

CASSIOPEIA POINTS TO ANDROMEDA GALAXY

Tonight, if you have a dark sky, try star-hopping to the Andromeda galaxy from the constellation Cassiopeia the Queen. If your sky is truly dark, you might even spot this hazy patch of light with no optical aid, as the ancient stargazers did before the days of light pollution.

What if your sky is more lit up, and you can't find the Andromeda galaxy with the eyes alone? Some stargazers use binoculars and star-hop to the Andromeda galaxy via the W-shaped constellation of Cassiopeia.

Cassiopeia appears in the northeast sky at nightfall and early evening, then swings upward as evening deepens into late night. In the wee hours before dawn, Cassiopeia is found high over Polaris, the North Star. Note that one half of the W is more deeply notched than the other half. This deeper V is your "arrow" in the sky, pointing to the Andromeda galaxy.

Draw an imaginary line from the star Kappa Cassiopeiae (abbreviated Kappa) through the star Schedar, then go about 3 times the Kappa-Schedar distance to locate the Andromeda galaxy.

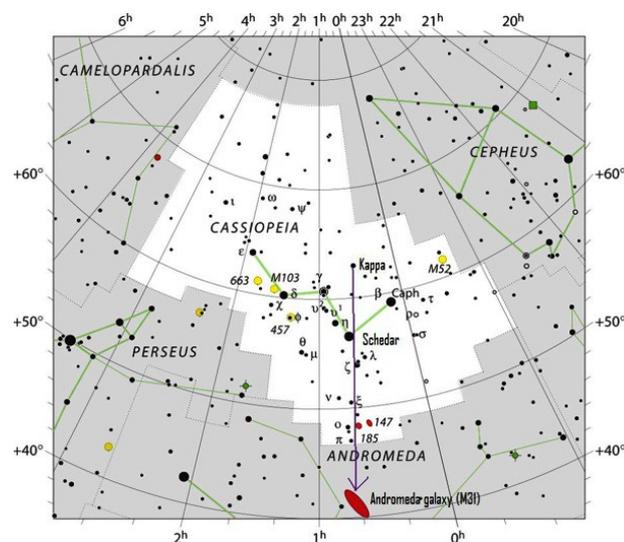
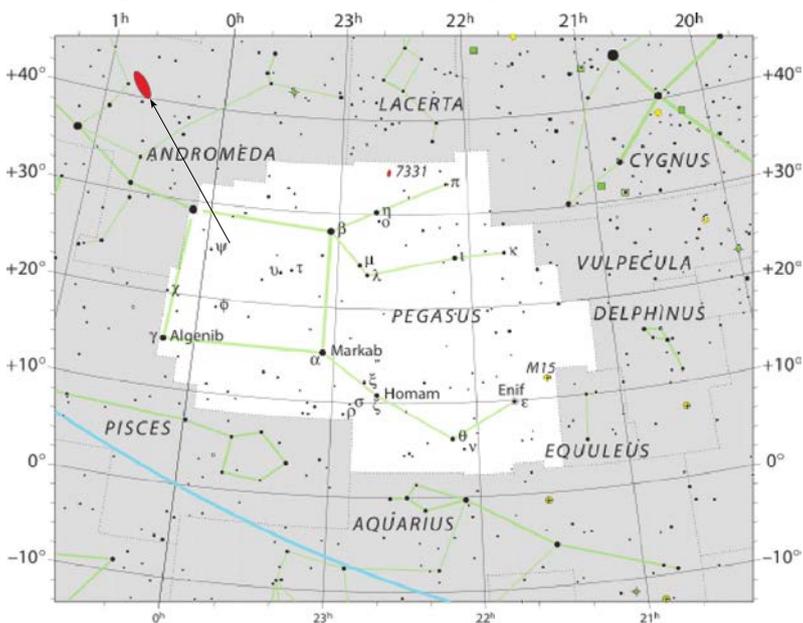
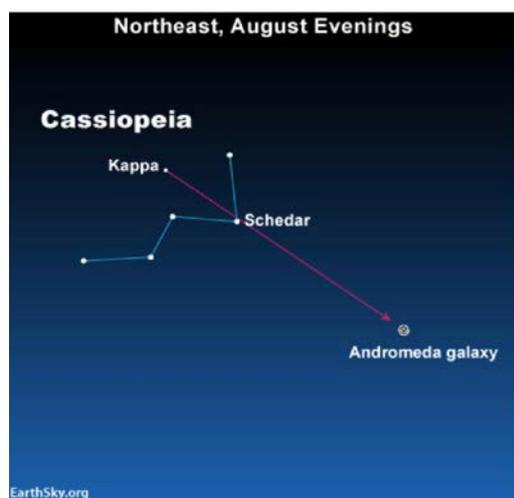
Remember, on a dark night, this galaxy looks like a faint smudge of light. Once you've found it with the unaided eye or binoculars, try with a telescope if you have one.

Why not look for the nearest large spiral galaxy to our Milky Way tonight. It's becoming well placed for evening viewing from Northern Hemisphere locations.

The Great Square of Pegasus is another great jumping-off point for finding the famous Andromeda galaxy, see below.



The Andromeda galaxy is the nearest large spiral galaxy to our Milky Way. It's about 2.5 million light-years away, teeming with hundreds of billions of stars. It is also known to astronomers as Messier 31.



THE GALAXY IN CONTEXT

The Andromeda galaxy and our Milky Way galaxy reign as the two most massive and dominant galaxies within the Local Group of Galaxies. The Andromeda Galaxy is the largest galaxy of the Local Group, which, in addition to the Milky Way, also contains the Triangulum Galaxy and about 30 other smaller galaxies. At a distance of 2.5 million light-years, the Great Andromeda galaxy (Messier 31) rates as the most distant object you can see with the unaided eye.

The Andromeda galaxy is the closest big galaxy to our Milky Way. It's a spiral galaxy, like ours. At 2.5 million light-years, it's the most distant thing you can see with your eye alone.

AK, with EarthSky and Wikipedia Notes