



Star & planet almanac 2005: A monthly guide to the sky at night

by Liesbeth Bisterbosch, translated by John Meeks

Henry Goulden Books, 2004. ISBN 0-904822-15-X. £12.99 (pbk). (The Chapel, Treligga, Delabole, Cornwall PL33 9EE. Tel. 01840-212728.)

This Almanac is in the form of a large scale (approx. 42cm×29cm) spiral bound calendar. Each month has its own page consisting of a horizon map of the night sky about an hour after sunset for the middle of the month, text commenting on the planets, constellations and prominent stars visible that month, and, running along the bottom of each page, the month's calendar with Moon phases and weekly sunrise/sunset times calculated for 51°N.

It is designed as 'an introduction to naked eye astronomy' and only the brighter stars which can be seen from towns and cities are shown. This simplifies the night sky and makes it less daunting for the beginner to identify constellations. The stars are shown in sizes relative to their brightness and each planet is given its own colour, which makes it easy to follow them on the maps throughout the year. Moon phases are also shown on the

map with the appropriate date beside. The major constellations have the traditional lines joining up the stars but the Zodiacal constellations are represented by illustrations, Aries a sitting ram, Taurus a charging bull and so on. The constellations are given their English names, again (presumably) to appeal to the beginner, although being told in February that Capella is 'high overhead in the Charioteer' momentarily floored me!

Before the monthly pages is a useful introduction to the motion of the stars and planets around the sky, and how to find your way around the night sky including determining north by the stars. After the map pages guidance is given in using the maps for different times (using the March map for a January midnight for example), and also a clear explanation of how the Sun, Moon and planets differ in their motion across the sky to that of the stars.

At the very end of the almanac, small (six to a page) monthly maps are given for the positions of the planets in the morning sky in the same format as the larger night sky maps, again for the middle of the month in question but this time for about an hour be-

fore sunrise. Finally, six maps for the circumpolar stars are given.

The text was translated from the original German which may account for some of the non-English words and abbreviations which have crept in – 'So' appearing as the abbreviation for Sunday, for example. Other small typographical errors appear throughout the almanac which, although they do not detract from the content, do spoil the overall impression of a well designed and produced publication. This is a great shame.

The design of the almanac is visually appealing, the illustrations clear and easy to follow, the text interesting and helpful. The whole is printed in dark blue on a pale blue background, and the sky maps are a deep mid-blue; so dare I say it, this is a pretty as well as a useful publication. I recommend it.

Patricia Barber

Patricia Barber is Assistant Secretary to the BAA. For many years she ran a Girl Guide company, and during this time attempted to get some of the Guides through their Stargazer badge!

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