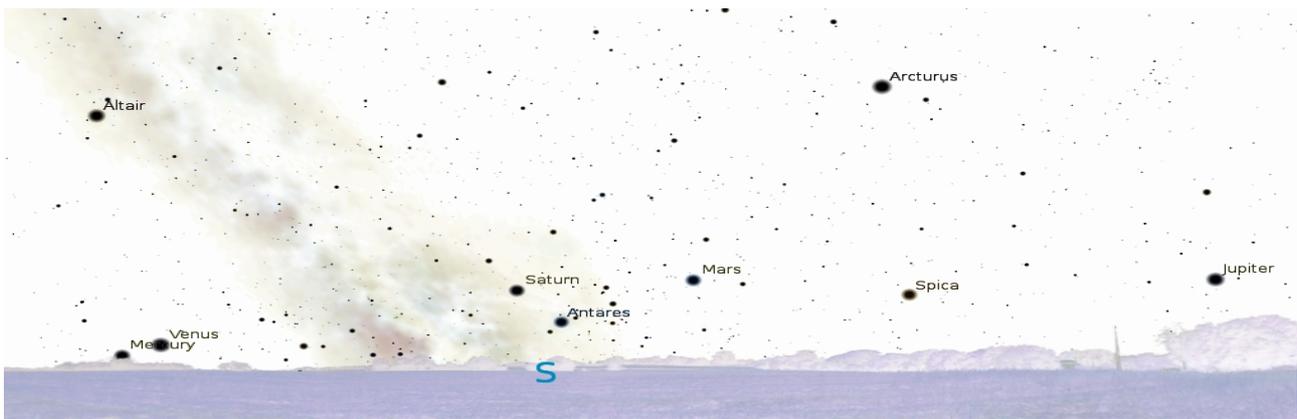


## Astronomy in the Two Dales

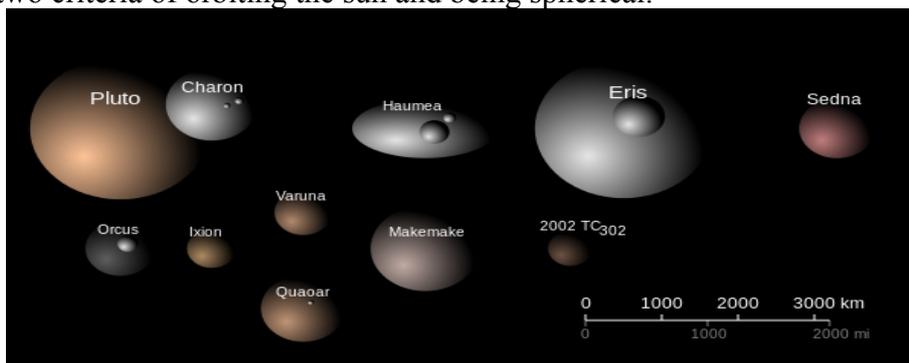
### February

The best time to be out and about with your telescope this month is when the moon is new and small and dull , so that all those bright and sparkling stars leap out of the inky blackness of the night sky , so that will be the 8<sup>th</sup> of the month then , OK? the full moon not being due till the 22<sup>nd</sup>.

If it is planets you want to observe , then , with the exception of Jupiter , which is rising in the east after sunset , all the other planets that can be observed are lined up in the early morning sky , just as they have been for the last couple of months, it is as if they have gone on strike and refused to move , picketing the dawn sky in objection to government policy , perhaps the appalling response to the floods? Who can say.



Whilst we are on the subject of planets , what exactly is a planet ? Well , according to the International Astronomical Union ( well there you are , it's the bloody union making the planets stop orbiting ) a planet is defined as “ a celestial body in orbit around the sun demonstrating hydrostatic equilibrium and having cleared its orbit of debris “ by the way , hydrostatic equilibrium means to be spherical in shape. According to this definition we have 3 planets in the solar system , yes thats right , 3 , as only Mercury , Saturn and Neptune meet the definition , ( it `s discrimination by management , is what it is ) leaving all the other planets classified as Dwarf planets , which only meet the first two criteria of orbiting the sun and being spherical.



The problem is that there are many other objects classified as Dwarf planets . ( bloody dwarf planets stealing our orbits ) and if they were added to the list of celestial bodies we would have 500 planets in the solar system , the smallest being 302 kilometres across up to Jupiter which is 70,000 kilometres across.

Then we have another problem , astronomers have found an object beyond the orbit of Neptune , beyond the orbit of any known planet , ten times further from the sun than Pluto and it is bigger than the Earth , is this a planet or a massive lump left over from the destruction of another object ? will this object change our perception of the solar system ? Will UKIP accuse it of being a migrant

from Alpha Centuri ? All this and more next month .

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