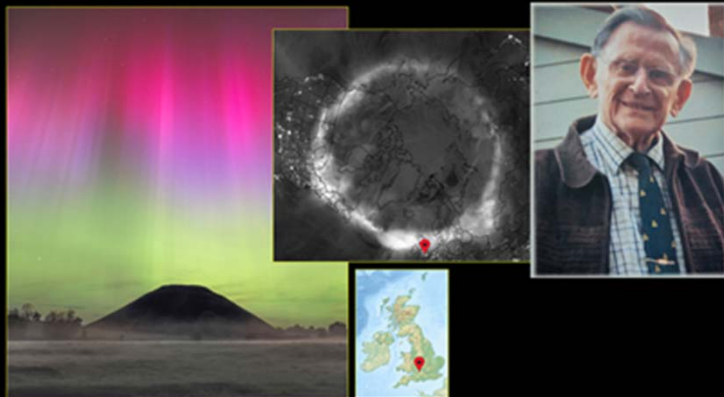




16th September 2026

Tonight: Year 5 - Meeting No 34

- The sky tonight
- Recent news, sightings and Members' Matter
- "Great Auroral Events" – a talk in memory of David M Willis
– Professor Mike Lockwood FRS
- Forward look



The sky tonight (20:45): stellarium-web.org



The sky tonight (20:45): stellarium-web.org



The sky early tomorrow (05:30): stellarium-web.org



In the news...







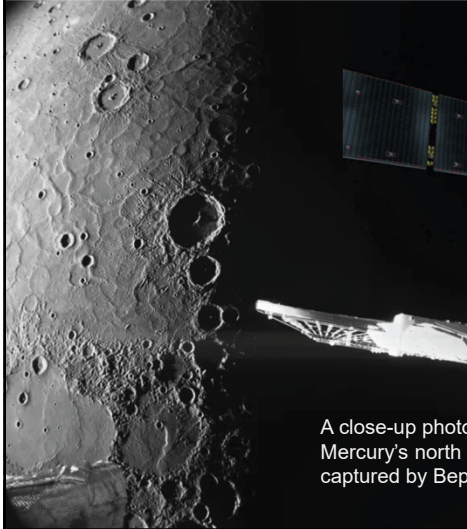
Eight-year mission to Mercury enters most perilous stage

BepiColombo, the most complex probe ever sent to the planet, is preparing to shed its British-built propulsion module before settling into orbit

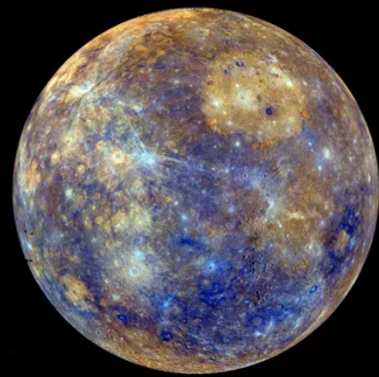
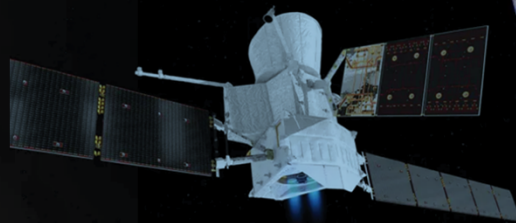


Rhys Blakely, Science Editor

Thursday September 03 2026, 4.15pm, The Times



A close-up photo of Mercury's north pole captured by BepiColombo



The Japanese probe, Mio, will study Mercury's magnetic field and effects of charged particles from the Sun.

The European probe, Mercury Planetary Orbiter, will carry an instrument led by University of Leicester using X-rays to map the chemical composition of Mercury's surface.

Other instruments will photograph the planet's battered landscape, probe its enormous iron-rich core, and search its permanently shadowed polar regions for ice.

Could Martian moon be an alien spaceship? This scientist will find out

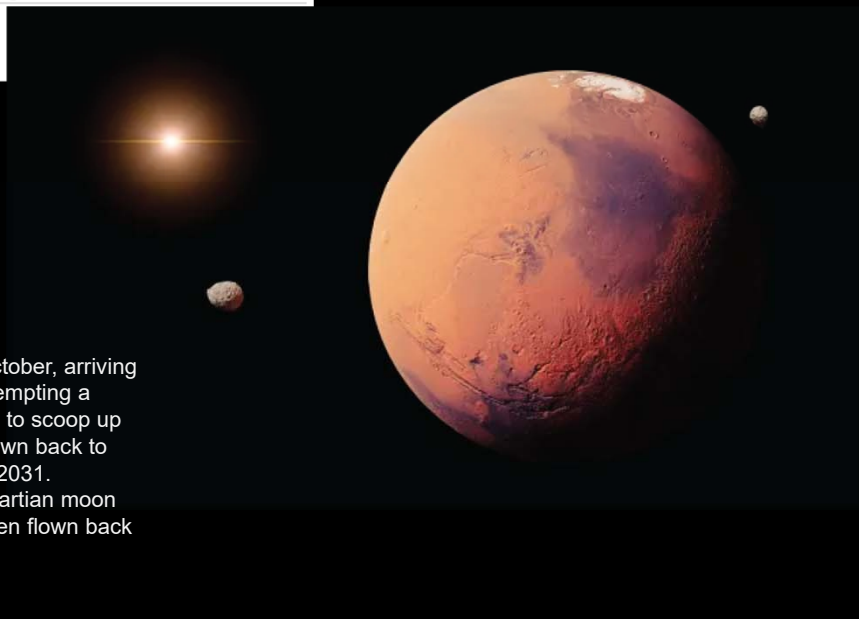
Wild theories have claimed Phobos is hollow or even an alien craft. Sara Russell, from the Natural History Museum, is part of a mission to dig into its soil



Kaya Burgess, Science Correspondent

Monday August 31 2026, 8.55am, The Times

A spacecraft will be launched in October, arriving at Phobos next summer before attempting a landing on the surface of the moon to scoop up some of its soil. Samples will be flown back to Earth for analysis, arriving by July 2031. This will be the first landing on a Martian moon and the first time samples have been flown back to Earth from the Martian system.



September night sky: Opportunity knocks for Neptune



Chris Lintott

Monday August 31 2026, 12.01am, The Times

This September marks the 180th anniversary of the (formal) discovery of Neptune by Johann Gottfried Galle (Berlin) in 1846.

Urbain Le Verrier predicted its existence and position, and sent the coordinates to Galle, asking him to verify. Galle found Neptune on the same night he received Le Verrier's letter, within 1° of the predicted position. The discovery of Neptune was a dramatic validation of celestial mechanics and a remarkable moment of 19th-century science.



Neptune is at opposition on the 26th September. With the full moon just above it, *this is a great opportunity to see our most distant planet.*

Neptune completes one orbit around the sun in a period of 165 years, so has travelled around the sky once since its discovery.

Giant 'superpuff' planets lighter than candyfloss are discovered

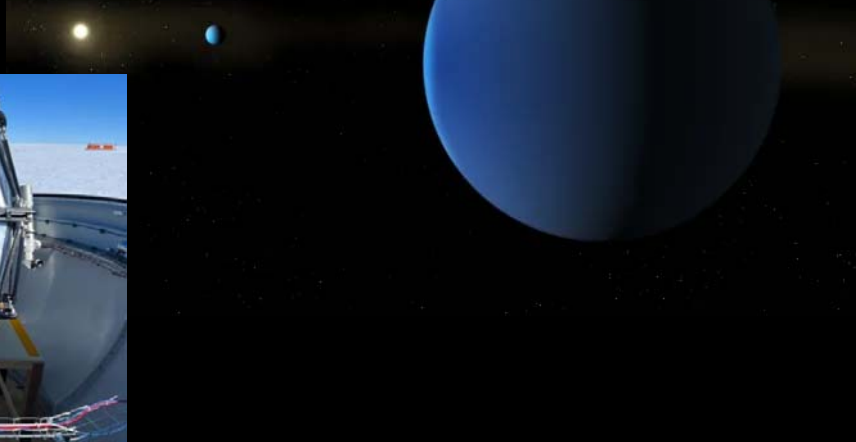
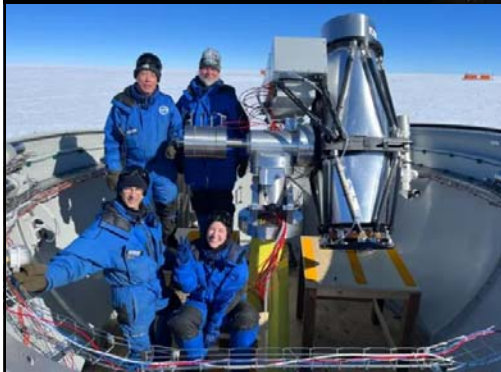
They are the largest such worlds yet detected, with the lead scientist behind the discovery saying it is rare to find two in the same system



Kaya Burgess, Science and Religious Affairs Correspondent

Thursday June 25 2026, 2.01am, The Times

Two planets in orbit around a star 1,100 light years from Earth are as big as Jupiter but have densities of just 0.038g and 0.047g per cm^3 .



Alan Hale obituary: star gazer who spotted a comet

Astronomer who co-discovered Comet Hale-Bopp and encouraged the use of science as a tool to unite nations and cultures dies aged 68

Wednesday July 08 2026, 12.01am, The Times



Professor Sir Francis Graham-Smith obituary: Trailblazing astronomer royal

Trailblazer who learnt the basics by lying on his back on a starlit night and gazing up and went on to help to explain the origins of the universe, dies aged 102



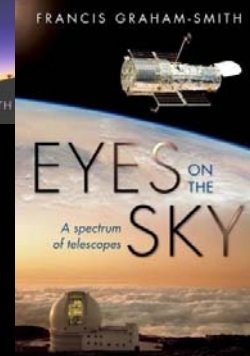
Graham-Smith was the director of the Royal Observatory Greenwich at Herstmonceux

SCIENCE PHOTO LIBRARY

The Times

Wednesday July 02 2025, 12.01am, The Times

Astronomer Royal 1982-90






THE TIMES VIEW

Losing the Lovell Telescope would be a disaster for space science

The UK's largest telescope, at Jodrell Bank, should not fall victim to bean counters

The Times View
Thursday July 30 2026, 9.45pm, The Times

Musicians add star power to campaign to save Jodrell Bank

Brian May, Johnny Marr and Jarvis Cocker are among more than 200 public figures who have called on Andy Burnham to intervene over planned funding cuts

Rhys Blakely, Science Editor
Monday August 03 2026, 12.35pm, The Times

Andy Burnham pledges to save Jodrell Bank observatory from closure

The prime minister fondly recalled school trips to the site, which he called a research and heritage asset, but which faces losing government funding from 2028

Kaya Burgess, Science Correspondent
Wednesday September 02 2026, 12.25pm, The Times

Nasa's next great space telescope that will map the dark universe

Built around a mirror once intended for American spies, the \$4.3 billion Nancy Grace Roman telescope will change our understanding of the universe within a year

Rhys Blakely, Science Editor
Wednesday August 26 2026, 11.11am, The Times



The Roman space telescope has the same resolution as Hubble but a field of view 100 times larger.

Over its 5-year primary mission, Roman is expected to reveal 100,000 new alien worlds and measure light from nearly a billion galaxies, shedding light on dark matter.



Nancy Grace Roman, who in 1961 became Nasa's first chief astronomer

Sugar raining down from space may have helped create life on Earth

Cluster of sweet molecules in Milky Way gas cloud offers clue to possible origins of DNA, astronomers claim



Kaya Burgess, Science Correspondent

Monday July 13 2026, 4.05pm, The Times

Scientists have discovered sugar molecules in clouds of interstellar gas, suggesting a key ingredient for DNA and RNA could have come to our planet from deep space.

Scientists used two telescopes, including the Yebes radio telescope in Spain, to examine a gas cloud near the centre of the Milky Way. They found evidence of a sugar molecule called erythrulose.

These gas clouds could also have helped to seed life across the universe, beyond our planet, the study suggests.



The Earth is spinning faster. So how should we measure time?

More than five decades after the introduction of the first leap second, experts plan a historic shift to spare us from potential technological meltdown



Rhys Blakely, Science Editor

Sunday September 06 2026, 6.00pm, The Times

Since the early 1970s, we have occasionally added an extra leap second to Co-ordinated Universal Time (UTC), the standard used to keep clocks around the world in step. The extra second kept clocks aligned with the turning of the planet, which was slowing down.

Now, for reasons not fully understood, the Earth is rotating a little faster. This means that for the first time it may be necessary to skip a second.

In October national delegates will meet at the General Conference on Weights and Measures. Under a draft proposal, leap seconds would cease to be used from May 20th next year. Instead, atomic time would be allowed gradually to drift away from the Earth's rotation, with the gap eventually permitted to grow to as much as an hour.



FB post by Astrovibe
7th September

Milky Way over Salar de Uyuni, Bolivia

Astrovibe

969K followers • 2 following

 AstroVibe

Exploring space, science, and innovation through real and AI-generated visuals. Bringing you amazing facts, discoveries, and knowledge to spark curiosity every day.

Hire Me: astrovibe28@gmail.com

Order Custom Content:

Digital creator

Subscribe

Message

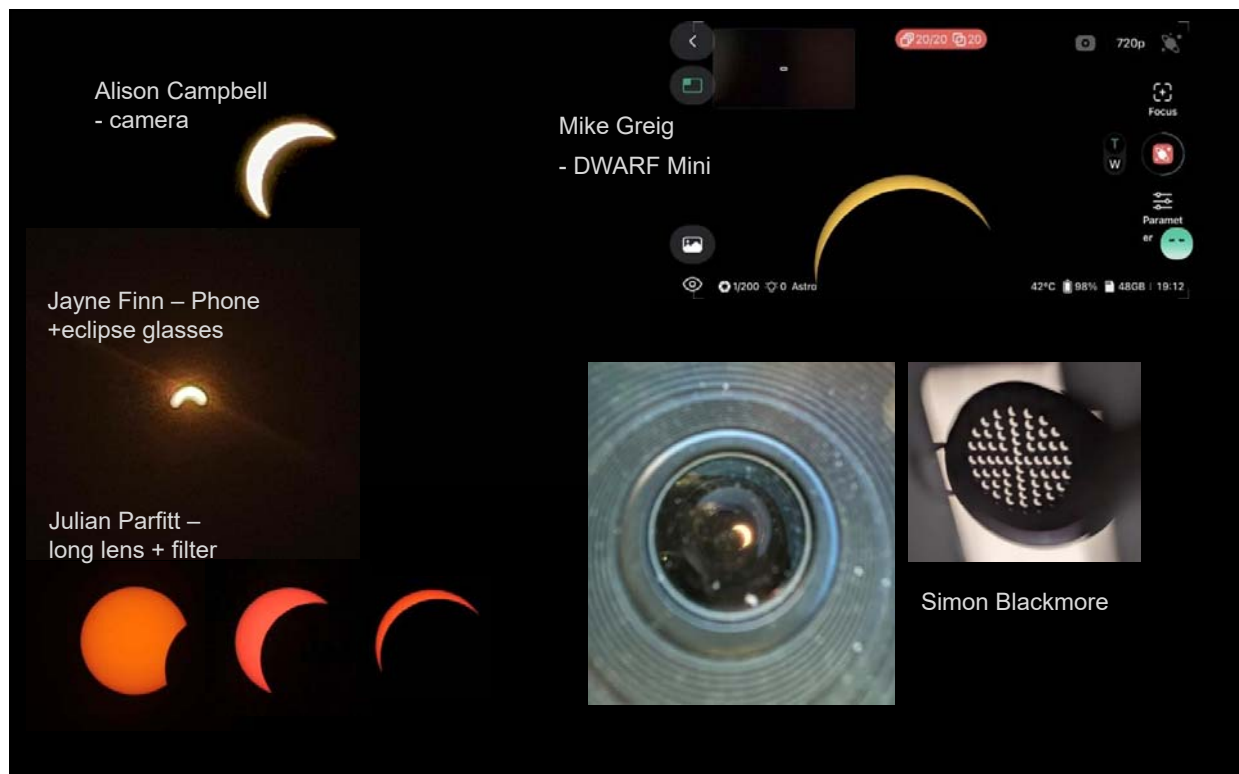
Follow



Recent sightings and
Members Matter

Venus Fly-by
30th April 20:38





Simon Blackmore



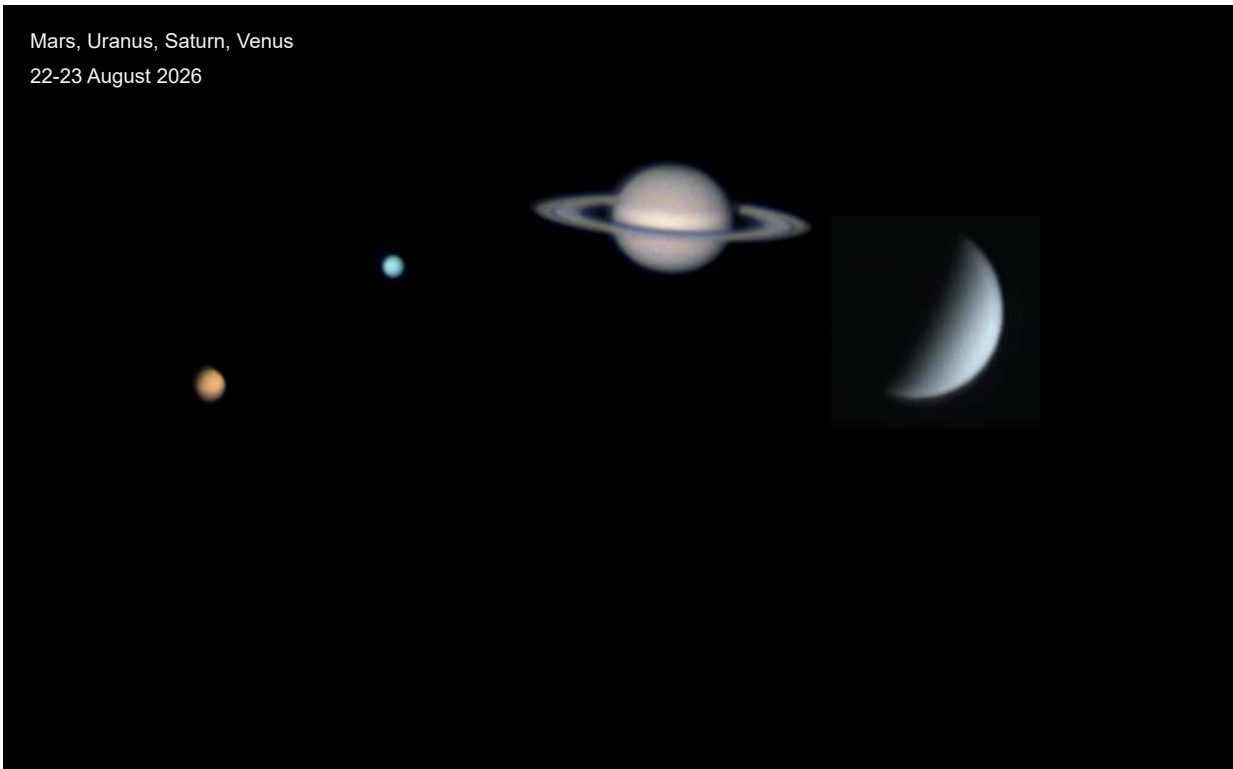
Bartle Frere

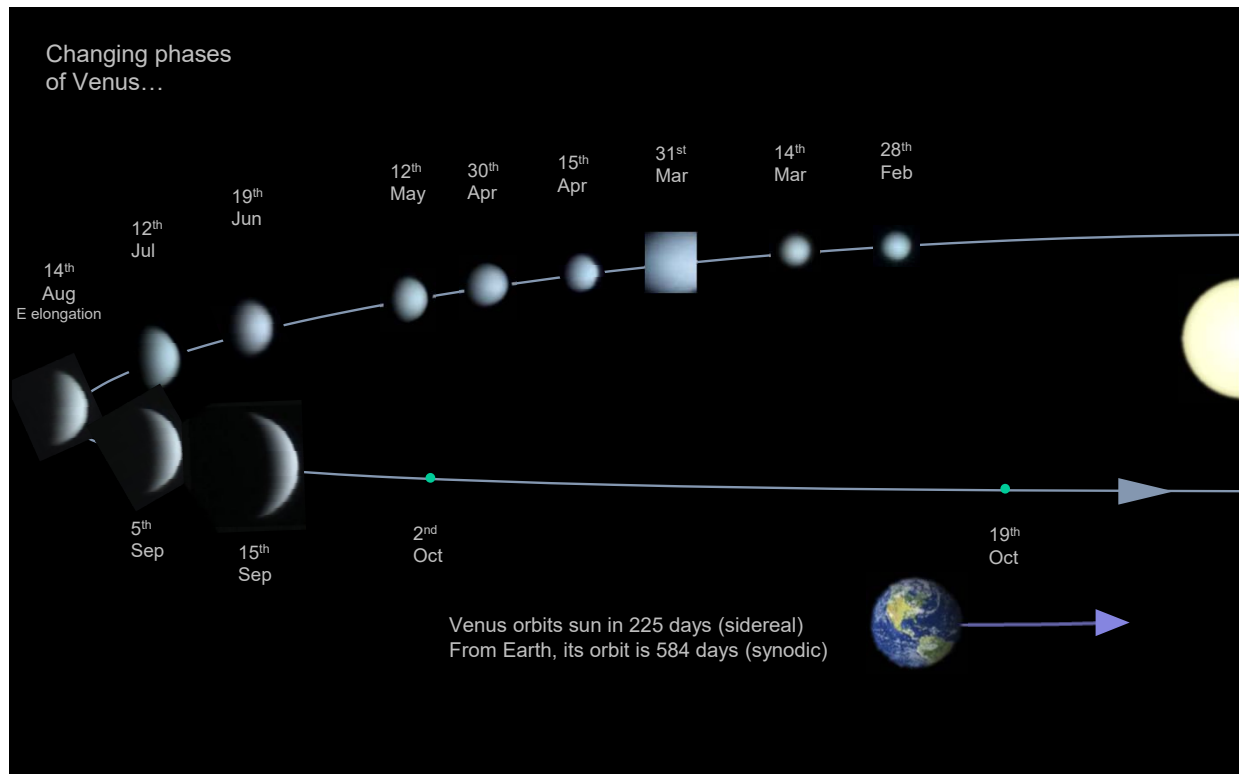


Kevin Langley

Copilot AI response to how a lunar eclipse would appear from the Moon

Mars, Uranus, Saturn, Venus
22-23 August 2026









Kevin Corbett
20th Aug 19:22

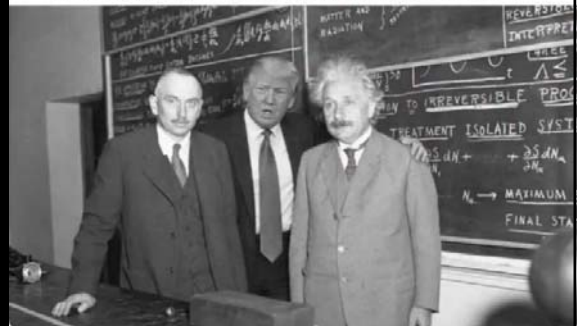


John Scoble
24th Aug



via Simon Blackmore

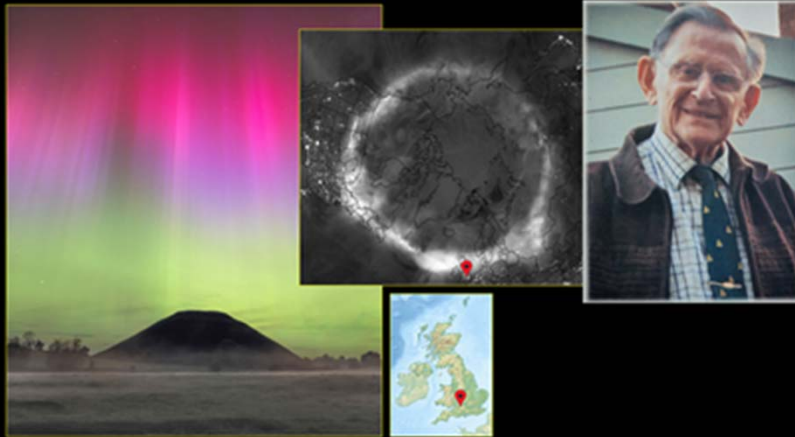
This is a rare photo of Donald Trump from 1934, helping Albert Einstein finish the theory of relativity. According to Trump, Einstein had been stuck for weeks. "Very smart guy. Terrible with numbers. I looked at the board and said, Albert, put a little 2 up there. He loved it."



via Kevin Langley

Tonight's Feature

"Great Auroral Events" – a talk in memory of David M Willis
– Professor Mike Lockwood FRS



Looking forward...

What to see in the coming month

September

- 22nd : Venus at greatest brightness (during daylight); Equinox on 23rd
- 26th : Mars in line with Castor and Pollux (early morning: 01:30-05:30)
- 26-27th : Moon near Saturn (late on 26th, early on 27th)
- 30th: Moon (waning gibbous) rises with the Pleiades (from about 21:00)

Planets visible: (Me), (V), Ma, J, S, U, N

Moon: Full: 26th

October

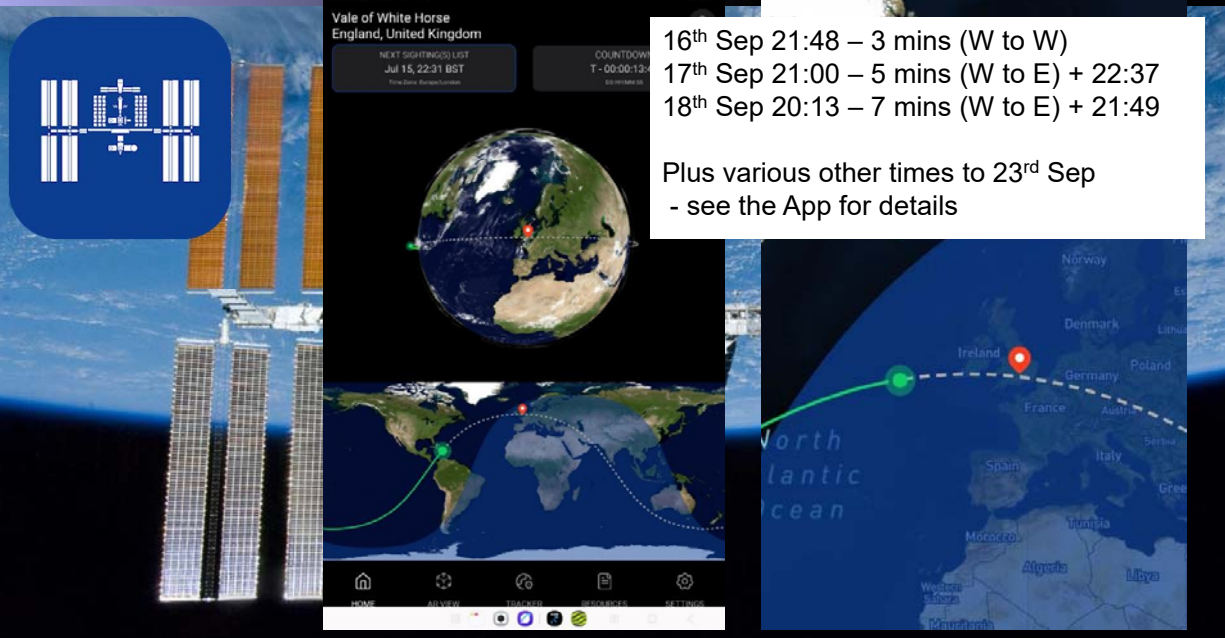
- 3rd : Moon forms triangle with Castor and Pollux (from ~ midnight)
- 5th : Moon near Mars (within ~1 degree) and 4 degrees from Pleiades
- 10th : Mars rises in Beehive cluster (~02:00 to 06:00)

Planets visible: (Me), (V), Ma, J, S, U, N

Moon: New: 10th Full: 26th

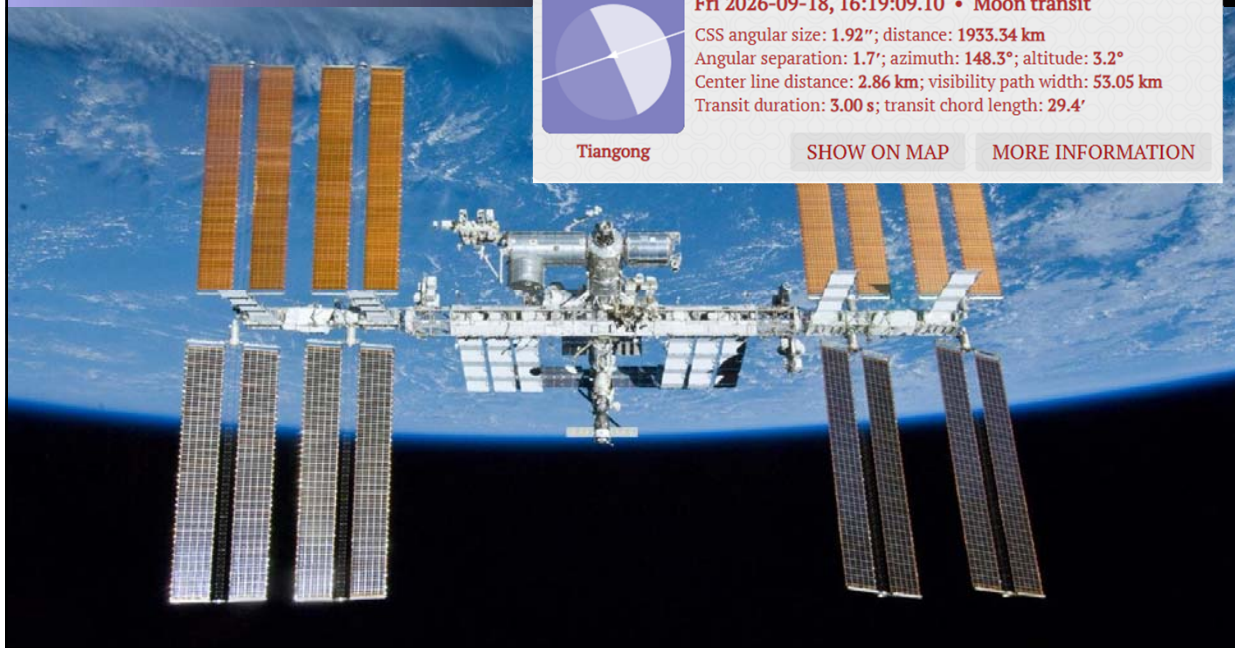
ISS visible from Marcham

From SpotTheStation NASA App



ISS transits visible from Marcham

transit-finder.com





Fri 2026-09-18, 16:19:09.10 • Moon transit
CSS angular size: 1.92"; distance: 1933.34 km
Angular separation: 1.7"; azimuth: 148.3°; altitude: 3.2°
Center line distance: 2.86 km; visibility path width: 53.05 km
Transit duration: 3.00 s; transit chord length: 29.4'

Tiangong

[SHOW ON MAP](#) [MORE INFORMATION](#)

Future meetings...

- 14th Oct : "Very Large Telescopes in South Africa" - Prof Phil Charles
- 18th Nov : "What are we really made of?" - Kevin Langley
- 16th Dec : "Astrochef" – details currently under wraps!
- **Change in date** for January meeting: now on **13th January**

Wednesdays at 7:30pm

Marcham Star Gazers
– 21 members



- Sharing images with other group members
- Alerts: what's happening now
- Notify last-minute telescope sessions

Marcham Star Gazers
WhatsApp group

