

By Vernon Whetstone

Amateur Astronomer

What say we get a little “loony” this week? I should probably say “luny” as we need to talk about the moon. Saturday, Oct. 8, is International Look at the Moon Day so we should all get outside and do just that.

On Saturday the moon will be just three days before full which means it will be rising just before sunset and will be visible in the early evening just above the eastern horizon.

You can use binoculars, a telescope, or even just your eyes to see and observe our orbital companion.

One obvious thing to look for is the traditional “Man In the Moon.” The association of three very large mare, or seas, that give the semblance of two eyes and an open mouth of a human face.

These seas are huge lava plains from the moon’s volcanic past forming flat areas on the lunar surface. One such, the Sea of Tranquility, was the target for the first lunar landing by humans in Apollo 11.

Another optical illusion on the lunar surface is the “Rabbit” on the moon. It is formed by looking at the two finger-like seas on the extreme right followed by the head and body extending down to the left.

If you are using binoculars or a telescope, look for the line of three large craters down the middle of the lunar face. Normally they are best visible when the moon is at its first quarter stage, but this will be as good a reason as any to look for them. If you are interested in participating in the event, point your favorite web browser to <http://observethemoonnight.org/> for more information.

October starts the season of the celestial seas. Several large constellations having to do with water are now becoming prominent.

Starting from right to left look for a large, boat-shaped group of stars forming Capricornus, the Sea-Goat. On the extreme left of this constellation is the star Debeb Algiedi. A little further left, almost in the same binocular field of view is the planet Neptune. If it helps, the moon is in the extreme right end of Capricornus tonight.

However, since we are dealing with an almost-full moon here, it might be best to wait a week before attempting observation. The moon won’t be seen in the constellation so you are on your own there.

To the left of Capricornus is another sea-related constellation, Aquarius, the Water Bearer. This constellation is so wide and spread out it is difficult to put together. The moon will be in it on Friday and Saturday.

Further left is the “V” shape of the fellow zodiacal constellation Pisces, the Fish. The shape of the fish is just under and parallels the square of our old friend Pegasus. Below Pisces is the so-called sea monster from the Perseus-Andromeda story, Cetus, the Whale.

Last, but not least, is my personal old friend, Piscis Austrinus, the Southern Fish. However, don’t bother looking for it because all of the member stars are so dim they cannot be easily seen, except for my particular favorite and brightest star in the constellation, Fomalhaut (pronounced FOAM-a-lot). It is often called the loneliest star in the sky.

Fomalhaut is the only star seen in the area and was once considered one of the “Royal Stars” of ancient Persia. To find it look almost due south just above the horizon at about 9:30 p.m. MDT, and say hello to my friend so he won't be so lonely anymore.

SKY WATCH: Full moon on Oct. 11. This is the smallest full moon of the year. It is also called the “Hunter's Moon.” Jupiter is very prominent in the early evening sky rising just above the head circle of Cetus, the Whale. Next week Jupiter and the moon will be playing tag.