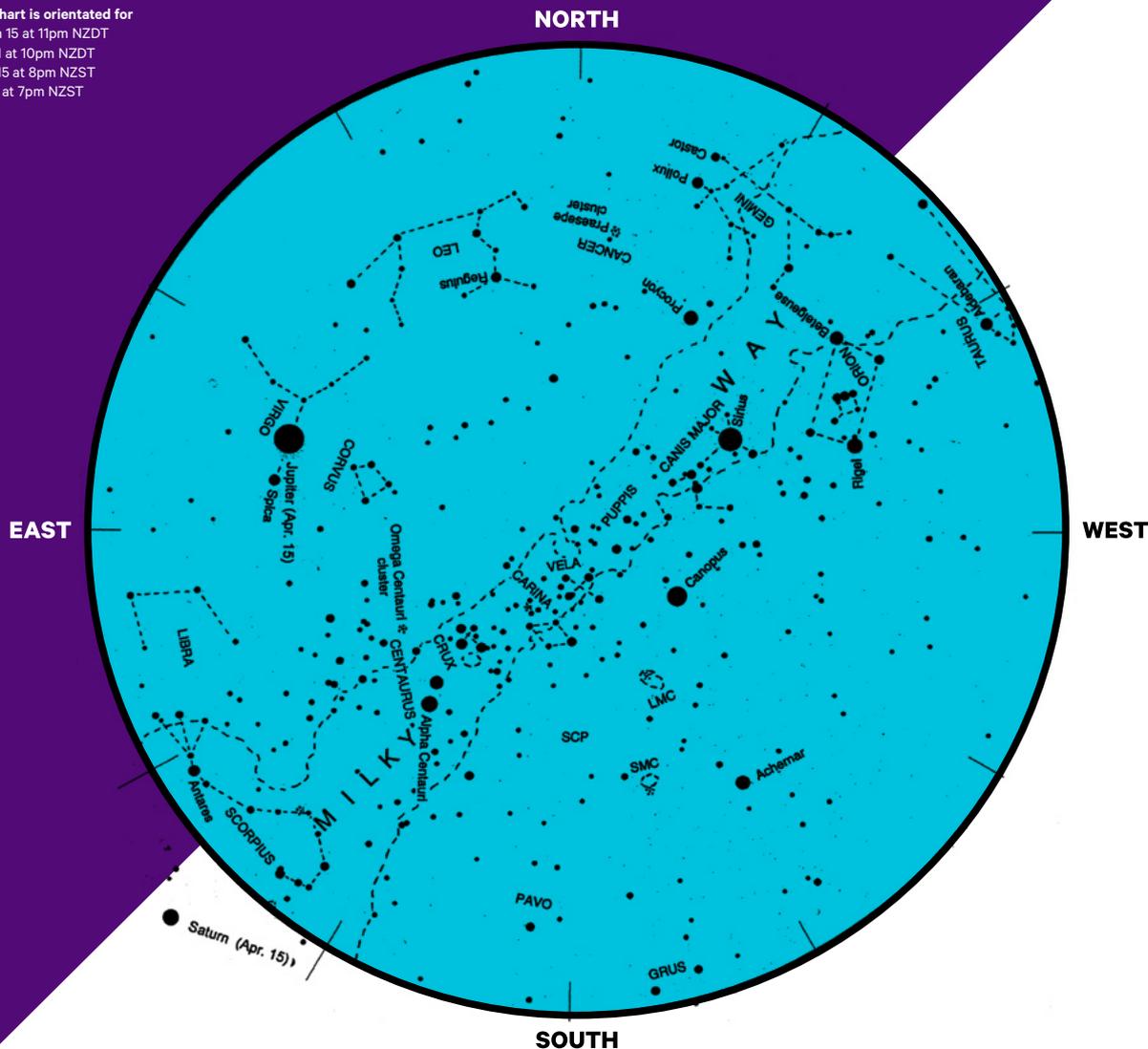


What's up in Space?

April 2017 The Heart of the Lion

The chart is orientated for
March 15 at 11pm NZDT
April 1 at 10pm NZDT
April 15 at 8pm NZST
May 1 at 7pm NZST



New Zealand daylight saving ends the first weekend of April, bringing the southern hemisphere summer abruptly to an end. On the bright side, the lighter mornings and darker nights will make it much easier to get out and do some observing.

One of the first objects visible in the evening twilight is bright golden Jupiter, rising in the east soon after the Sun sets at the beginning of the month. Jupiter is in the constellation of Virgo, just to the left of Spica, the 16th brightest star in the night sky. It slowly crosses the sky through the course of the night, before disappearing in the west at sunrise. By the end of the month it will be rising well before dusk. Jupiter reaches opposition on April the 8th, meaning it will lie directly opposite the Sun in the sky and be overhead at midnight. The full Moon passes close to Jupiter on the 10th/11th of the month.

In the north east is Leo the lion with the constellation's brightest star Regulus or Alpha Leonis marking the lion's heart. Regulus is at the top of an upside down question mark which represents the head and mane of the lion. The star is the 21st brightest in the night sky, but it is in fact a system of four individual stars arranged in two pairs.

Regulus A is a binary comprising of a hot, young, blue-white main sequence star with a tiny companion of less than 0.3 times the mass of the Sun, which is probably a white dwarf. The two are so close together that they can only be split by observing their spectra shifting slightly as they orbit around each other. Regulus B and C make a second pairing located 177 arc-seconds away from Regulus A. Resolving the BC pair from Regulus A is a good challenge for binocular observers, and certainly possible with a small telescope.