

## **Our Night Sky in July**

Mars and Saturn will both be low in the southern sky at dusk, and will set in the early hours. Venus will greet the early risers in the North East before dawn, following the Pleiades and Taurus, as the harbingers of the autumn constellations, but let's not go there since summer is hardly done yet!

Last month, I took my own advice and peered at Mars and Saturn through my telescope. The former was rather disappointing because of the small size and turbulent atmosphere, but Saturn is always magnificent and, in moments of good seeing, the rings showed up very well.

Now we are past the summer solstice and the nights become darker earlier, we can look forward to the reappearance of the Milky Way high above, and I do urge you to use binoculars to sweep along the multitude of stars that make it up; it really is a wonderful sight.

Now, how would you like a holiday on your own private lake, far from the madding crowds, with guaranteed sunshine, albeit rather faint, and only the slightest occasional drizzle? You will need your own private transport which might take some time to reach your destination, and you would find a few layers of thermal underwear a distinct advantage. So where is this delightful getaway? The largest moon in the Solar System, Titan, visited only once before by the Huygens spacecraft which lasted only a few hours on the unwelcoming surface. Your lake is softer altogether, and it consists of liquid methane, occasionally refreshed by the gentle drizzle of methane from the orange atmosphere. If you dip your fingers in the lake, you will realise that my suggestion of thermal underwear was well founded since the temperature of the liquid is about minus 180 degrees C. Oh, and one further drawback; NASA is planning to send a spacecraft which it intends to land in one of the methane lakes on Titan sometime in the future, and you might be unlucky enough to have it drop on your head.

Perhaps, after all, you would prefer to go to Cornwall!

*Bill Turnill*