

Our Night Sky for the week of July 2

The night sky continues to not be very dark but still presents a good chance to find bright objects and maybe pick out a constellation or two.

Last week I suggested you look for “The Big Dipper” Ursa Major, and when you spotted that you probably looked up from the bowl of the dipper and identified the Little Dipper “Ursa Minor”. In fact, the two stars at the end of the bowl point to The North Star, “Polaris”.

Polaris is the first star of the handle of the Little Dipper and is always in the same place in our northern sky. There are many interesting things to discover in these two northern constellations. Look from the first star in the handle to the second star of the Big Dipper handle. Look closely at the second star. It is actually two stars that appear very close together, Mizar and Alcor which you can pick out as separate stars if you look very closely. In fact, they only appear close together, Mizar the brighter star is 78 light years from here and Alcor another 3 light years beyond, if you have binoculars or a small scope take a closer look at Mizar, the brighter of the two stars. It is a telescopic double. So, in reality the second star in the handle of the Big Dipper is actually three stars.