

Halloween linked to astronomy?

Many of us recognize Halloween as a time to get dressed up and go trick or treating, but is it an actual holiday, especially from the stargazer's point of view? Halloween is in fact a "cross-quarter date," approximately midway between an equinox and a solstice. There are four cross-quarter dates throughout the year, essentially each being a minor holiday: Groundhog Day (Feb. 2), May Day (May 1), Lammas Day (Aug. 1) and Halloween (Oct. 31). Long ago, "the Celts of the British Isles used cross-quarter days to mark the beginnings of seasons," explains John Mosley of the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles.

"Our recognition of the cross-quarter days in the English-speaking world comes primarily from the Celts who lived in Britain in pre-Christian times," says astronomer Richard Pogge of Ohio State University.

Celts, as well as traditional Japanese Shinto societies, considered equinoxes and solstices the middle of a season. They chose cross-quarter dates as a time to ring in the beginning of each season. Regardless of when



Neel Roberts
The Sky's the Limit

you say a season begins or ends, equinoxes, solstices and cross-quarter days observe shifts in sunlight.

Cross-quarter days mark the midway spot of the sun's apparent path as the Earth orbits around the sun. Although the astronomical ties have largely been forgotten, each cross-quarter day has a matching minor holiday that dates back to the Celts.

"When the Celtic peoples were converted to Christianity, they kept their festivals but renamed them to conform to Christian practice," Pogge summarizes.

Sky watch for the next month

The Hunter's Moon takes place on Monday, Oct. 29, starting at 6 p.m. in the northeast-east horizon. It will be up all night and set just after 9 a.m. the next morning in the northwest-

west sky.

Venus will be crowned by Regulus on Wednesday, Oct. 3 just before 4 a.m. in the northeast-east. Venus will rise with Regulus right on top of it. It will be extra bright as it will look almost like a conjuncture.

The Orionids Meteor Shower peaks on Sunday, Oct. 21, one to two hours before dawn just to the north of constellation Orion's bright star Betelgeuse. With the second-fastest entry velocity of the annual showers at 15 per hour, meteors from the Orionids produce yellow and green colours and have been known to produce the odd fireball. The best viewing will be to the east after midnight to dawn.

Did you catch the Zodiacal light last month? It's a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. The best time to view the Zodiacal light is from Saturday, Oct. 13 for two weeks in the northeast before dawn.

Public events

The Saturday Observer's Night, which is hosted by All Star Telescope ([\[startelescope.com\]\(http://startelescope.com\)\), located just outside Didsbury, takes place on Oct. 20, starting at 8 p.m. until midnight. This full facility telescope dealer has a heated showroom, with refreshments and washrooms. Everything is provided free of charge. I am planning to attend, and you are welcome to caravan with a group I am assembling leaving Vulcan at about 4:30 p.m., weather permitting. We stop for a Chinese buffet before heading to the celestial farm for the evening. For more information, contact Ken From at 866-310-8844 or visit \[www.all-startelescope.com/pages/observer-nights\]\(http://www.all-startelescope.com/pages/observer-nights\).](http://www.all-</p></div><div data-bbox=)

Monthly public stargazing at the Vulcan Tourism and Trek Station next takes place Friday, Oct. 12. Have you checked us out this year at all? We've had a great year so far, so don't hesitate to get involved. We'll talk about the Hunter's moon rising this month and much more, weather permitting. A small indoor presentation is followed by star gazing. Treats and refreshments are provided free of charge, and all welcome. For further information, contact the Trek Station at 403-485-2994.