

Our Sky in July 2012

My appointment with Venus last month turned out to be a disappointment! Encouraged by the sight of the waning Moon through a gap in the clouds, I sallied forth to the Manor Fruit Farm at 0440 armed with a garden chair, a mini step ladder, a pair of binoculars and a sheet of white card on which to project the image of the Sun. The quarry flirted with one or two gaps in the cloud, but never showed its face for me to see Venus as it crossed the Sun's face for the last time for over 100 years. Never mind; I have the memory of the last transit when we were blessed with cloudless skies throughout, and we celebrated in our garden with wine, and my trusty telescope following the procedures throughout. I should have a better view above the clouds for the next transit! One bonus, or two if you count the peace and quiet of an early summer morning blessed by the dawn chorus; I found the 'Senior' exercise apparatus, and teased a few of my muscles as I waited for the clouds to part.

We will lose Saturn in the West after sunset by the end of the month, but Jupiter will be rising in the East by 0230, and will appear earlier each morning. On the 16th, you can see Jupiter, Venus and the last phase of the waning moon together before dawn – a beautiful sight for the early risers.

As the month progresses, darkness descends earlier, and you will not have to wait up too late to enjoy the sight of the Milky Way stretching above your head, with the bright stars, Vega, Deneb and Altair forming the 'Summer Triangle'. Assuming Summer does come eventually, and you have a warm night, take the opportunity to lie out on a sunbed, cover yourself with a blanket, and scan the night skies with a pair of binoculars; but do try to find a really dark spot, well away from street lights and security lamps which are the bane of all astronomers.

Meanwhile, keep looking for the Noctilucent clouds; they will disappear again by mid August.