. I have taken declination -30° as the southern limit for objects. This is almost the declination of the first magnitude star Fomalhaut (+1.16) which will give you a marker as to how low these objects are even at their highest when due south. The suitable observation window is thus fairly restricted!

NGC24 (11.5) sg. Located about two-thirds the way between NGC253 and β Cet.

NGC253(7.1) sg. Seen highly inclined to our line of sight. Increasing magnification reveals mottling due to dust lanes. Head south for the best view of this gem.

NGC288 (8.1) gc. A loose globular which resolves readily with high power. The South Galactic Pole is about a 1° to the SW.

NGC613 (10.0) sg. Elongated and fairly bright.

Triangulum (Tri).

Iota (ι) (5.3/6.9 sep. 3.9") ds. Fine contrasting yellow and blue pair of stars.

Struve (Σ)239 (7.0/8.0 sep. 13.8") ds. Fine pale yellow and pale blue pair of stars.

NGC598 (**M33**) (5.7) sg. Viewed face-on and hence has a low surface brightness making it an elusive object. A good test for sky conditions using binoculars. From dark sites and under good seeing conditions it is just visible to the naked eye and vies with M31 as the most distant object visible to the naked eye. With 8"+ scopes try to locate the vast star cloud NGC604.

NGC672 (11.6) sg. A bright barred spiral galaxy seen somewhat edge-on.

NGC925 (12.0) sg. Steeply inclined to our line of sight makes it fairly bright. NGC598

P.V.H.