Look for the teapot

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Amateur Astronomer

We come now to one of my favorite places in the sky, the area of Sagittarius, the Archer.
When I was younger I could make out the three stars on the right side that mark his bow, and a star further out as the point of the arrow aimed at the heart of the scorpion.
Now, it is much easier to see the old guy in his modern dress, as a “teapot.”
Sagittarius is located almost due south, just east of Scorpius. This area of the sky also features the marvelous center of our Milky Way Galaxy. In fact, the Milky Way looks like the steam coming out of the teapot’s spout.
The exact center of the galaxy is located just above that spout. It is a location of millions of stars which, unfortunately, we cannot see because of the massive clouds of dust and gas which also are in that direction.
This is also the location of many of the faint fuzzies that are fun to hunt. Star clusters, star clouds, and nebula are there in abundance.You would have a hard time swinging a cat in that area without finding something to look at in your binoculars or even a small telescope.
To really see these objects, however, you will need to be in a very dark-sky place. All of the light pollution generated by even small towns tend to erase any view of this area.
Another problem, especially at this time of year, is it doesn’t get really good and dark until between 9:30 and 10p.m. local time, and often the best viewing is after midnight.
Last week we looked at Messier objects six and seven; Ptolemy’s cluster and the Butterfly cluster respectively located just above the stinger of the scorpion.
If you start there again and just continue up and slightly left over into the area of the teapot’s spout and follow the glow of the Milky Way up you will soon find two fuzzies in the same field of binocular view.
They are M8 (the lower one) and M20, the Lagoon and Trifid nebulae. Both are large, star forming regions, the light of which illuminates the surrounding gas and dust clouds.
In fact, the clouds of dust are what give the two their namesake divisions.
Another small star cluster, M21, can also be seen just up and left of the Trifid.
Continue up and slightly left for three more gaseous nebulae M16, M17, and M18, the Eagle, Omega, and Swan (from top to bottom). All three will be in the same binocular field of view.
From there on it is just one more star cluster after another in a very exciting place to be looking.

SKY WATCH: First quarter moon Thursday, July 26. Tonight, the moon, Mars, Saturn, and Spica all together in the southwest. Saturday, July 28, the moon and Antares.
As for me, what will I be looking at tonight? I will be looking at the star Wei (also known as Epsilon Scorpii), two stars down from bright red Antares, the heart of the scorpion. Why you ask? This star is 65 light years away, which means the light of this star left 65 years ago, on the

day I was born, which was yesterday, July 24. So, now you know how old I am and why I am known as “The Stargeezer.”