



Evening sky in February 2011

At this time of year, on a moonless night far from city lights, the Milky Way is a swathe of light arching north-south across the sky, slanting slightly to the East. This is the combined light of millions of stars too far away to be seen individually. From urban areas its faint light is obliterated by the city lights (light pollution). Look towards Orion and you are looking towards the outer edge of our Milky Way galaxy, the star city in which we live.

Almost overhead are the two brightest stars in the night sky, Sirius in Canis Major (Big Dog), the brightest, and Canopus in Carina (Keel), the second brightest. North-west are Achernar in Eridanus, the River, and Fomalhaut in Piscis Austrinus, the Southern Fish. Towards the south-east the Southern Cross is on its side, with the Pointers lower down. The Pointer furthest from the Cross, Alpha Centauri, is a stellar system of three stars of which, Proxima, the red dwarf star, 4.2 light-years distant, is the star closest to our solar system.

Jupiter is in Pisces.

The Moon is in the evening sky from 5 February until 22 February.