





March Skies over the Pinnacles

March 2025

by Jeff Hutton

March's Four Principal Phases of the Moon

March 6	First Quarter	
March 14	Full Moon	
March 22	Last Quarter	
March 29	New Moon	

Landscape

For folks who are brought up in the city, an urban identity is taken on. For those who grow up in the area called Appalachia, among mountains, rivers and valleys, another perspective is developed. Those who live out their lives in the city are almost totally unaware of the stars of the firmament above. Their perception of the world is that it is human-engineered and the only bits of the natural world are confined into manicured spaces or vacant lots: weedy, wild and...dangerous. Those of us who have grown up among the mountains of Appalachia have traditionally accepted nature for who she is but sometimes we've exploited her as a resource belonging to this generation only.



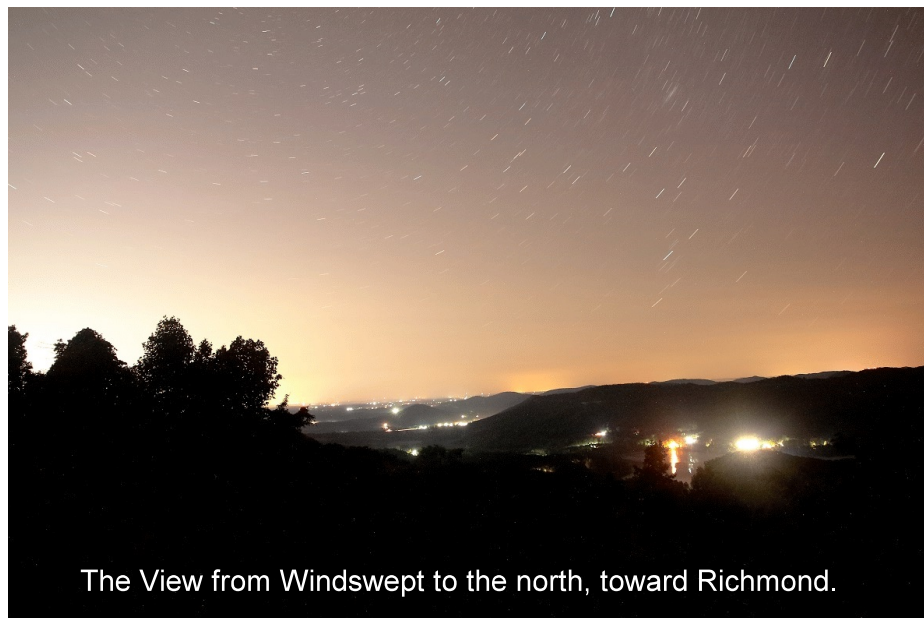
Dr. Jeff Bary

On Wednesday, February 26, Dr. Jeff Bary, physicist from Colgate University, gave a presentation to the Berea community at the Loyal Jones Appalachian Center about how surroundings in which we are born and grow up in make us who we are. Dr. Bary made the startling assertion that our landscape is not confined to the ground we walk on but also the sky, sometimes blue by day and full of familiar stars at night. I'll add that this idea of stars being part of daily existence is one that I have always held. Since the advent of artificial lighting, the night skies of the city have faded to a sad grey and only the Moon, the bright planets and a few bright stars are visible between the grey towers of the city, should anyone care to look up. In recent years, much of the landscape heritage of the Appalachians has been lost, not just to the sprawl of cities and to mining operations but also because of the brightening of our night sky. This was central to Dr. Bary's talk.

During the next night Dr. Bary, hosted a star party at the Windswept Conference Center. Dr. Ansel Elkins, of Berea College's English Department, asked the Pinnacles Astronomy Club, <https://www.facebook.com/groups/527517766312582> to identify constellations as well as to use their telescopes to view the planets and wonderful deep space objects such as the Double Star Cluster in Perseus and the great star forming nebula in Orion. Present were Berea College students and those who were present at his lecture on the Berea College campus. Windswept is located high above Owsley Fork Reservoir and built by a past member of the Berea College Music Faculty. The daytime view is amazing.



The night presents a different sort of landscape. A look north from Windswept reveals a badly light-polluted sky. This image is looking in the same direction of the daytime one above. The faint streaks are northern stars.



The View from Windswept to the north, toward Richmond.

Turn around and see the summer constellations of Sagittarius and Scorpius against a darker southern night sky.



The southern view from Windswept toward Daniel Boone Forest.

Notice the foreground lighting above. Berea College maintains a pole-mounted sodium-vapor street light that is partially hidden in the trees. A call to the college was made to ask for it to be extinguished for the night. The response was that the light couldn't be turned off. **Couldn't be turned off?** The purpose for the light is to provide security behind a locked gate. Located at center-right of the above picture is the illuminated dome of the college's observatory. One might ponder why you would want to nightly illuminate an astronomical observatory.

The artificial and unnecessary lighting of the night sky is called light pollution. As Dr Bary asserts, the denial of your ability to see a dark sky, full of stars, is an example of a denial of a birthright.

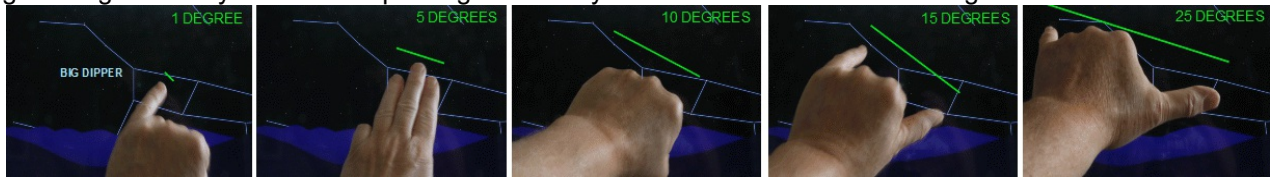
I quite agree.



Windswept's own bit of light pollution.

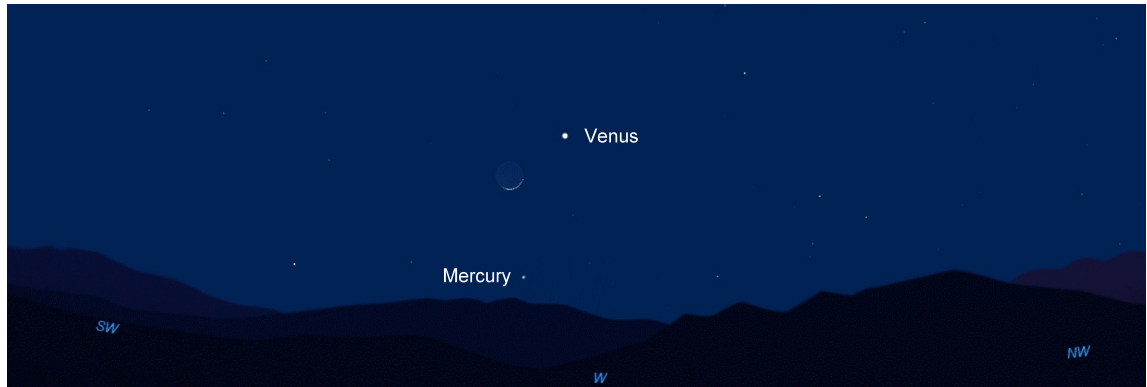
Attractions in March

When you hold your hand all the way out and hold three fingers out, like the scout's salute in panel 2, your fingers create an **angular distance** of 5 degrees, about the width of the bowl of the Big Dipper. When I talk about the angular distance between, say, the Moon or a star or planet, I'll say that they are separated by a certain number of angular degrees. Sky and Telescope magazine is my source for most of the following information.



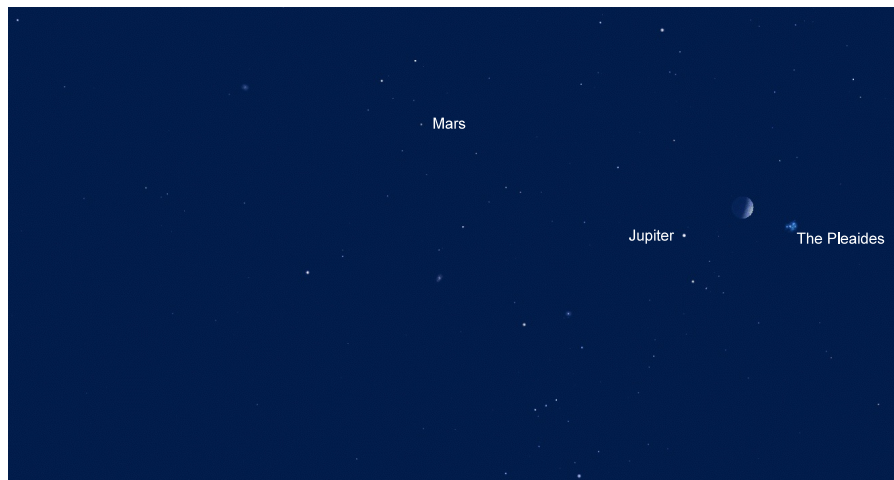
March 1

Right after the sun sets, look low in the western sky for the fingernail-thin Moon and Venus will be beautiful to the upper right. If you can find a spot with a low western horizon (no trees or buildings) and you might just spot Mercury before it sets.



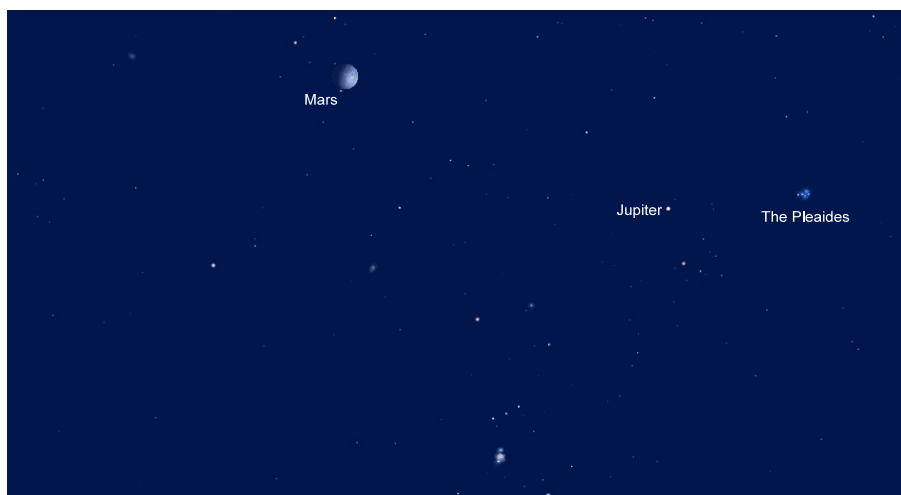
March 5

Look high overhead and see a pretty grouping of the Moon, Jupiter at lower left and the star cluster known as the Pleiades at lower left. Ruddy Mars is seen further east in the constellation, Gemini.



March 8

Tonight, catch the Moon and Mars, just a degree apart.



March 8

Come to Winchester for a star party!



March 9

Sadly, Daylight Savings Time starts today, robbing is of an hour of star gazing in the evening. Astronomers call this GNT or **Government Nuisance Time**.

March 14

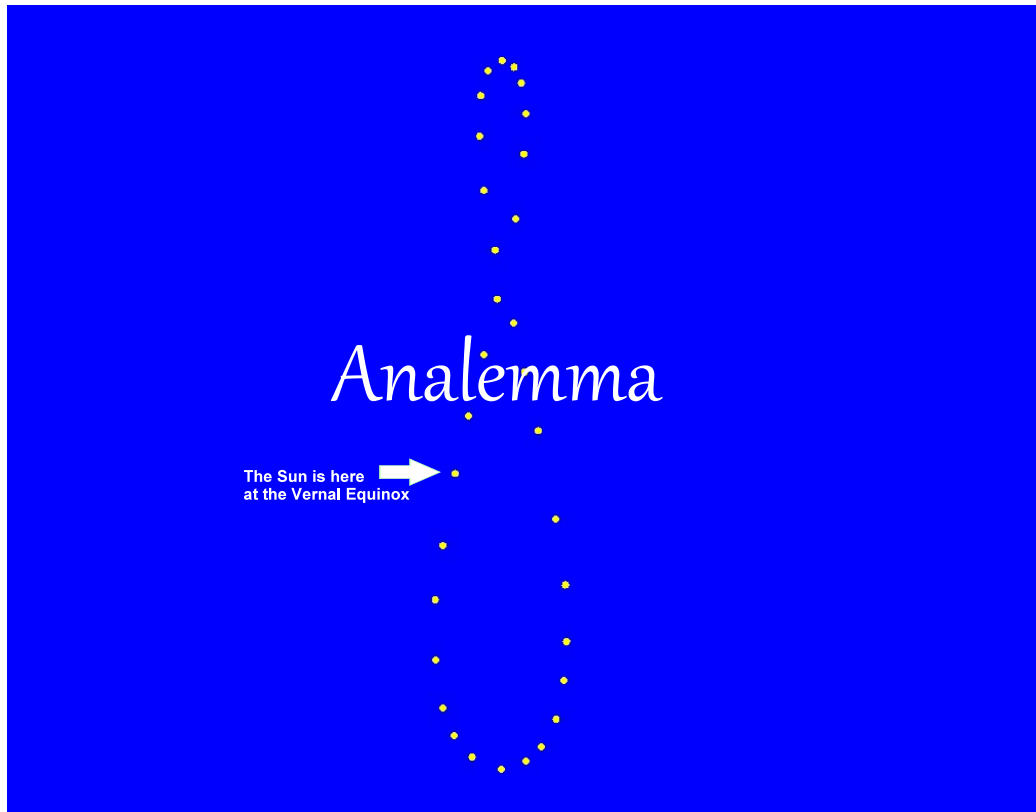
Total Lunar Eclipse. If you stay up until about 1AM, you'll star to see the moon darken as if enters the Earth's umbral shadow, the darkest central part. By about 2:20 the whole face of the Moon will be swallowed up in reddish darkness. How dark? That's hard to predict. I've seen lunar eclipses when the Moon was tranformed into a coppersy lantern in the sky and others when it nearly disappeared. The brightly lit lunar surface will begin to return at about 4AM.



May 15, 2022 Lunar Eclipse Compilation by the Author

March 20

Happy Vernal Equinox! Spring begins at 5:01



March 29

Partial solar eclipse, but it won't be visible from here.