

Greeks lend name to sky's Southern Ship

The Southern Ship Region, while occupying a reasonably large area, is not well-known and contains no familiar constellations. It does, however, relate to a story from Greek mythology that has been chronicled in books and movies.

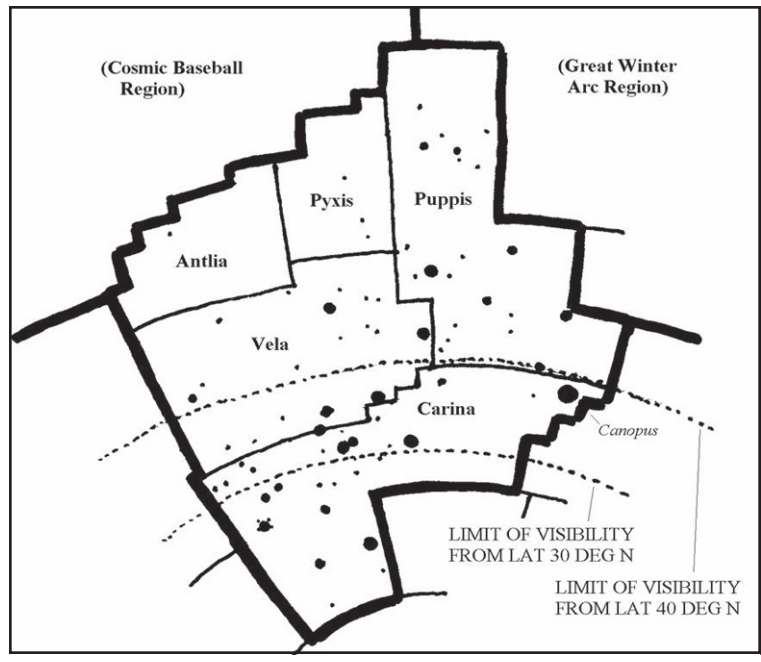
The Greeks regarded this region as one huge constellation, Argo Navis, the ship of the mythological Jason and his Argonauts. According to Richard Hinckley Allen in his 1899 classic book, "Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning," the ship "carried the famous expedition ... in search of the Golden Fleece, and when the voyage was over the goddess Athene placed the boat in the sky."

Finding the ship's region isn't difficult, thanks to the hunter and his big dog. Orion is now high in the southwest in the early evenings prominently displaying his famous three-star belt while Canis Major is to his lower left and hard to miss, being the home of Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky. The Southern Ship begins just beyond Canis Major – to the east (left), southeast (lower left), and south (below).

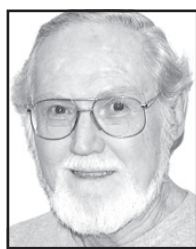
In more recent times, the great ship has been partitioned into four constellations representing four parts of the ship, and unfortunately identifying those constellations isn't easy. Nearest to Canis Major is Puppis, the Ship's Stern. For ye landlubbers, the stern is the ship's rear section; its bow (front) isn't visible and has no constellation. Further to the southeast, and partly below the horizon, is Vela, the Ship's Sails. Both Puppis and Vela have several fairly bright stars, but being so low and near the horizon they don't stand out well.

Most of Carina, the Ship's Keel, is too far south to ever be seen from our mid-northern latitudes, yet its brightest star, Canopus, makes a brief appearance for a few hours from the more southern parts of the U.S. this time of year.

The fourth part of the ship is Pyxis, the Mariner's Compass, but don't bother looking for this small, faint and quite unremarkable constellation.



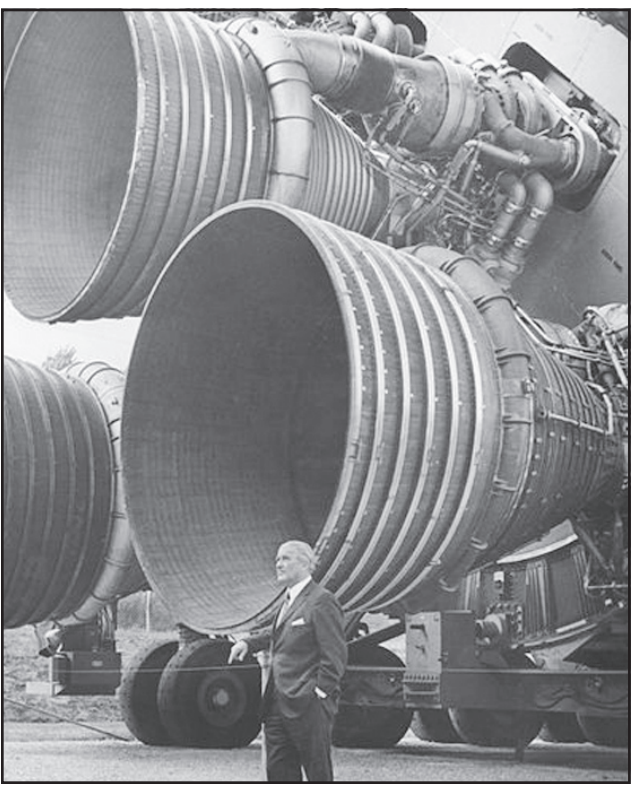
Southern Ship Region (author's diagram)



Paul Derrick
● Stargazer

There is yet one more constellation – not considered part of the ship by the Greeks, but one that I've added because it needed a region to call home – Antlia, the Air Pump. As told to me by a salty old Greek sea-dog, the ship's crew included an ambitious and creative, but not-so-bright, young Argonaut unfamiliar with the physical laws regarding equal and opposite forces. Thinking he would score big with Captain Jason, he stowed away an air pump to bring out when the mighty ship was stilled by a period of windless calm. Antlia is also small and faint, and like Pyxis, one of the constellations I call a "forgetum" – so faint and devoid of interesting objects that casual observers can ignore them.

Unless you live in the southern part of the U.S., you might decide to regard this entire region as a



NASA

Rocket expert Werner von Braun standing in front of huge NASA rockets.

forgetum. However, if it's within your reach, it does contain some jewels worth seeking out.

Astro Milestones

- March 13, 1781, William Herschel discovered the planet Uranus from Bath, England.
- March 14 is the birthday of German-American physicist Albert Einstein (1879-1955).
- March 17, 2011, NASA's Messenger spacecraft, launched in 2004, began its orbital study of Mercury which is still ongoing.
- March 23, 2012, is the 100th birthday of German rocket scientist Werner von Braun (1912-1977), who in one lifetime personified the worst and the best of science's potential. His V-2 rockets, built partly with slave labor, enabled Nazi Germany to bombard London and other European cities, killing countless innocents during World War II. After the war, his rockets launched the U.S. space program and eventually put humans on the Moon.

Night Sky Events

Held at arm's length, the width of your fist is 10° and the width of your index finger is 1°. The width of a full Moon is ½°.

3 Saturday: Mars reaches opposition – opposite the Sun as seen from Earth. It will pass nearest Earth at 63 million miles and, reaching magnitude -1.2, will gleam like a reddish Sirius (the night-sky's brightest star). This year Mars comes to opposition during the month named in its honor.

5 Monday evening: Mercury is seen low in the west at dusk.

7 Wednesday evening: Mars is 10 degrees to the upper left of the Moon; owing to the red planet's current brilliance, it should stand out well against the glare of the Moon.

8 Thursday: This full Moon is called the Lenten Moon, Sap Moon, Crow Moon, and Worm Moon.

10 Saturday evening: After they rise about 9:30 p.m., the Moon (low in the east south-east), the star Spica (above), and Saturn (to their left) form an equilateral triangle 6 degrees on each side.

12 and 13 Monday and Tuesday evenings: Brilliant Venus and bright Jupiter pass within 3 degrees.

14 Wednesday: Moon is at third quarter.

20 Tuesday: Spring equinox when day and night are of (almost) equal length.

22 Thursday: The Moon is new.

25 Sunday evening: The crescent Moon is 3 degrees to the upper right of Jupiter in the west.

26 Monday evening: The crescent Moon is 3 degrees to the upper left of Venus in the west.

27 Tuesday evening: Venus is at its farthest from the setting Sun for this "evening star" appearance and is up for nearly four hours after sunset.

27 Tuesday evening: The crescent Moon, passing through Taurus, is between the star Aldebaran (upper left) and the Pleiades star cluster (lower right).

30 Friday evening: The Moon is at first quarter.

Time Change: at 2 a.m. March 11 we set our clocks forward to Daylight Saving Time.

Paul Derrick is an amateur astronomer who lives in Waco, Texas. Contact him at paulderrickwaco@aol.com or (254) 723-6346 or write 918 N. 30th St., Waco, Texas, 76707.

On the Beat

COLBY POLICE

Tuesday

3:01 a.m. – Caller reported subject making loud noises. Spoke to both parties.

9:20 a.m. – Report of gun lost or stolen from vehicle. Report filed.

11:13 a.m. – Chief did presentation for students at Colby High School.

1:52 p.m. – Caller reported leaving documents at 1150 S. Franklin two days ago, and subjects will not return them to him. Recovered items; will send to owner.

3:11 p.m. – Caller had information on subjects passing out information on Race season who do not have permission.

3:52 p.m. – Subject came to station about scam. Report filed.

4:42 p.m. – 911 disconnect from Colby Middle School. OK.

9:30 p.m. – Caller reported theft of merchandise. Report filed.

9:55 p.m. – 911 open line. Everything OK.

11:19 p.m. – 911 caller reported a vehicle going into the ditch by Dillons. Ambulance paged.

Wednesday

12:28 a.m. – Report filed on accident at 11:19 p.m. Tuesday at Range and Williams.

1:33 a.m. – Caller reported getting harassing text messages. Spoke with subject, information provided.

2:16 a.m. – Security check at Oasis.

3:40 a.m. – Closed door on building.

9:15 a.m. – Report of stolen vehicle tag. Report filed.

12:26 p.m. – Caller advised of

theft. Report filed.

2:43 p.m. – Report filed on tow away.

3:57 p.m. – Caller reported hit and run in the Dillons parking lot.

11:13 p.m. – Walk through at college.

11:56 p.m. – Minor in possession report filed on traffic stop.

THOMAS COUNTY SHERIFF

Tuesday

7:10 a.m. – Caller advised of animal complaint in Thomas County. Report filed.

8:06 a.m. – Caller reported dam-

age to mailbox in the 2700 block of County Rd. 24. Report filed.

9:08 a.m. – Brought inmate from Lawrence Police Department to Law Enforcement Center.

2:30 p.m. – Driving while suspended report filed for traffic stop in the 1300 block of E. First Street Annex.

2:58 p.m. – Booked Miles Ackerman.

3:12 p.m. – Released Ackerman.

9:57 p.m. – Booked Casey Sporing.

11:19 p.m. – Assisted Police Department units with vehicle in ditch at Range and Williams.

Wednesday

8:12 a.m. – Forgery report filed.

9:45 a.m. – Provided assistance to motorist on S. Range.

11:07 a.m. – Booked Damian Vo.

11:22 a.m. – Booked Vu Vo.

11:39 a.m. – Caller reported something in roadway at east-bound I-70 Exit 53 off ramp. Objects removed from roadway.

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