



Evening sky in December 2017

The Southern Cross (Crux) and Pointers appear very low above the southern horizon. The Pointers, Alpha and Beta Centauri form part of the constellation Centaurus which almost encircles Crux. High above we find the bright star, Achernar in Eridanus (River). Halfway between Crux and Eridanus are the Large and Small Magellanic Clouds. They are satellite galaxies to our own Milky Way and can be seen on dark moonless nights. The large Magellanic Cloud represents the “tablecloth” of clouds (formed over Table Mountain when the Cape Southeaster blows), in a small constellation named after Table Mountain (Mensa). In the North a third galaxy, the Andromeda Galaxy, is diagonally below the Great Square in Pegasus (Flying Horse).

In the beginning of the month planets Mercury and Saturn may be glimpsed low in the west just after sunset. Mars moves from Virgo into Libra during the month and rises about two hours after midnight. Jupiter is in Libra and rises two hours before sunrise. The Moon is in the evening sky until 4 December and again after 19 December.

The Geminid meteor shower is active between 4 and 16 December. Favourable conditions are expected and best views will be between 23h30 to 03h00 with maximum on the 14 December.

Summer solstice is on 21 December.