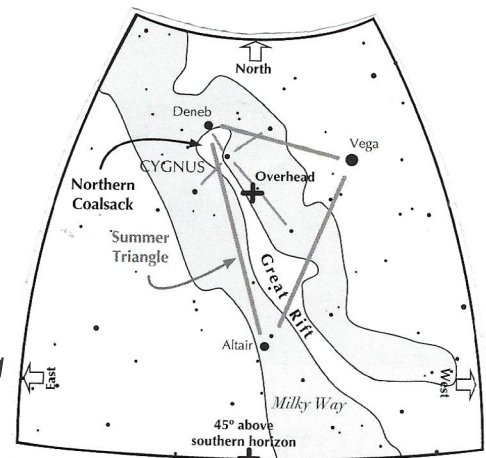


Skywatch September/October: An Immense Nebula Splits the Milky Way, Lengthwise

Early evening in late summer and early fall is a great time to head to outside and admire what lies above. If you are fortunate enough to be under dark, moonless skies, you are in for a real treat.

Beginning in the northeast, running overhead, then dropping to the southwest horizon is the variedly glowing ribbon of the Milky Way. Directly above appears one of its brighter regions, marked by the bright star Deneb, which twinkles as the tail star of Cygnus, the swan. Along its spine is an intriguing feature that at first easily escapes notice, then becomes much more obvious.



Facing South in September or October 90 minutes after sunset.

Known as the "Great Rift," this dark lane splitting the Milky Way lengthwise is a complex of enormous clouds of dust imbedded within the plane of our galaxy. These vast, dark nebulae contain the building blocks of future stars which obstructing most of the light emanating from stars far behind it.

The section immediately to Deneb's south is a seemingly starless area called the Northern Coalsack. The dust clouds forming it and much of the rest of the Great Rift lie 3,000 light-years from us on Earth.

It is amazing what you can see on a clear night. You just need to make the time to gaze skyward.

JOHN GOSS

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