

FIND THE TEAPOT, AND THE GALAXY'S CENTRE

Tonight, or on any moonless evening during a Northern Hemisphere summer or Southern Hemisphere winter, you can look in the evening hours toward the centre of our Milky Way galaxy. It's located in the direction of Sagittarius the Archer, with happens to contain a famous asterism – or noticeable pattern of stars – called the Teapot.

From the Northern Hemisphere, you'll be looking south during the evening hours for this star pattern.

From the Southern Hemisphere, look for the Teapot to climb high overhead around mid-to-late evening.

If you're blessed with a dark sky, finding all this will be easy. In a dark sky, you'll see a broad boulevard of stars – the edgewise view into our own Milky Way galaxy – which broadens and brightens in the direction of the galaxy's centre.

Or maybe you know the planets? If you have that dark sky, know that, in 2018, the starry band of the Milky Way passes between the Teapot and the golden planet Saturn. It lies about midway between the spout of the Teapot and Saturn this year. The chart above expands the view to include the constellation Scorpius, which is relatively bright and easy to spot for its curved Scorpion's Tail. Sagittarius the Archer – and its Teapot asterism – is next door to Scorpius on the sky's dome.

From the Northern Hemisphere, look southward in July and August evenings to see these stars. From the Southern Hemisphere, look generally northward, higher in the sky and turn this chart upside down.

We can't really see the galactic centre. It's heavily veiled by intervening stars, star clusters and nebulae (vast clouds of gas and dust). The centre of our Milky Way looms some 26,000 light-years away. But we can gaze toward this direction in space, and – if your sky is dark enough – it's a sight to behold!

By the way, the Teapot makes up the western half of the constellation Sagittarius the Archer.

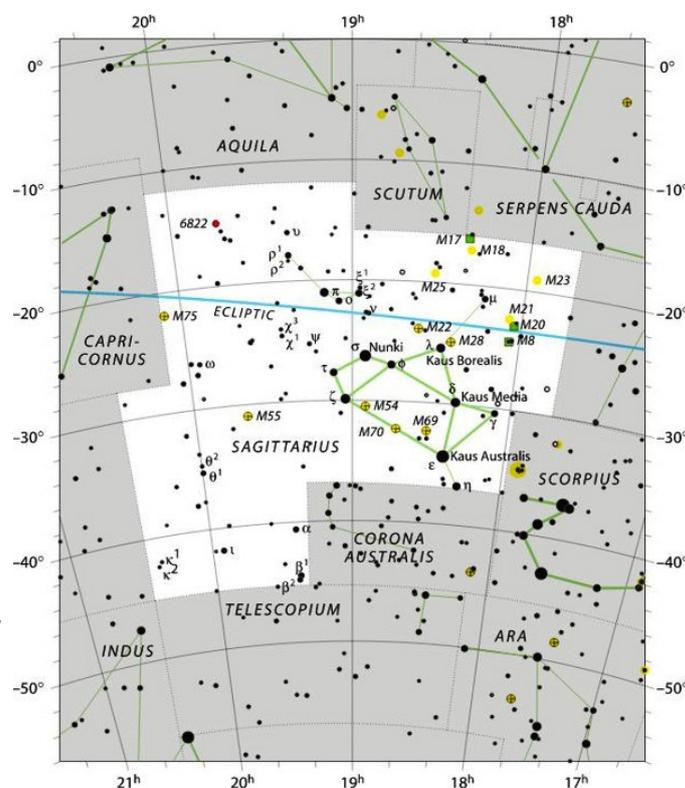
Modern eyes have an easier time envisioning a teapot than an Archer with a drawn-out bow (see the sky chart of Sagittarius below).

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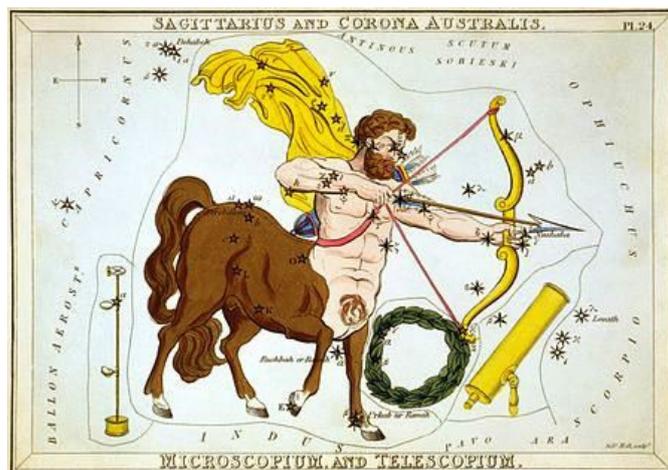
In Greek mythology, Sagittarius is usually identified as a centaur, half human, half horse. However, perhaps due to the Greeks' adoption of the Sumerian constellation, some confusion surrounds the identity of the archer. Some identify Sagittarius as the centaur Chiron, the son of Philyra and Cronus, who was said to have changed himself into a horse to escape his jealous wife. There are two centaurs in the sky, some identify Chiron with the other constellation, known as Centaurus.

The arrow of the constellation points towards the star Antares, the "heart of the scorpion", ready to avenge Scorpius's slaying of Orion.

AK, with EarthSky and Wikipedia Notes



Sagittarius, with the Teapot asterism outlined in green.



Sagittarius as depicted in Urania's Mirror, a set of constellation cards published in London c.1825