

## Our Night Sky for the week of July 30

As summer continues, the earth's northern hemisphere is pointed as far away from the ecliptic as it ever gets. The ecliptic is the plane of the solar system that the outer planets follow around the sun. That path is represented in our sky by a great circle showing the path the outer planets follow. In the summer it is very low on the southeastern horizon and by December it will again have moved up much higher in our sky. In the mid northern latitudes, we are at a bit of a disadvantage for planetary viewing because for a good part of each year, even though they are on the correct place in their orbit to be visible in our skies, our location at this time of year puts them just above our horizon and in the thicker air at the lower sky altitudes.

However, there is a treat coming in August. Every year on about the 12th of August, the earth travels through the path of comet Swift- Tuttle. There are meteor showers frequently throughout the year but in mid August, the Perseids meteor shower is the best of the year. Comets follow orbits way out to the outer solar system and on a regular basis fall quickly back into the inner system, bringing with them millions of tons of gravel, ice, gas and dust. Think of them as the solar system's dump trucks.

More next week.