

Astronomy In The Two Dales

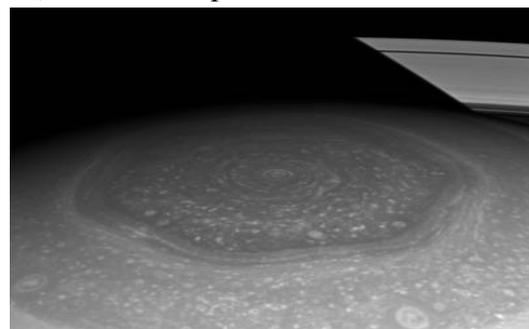
December

Hurrah! It is the festival of Saturnalia , running from the 17th to the 23rd of December , a time when everything is reversed , slaves could insult their masters , gambling was legal , gifts were given and social conformity was ignored. More about the Dark Sun later.

This month we have two meteor showers , as all of you know by now , unless you have not been reading this article , then I will tell you that there are two meteor showers this month. The first , the Geminids , occurs on the 13th and 14th with up to 120 meteors an hour , however ,we have a full moon , another supermoon when the moon is at it's closest approach to the earth , on the 14th which will illuminate the night sky and block out this display. For those who wish to brave the cold , look south after midnight .

Our second display of fiery rocks is on the 21st and 22nd of the month , coinciding with the winter solstice , which occurs at 10.44 am on the 21st . The Ursids only produce 10 meteors an hour , however with a diminishing moon , they will be easier to see , radiating from a northerly direction.

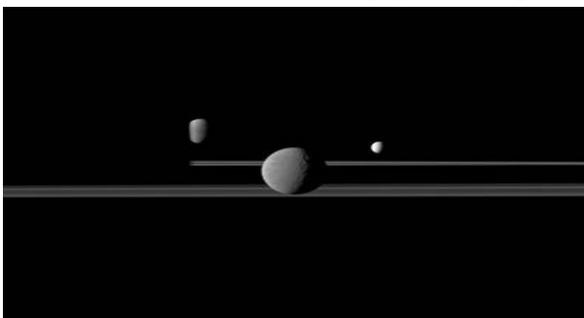
Venus and Mars can be seen in the south western sky , they will set between 6.30 and 8.30 pm , as the nights are long this is a perfect time for observation , even with a pair of binoculars.



So , back to Saturn , the second largest of the planets in the solar system , orbiting 10 times further from the sun than the earth , taking 29 years for one orbit of the sun. Saturn is famous for its rings of ice , it also has 62 moons.

Recent discoveries have shown that the winds of Saturn create a hexagonal pattern at both of the planets poles , this has also been seen to change colour from a blueish colour to a golden hue though what causes this is unknown.

The Cassini probe in orbit around Saturn has also found geological activity on several of the moons in orbit around Saturn , with geysers of gas and vapour and seas of hydro carbons.



Saturn can be described as a failed star with it's own planetary system , a distant counter point to our own star , and worth celebrating. Merry Christmas and happy Saturnalia.

The Starman , Reeth Informal Astronomy Group , Reethastro.org

