

# What can you see from the Isle of Man's dark sky locations?

## Polaris, the Pole Star

Polaris is the brightest star in the Ursa Minor constellation and is known by several names due to its importance in celestial navigation. It is very close to the north celestial pole which is why it is often referred to as the Pole Star.

## Cassiopeia

The Cassiopeia constellation is easily recognisable in the night sky thanks to its distinctive 'W' shape formed by five bright stars. In Greek mythology the constellation was thought to represent the vain Queen Cassiopeia who boasted about her unrivalled beauty. Cassiopeia can be seen most clearly in early November.

## The Plough

The Plough, also known as the Big Dipper, is a collection of seven stars that has been recognised as a distinct grouping in many cultures for thousands of years. The stars that make up the Plough are the seven brightest stars of the Ursa Major constellation.

In the days before we had compasses to navigate, people consulted the night sky and used the stars to work out which way pointed north. Find the Plough and use the two stars at the end, (Merak & Dubhe) at edge of the plough's bowl (these are known as the pointer stars), to trace a line to the faint Pole star (also known as Polaris). If you stand facing this star you will be facing north. The height of the star above the horizon gives us the latitude; this is how the Vikings found the Isle of Man over 1,000 years ago.

## Pegasus

The Pegasus constellation is named after the winged horse Pegasus in Greek mythology. It was one of the 48 constellations listed by second century astronomer Ptolemy and remains one of the 88 modern constellations.

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## Betelgeuse

Betelgeuse is the eighth brightest star in the night sky and the second brightest star in the constellation of Orion. It is distinctly tinted red and is one of the largest and most luminous stars.

## The Winter Hexagon

The Winter Hexagon is an asterism (not a constellation) that is seen magnificently from the Isle of Man from November through to March. It dominates the southern horizon and is made up of six very bright stars, Sirius at the bottom, Canella, overhead, and the Procyon and Castor on the left and Aldebaran and Rigel on the right. The whole hexagon shape is then finished off with Betelgeuse in the lower middle.

## Orion's Belt

Finding the three bright stars that make up Orion's Belt is the best way to locate the Orion constellation. Often known as the Hunter, Orion is one of the most recognisable constellations in the night sky and is visible throughout the world.

## Capella

Capella is the sixth brightest star in the night sky and the third brightest star in the northern celestial hemisphere. Although Capella appears to be a single star to the naked eye, it is actually a star system consisting of four stars, two of which are 10 times bigger than the sun.

## The Summer Triangle

The Summer Triangle is an asterism, a pattern of stars, involving the three stars Altair, the 12th brightest star in the night sky, Deneb, the 19th brightest star in the night sky, and Vega, the 2nd brightest star in the northern celestial hemisphere. During the summer months the Summer Triangle can be found virtually overhead at mid-northern latitudes but can also be seen in spring during the early morning and in autumn during the evening until November.

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## Cygnus

The Cygnus constellation of Cygnus lies on the plane of the Milky Way and its name comes from the Greek word for 'swan'. It is one of the most recognisable constellations in the northern hemisphere and features a prominent asterism known as the Northern Cross.

## Arcturus

Arcturus is the brightest star in the Boötes constellation and the northern celestial hemisphere and the fourth brightest star in the night sky. To the naked eye the star appears an orangey-yellow colour. An easy way to locate Arcturus is to follow the arc of the handle of the Plough.

## Gemini

Gemini is one of the constellations of the zodiac and its name in Latin means 'twins', associated with the twins Castor and Pollux in Greek mythology. The best time to observe Gemini at night is overhead during January and February and by April and May the constellation will be visible soon after sunset in the west.

## Leo

Leo is also one of the constellations of the zodiac and its name is Latin for 'lion'. It is made up of many bright shining stars and many cultures have portrayed the constellation of Leo as a Lion commonly represented as if the sickle-shaped asterism of stars is the back of the lion's head.

## Regulus

Regulus is the brightest star in the Leo constellation and is also one of the brightest stars in the night sky. Lying approximately 77 light years from Earth, Regulus is a multiple star system composed of four stars organised into two pairs.

## Sirius

Sirius is the brightest star in the night sky Sirius is also known as the Dog Star due to its prominence in its constellation Canis Major (The Big Dog).