



If you're interested in stargazing, come join us.
 Everyone is welcome. We have group stargazing sessions, workshops, talks, and other events
BathAstronomers.org.uk
 BathAstronomers



Daylight information for the month is:

Sunrise: 07:51 (1st) 08:14 (31st)
 Sunset: 16:04 (1st) 16:10 (31st)

This is the month of the longest night and hence the darkest skies. It is the time to blow the dust off binoculars and telescopes and get looking up. This month has a number of delights to go with those inky black skies including planets, meteor showers and a comet that might get bright enough for amateur stargazers to easily find.



New Moon: 7th December
 First Quarter: 15th December
 Full Moon: 22nd December
 Last Quarter: 29th December



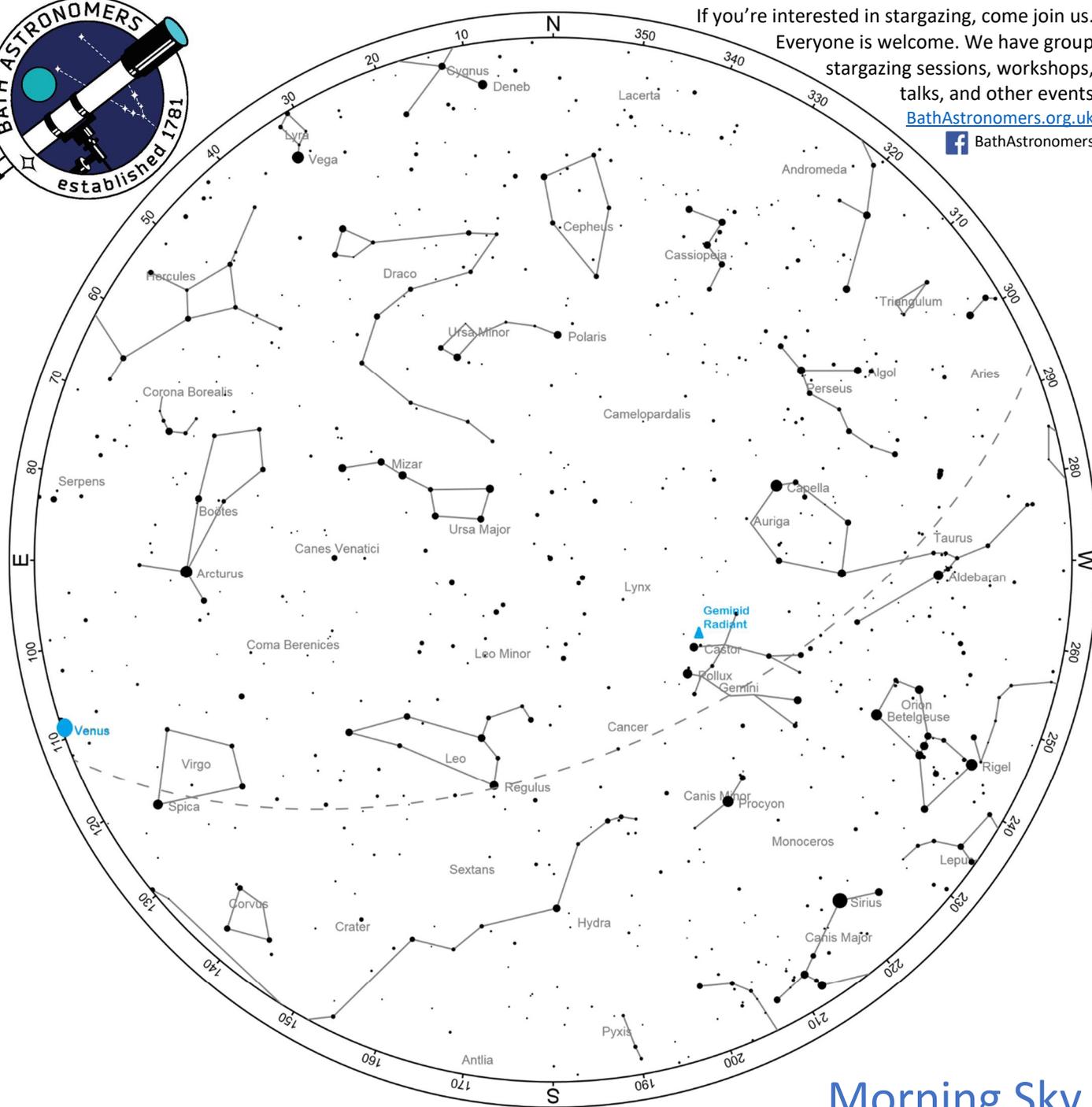
The Geminid Meteor shower peaks on 13th Dec and in the early hours the radiant will be overhead. It should be visible a week or so before and after peak but best before due to the presence of the Moon later in the month. Later in the month the Ursid meteors may be visible above the Northern horizon. On the morning of the 3rd Dec, Venus and the crescent Moon will be close in the morning sky and near Spica in Virgo making a pretty trio of objects.



The dawn sky is dominated by Venus this month and with higher power binoculars you might be able to make out the crescent shape of the planet. It is not the only object in this part of the sky as Mercury sits between it and the Sun and can be glimpsed just before sunrise. The Messenger is furthest from the Sun on 15th Dec. By 22nd Dec, Mercury passes close to Jupiter before sunrise.

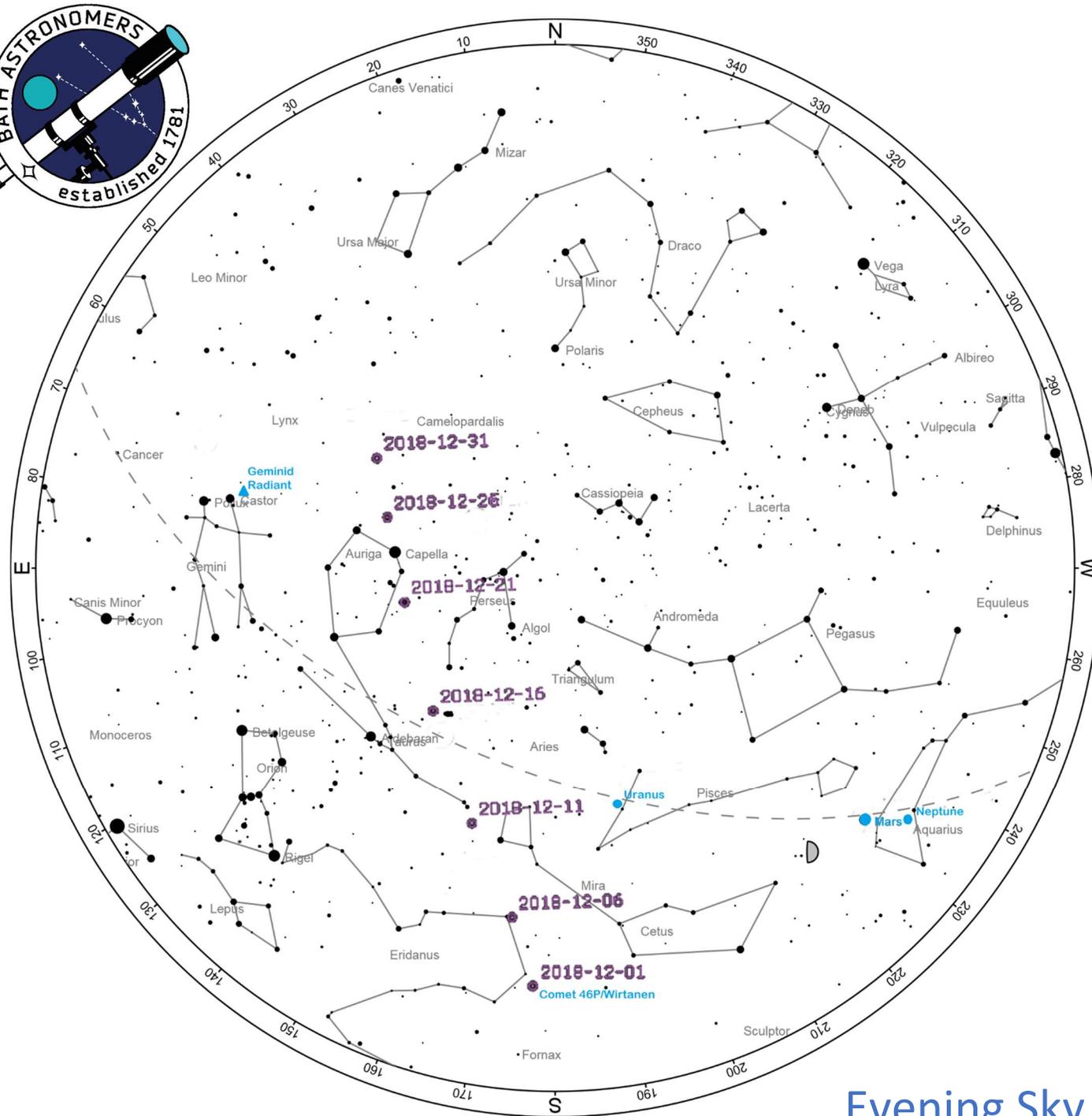


The comet 46P/Wirtanen will be high and hopefully bright in the evening and morning skies this month climbing higher as the month progresses, away from atmospheric disturbance and horizon light pollution. Venus and Mercury can be glimpsed before Sunrise and although no surface features are visible, their crescents tell us Copernicus and Galileo were correct about the Sun.



Morning Sky in December 2018

Location: Bath, UK, 51.3758°N, 2.3599°W
 Time: 16 December 2018 04:00 (UTC +00:00)



Location: Bath, UK, 51.3758°N, 2.3599°W
Time: 15 December 2018 21:00 (UTC +00:00)

Evening Sky in December 2018



The winter constellations are on full display and are well worth learning with their distinctive shapes. Try Taurus, Perseus, Auriga and Orion. The Sun and planets travel across the sky along the same path, called the Ecliptic. The path is shown on diagram as a dashed line. This time of year, the line arcs higher in the sky and any planets located on it make good viewing. Mars is the easiest naked eye planet visible and is the red/orange bright 'star' in the Southwest after Sunset.



Uranus is high in the sky this month and just visible to the naked eye if you know where to look but easier to find in binoculars. It is at its best this month so make sure you have a go at finding it. Perseus is close to being overhead and contains interesting open star clusters like M34, M45 the Pleiades and the Double Cluster NGC869 and 884; they sit between Perseus and Cassiopeia. Pan further down and Comet 46P/Wirtanen should be visible on its track northward. The path of the comet is shown on the chart through the month and in binoculars should give good contrast and may even allow plasma or dust tails to be seen if they form.



On 6th Dec Mars and Neptune will be within a Moon's width of each other and visible in the same lower power field of view. The difference in brightness between the two is 1,400 times and so you may find Neptune a little harder to pick out, but as you focus in and out only Mars and Neptune won't reduce to points of light. Comet 46P/Wirtanen approaches closest to the Earth on 18th Dec, it will speed across the sky from night to night and this motion can be noted in periods as short as just 15 minutes. Taking photos every 15 minutes and then merging these into a movie can be very rewarding. On its travels it will pass close to the Taurus's Omicron and Xi, the Pleiades cluster, and bright Capella in Auriga. The best time to observe will be early December to avoid the Moon washing out too much of the finer detail.



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