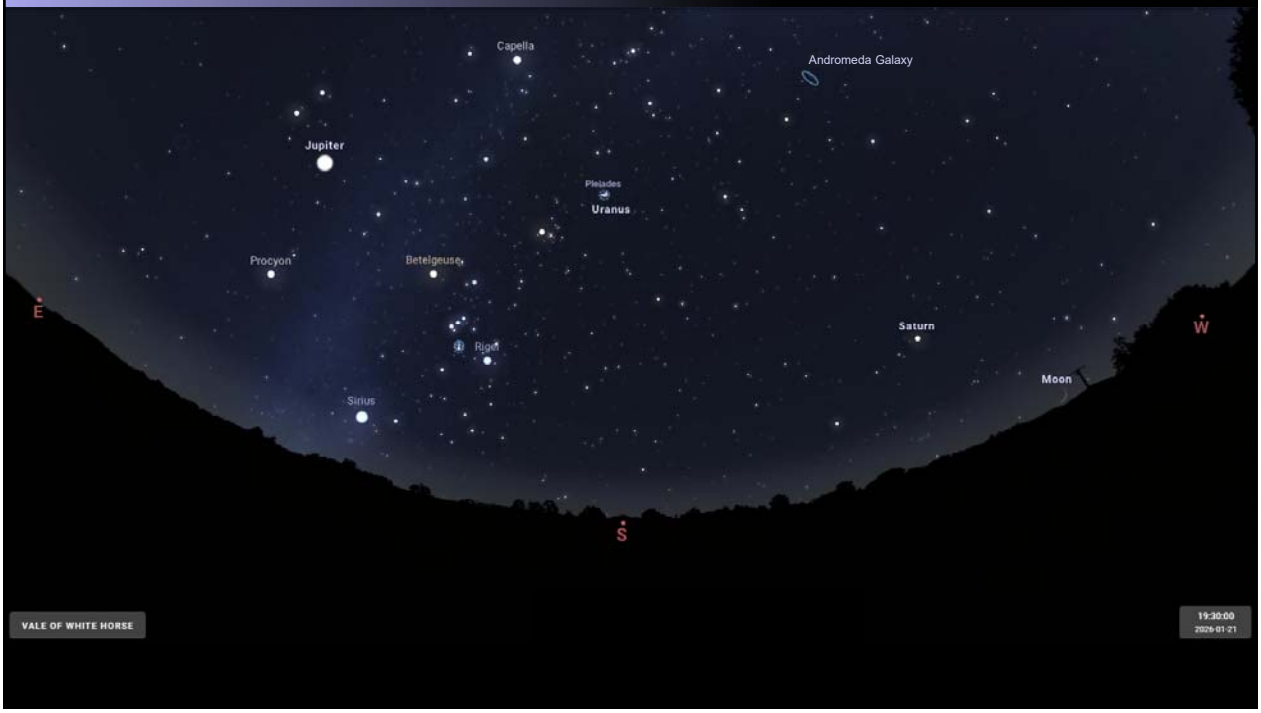
Marcham ASTRONOMY

21st January 2026

Tonight: Year 4 - Meeting No 29

- The sky tonight
- Recent news, sightings and Members' Matter
- Feature: "*Stars and Stones: Megalithic alignments*" – Simon Blackmore
- Forward look

The sky tonight (19:30)**:** stellarium-web.org

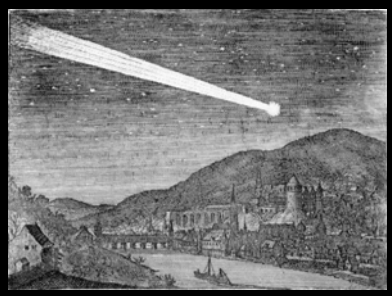


The sky tonight (19:30)**:** stellarium-web.org

In the news…

Earliest depiction of a comet in Dutch art

The Chief Commissioners of the Wharves by Wallerant Vaillant (1674)



Great comet of 1618-19 - Heidelberg

Earth's magnetic conveyor belt has fed moon for billions of years

Plus: the weather forecast where you are

Paul Simons

Wednesday January 14 2026, 12.01am, The Times

Climate change

Space | Weather

Nasa

Apollo moon missions first brought back lunar samples of soil to Earth in the early 1970s

The Earth and moon have been dancing together in a close embrace for billions of years, but recently an unexpected effect of that partnership was revealed — the Earth's atmosphere has been feeding the moon's surface with useful materials for billions of years.

When Nasa's Apollo moon missions first brought back lunar samples of soil to Earth in the early 1970s, scientists were puzzled by traces of volatile chemicals such as water, carbon dioxide, helium, argon, and nitrogen found in the moon's soil. Some of these materials had clearly come from the solar wind, but a big surprise was that some of the substances, particularly nitrogen ions, had originated from Earth. So how did these particles get dumped on the lunar surface?

In the past, it was thought they were most likely knocked loose from the Earth's upper atmosphere by the solar wind, the steady flow of charged particles from the sun streaming out into space. However, the amounts of substances found in the lunar soil, particularly nitrogen, were too large to be explained by the solar wind alone, and the explanation remained out of reach for many years. A recent investigation may have put an end to the mystery, with research suggesting that the Earth's magnetic field acts as a conveyor belt that funnels particles from our planet's atmosphere to the moon along magnetic lines that can stretch to our satellite.

Watch: Nasa astronauts return to Earth after evacuation from space

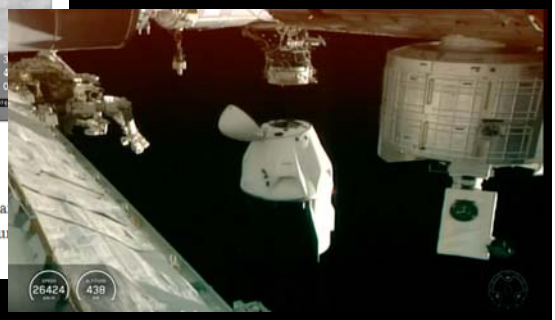
Crew 11 splashed down off California on Thursday morning after travelling around the Earth 2,672 times during their time onboard the International Space Station

Jacqui Goddard, Miami

Thursday January 15 2026, 1.05pm, The Times

Space | Nasa

SpaceX



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Four crew members from the International Space Station have returned sa
Earth, completing the first medical evacuation in the 65-year history of hu
spaceflight.

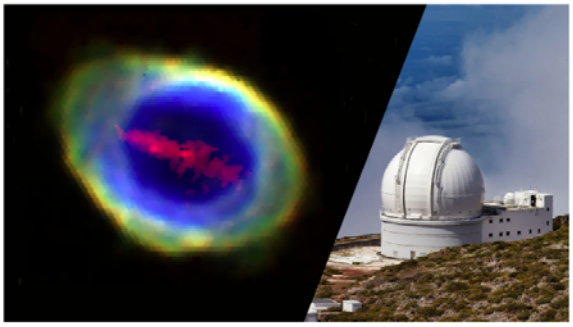
Iron ‘bar’ found in deep space hints at what might happen to Earth

Astronomers say the discovery of vast cloud of iron atoms may be the remains of a rocky planet that was vaporised when its star expanded at the end of its life

Rhys Blakely, Science Editor

Thursday January 15 2026, 9.58pm, The Times

Space Nasa



The Ring Nebula, 2,400 light years away, was split into its component colours by an instrument on the William Herschel Telescope in the Canary Islands

Scientists have discovered a massive and mysterious “bar” of iron in outer space that may offer a glimpse of what will eventually happen to the Earth.

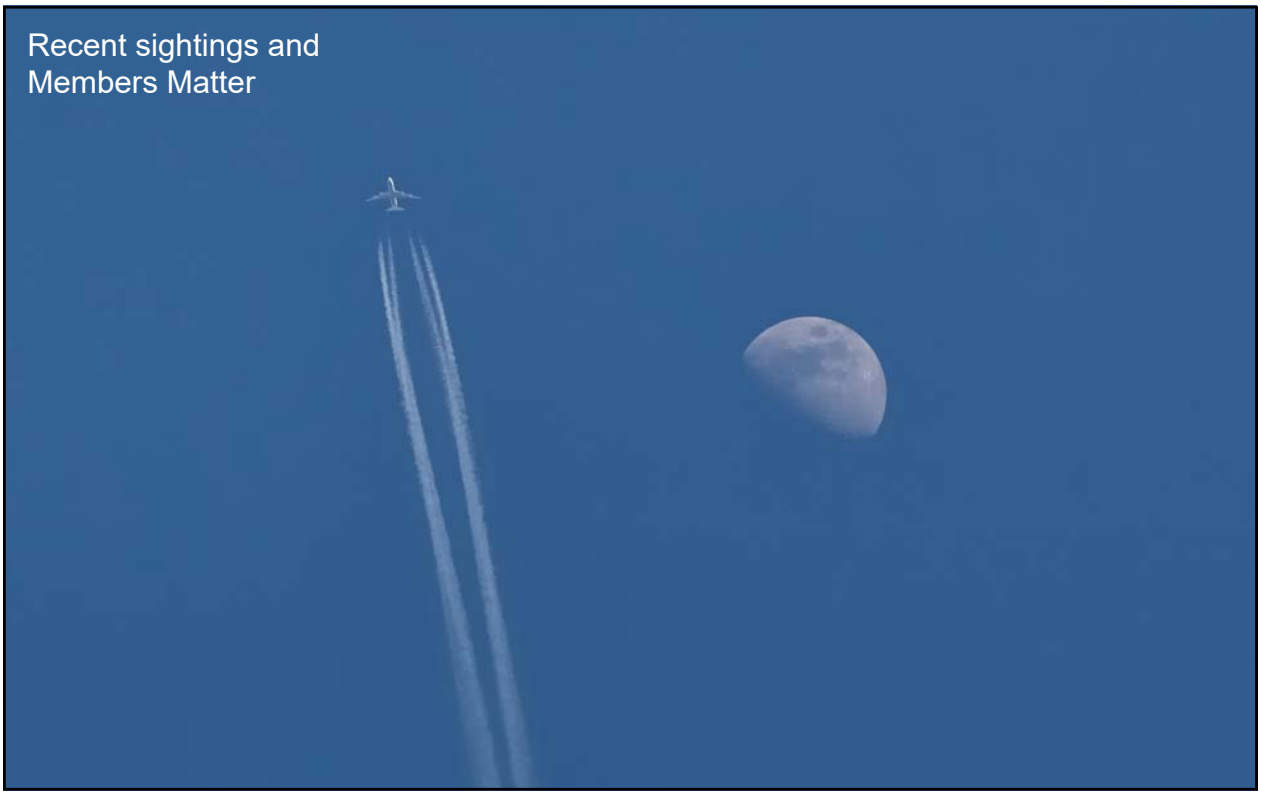
The bar-shaped cloud of iron atoms is almost four trillion miles long. If you could drive across it at 70mph, the journey would take more than eight million years.

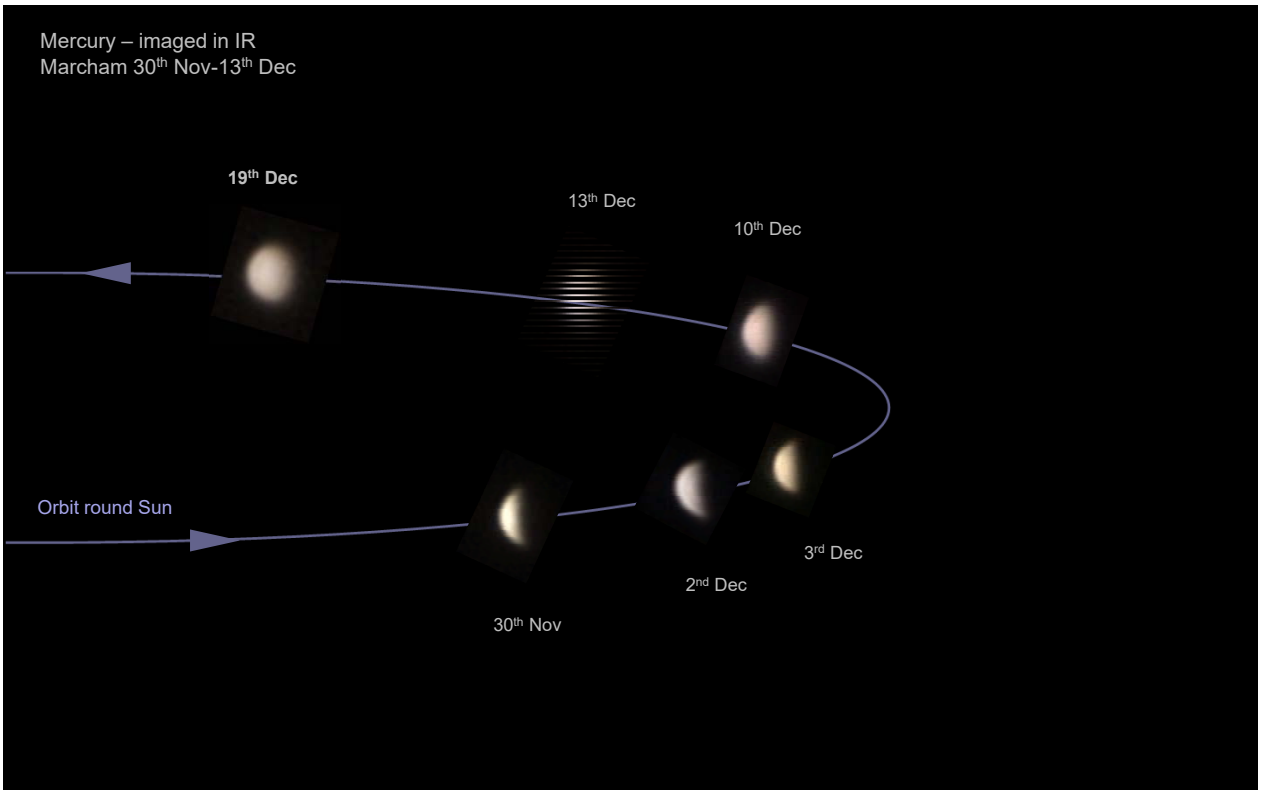
It was discovered inside the Ring Nebula, a spectacular ring-shaped cloud of gas about 2,400 light years away, by a team led by astronomers at Cardiff University and University College London (UCL).

According to the researchers, the total mass of iron atoms in the structure is comparable to the mass of Mars. The Ring Nebula, first spotted in 1779 in the northern constellation of Lyra by the French astronomer Charles Messier, is a colourful shell of gas thrown off by a dying star. Our sun is expected to go through a similar process in several billion years’ time.

How the iron bar formed is unknown. One possible scenario is that it is the remains of a rocky planet that was vaporised when its star expanded at the end of its life. If true, it could show us Earth’s ultimate fate. Iron accounts for roughly a third of the Earth’s mass and is the chief constituent of the planet’s core.

Recent sightings and Members Matter




Mercury – imaged in IR
Marcham 30th Nov-13th Dec
19th Dec
13th Dec
10th Dec
Orbit round Sun
3rd Dec
2nd Dec
30th Nov


M71: Globular Cluster 'Angelfish'
20th December 17:30-18:00
13,000 ly away in Sagitta
8" Telescope


Comet 3I ATLAS in Leo 168m miles away
21st December 2025 01:04-02:45
8” telescope


Simon Blackmore
24th December 22:53


Juilian Parfitt
Garford 26th December


Juilian Parfitt – Saturn and Jupiter
Garford 26th December

Laser at Diamond Light Source
Marking 80 years of Harwell Science
1st January

Bob Anderson

https://www.harwellcampus.com/history/

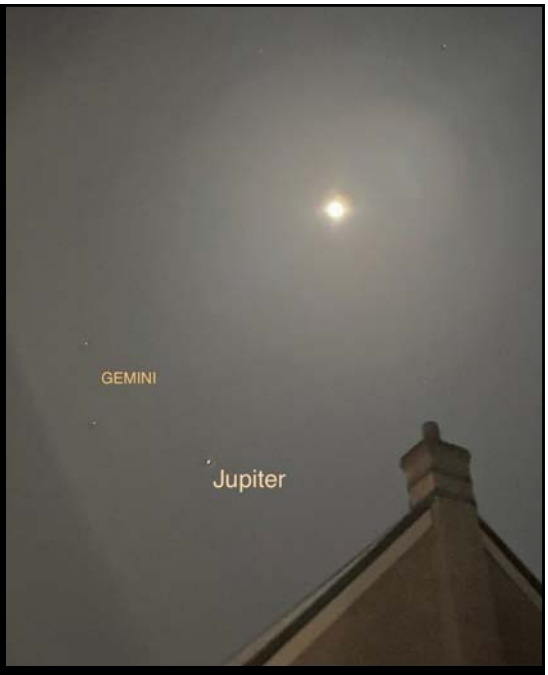
Facebook via Kevin Corbett


Jupiter, Castor, Pollux
1st January 20:24
Galloway


1st January 20:27
Galloway

Simon Blackmore
2nd January

16:38



20:20


Full (Wolf) Moon
3rd January 08:44
Galloway

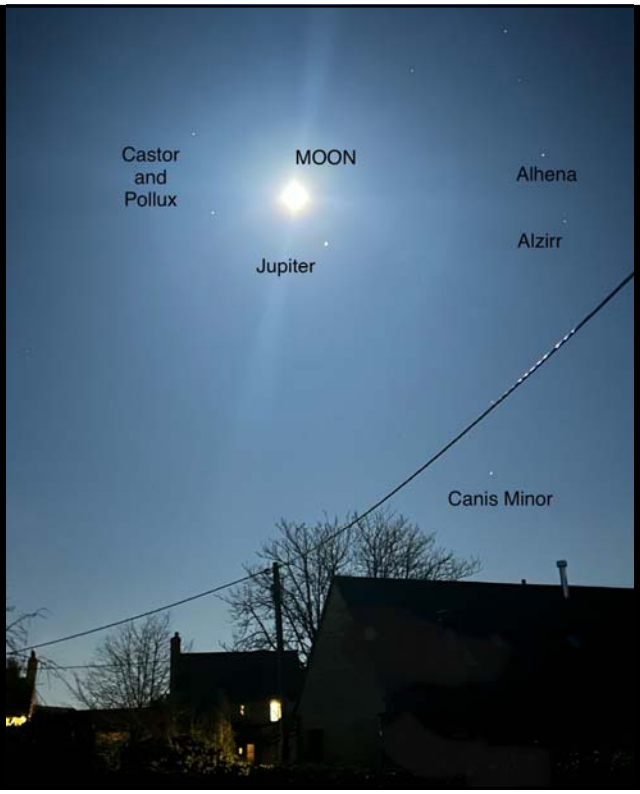

Full (Wolf) Moon
3rd January 08:45
Galloway

Full (Wolf) Moon
3rd January 16:24
Galloway

Full (Wolf) Moon
3rd January 16:56
Galloway

Georgie Blackmore
3rd January 2026 4:28 pm
Abingdon Bridge

Simon Blackmore
3rd January 21:30




Jayne Finn
Moon, Jupiter
Castor & Pollux
3rd January 17:47
iPhone


Waning Moon
14th January 06:36

Carolyn Blackmore

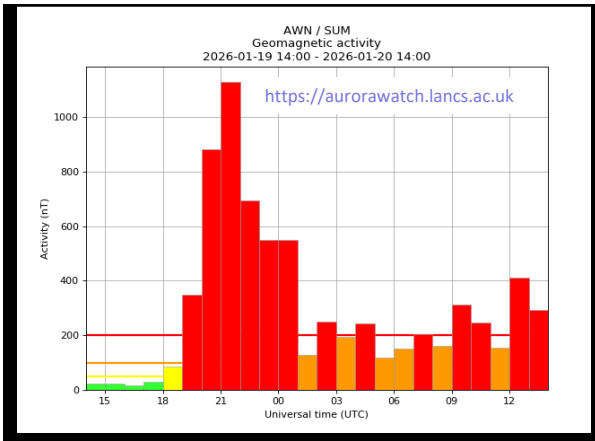
Jupiter and GRS
5th January 2026 22:22

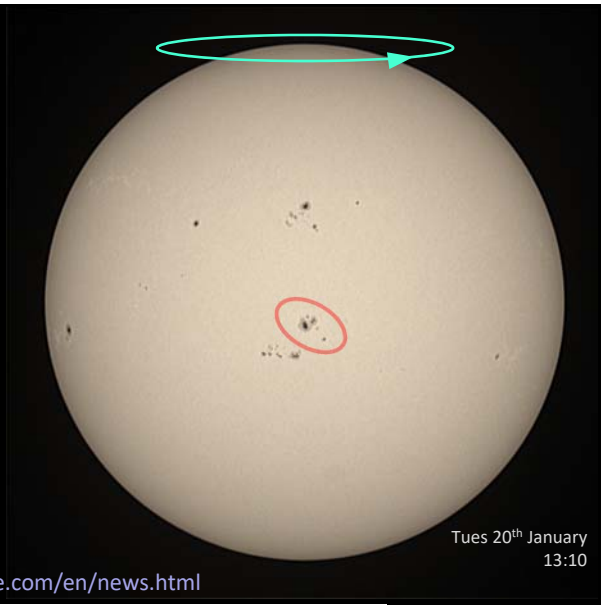

Jupiter and GRS
30th January **2025**


Jupiter and Ganymede
10th January 2026 19:23


Jupiter and Ganymede
10th January 2026 20:33


Kilbogget Park, Dublin
19th January c.21:00
© Rob Asher





Monday 19th January

Tues 20th January
13:10

https://www.spaceweatherlive.com/en/news.html

We just saw the arrival of the coronal mass ejection that was launched during yesterday's X1.9 solar flare. This means it took the CME only 25 hours to travel from the Sun to Earth. That is fast considering most CMEs take two to four days to travel this distance!

Tonight's Feature…

Stars and Stones: Megalithic alignments

– Simon Blackmore

Looking forward…

What to see in the coming month

January

- 23rd: Saturn 2.2° SW of Neptune and Moon 5.9° NE of Saturn
- 27th: Moon (68% lit) crossing N part of Pleiades (~21:00-23:00)
- 30th: Moon and Jupiter ~11° apart (early evening)
- 31st: Moon, Jupiter, Castor and Pollux in a rectangle (mid-evening)

Planets visible: J, S, U, N Moon: New: 18th Jan

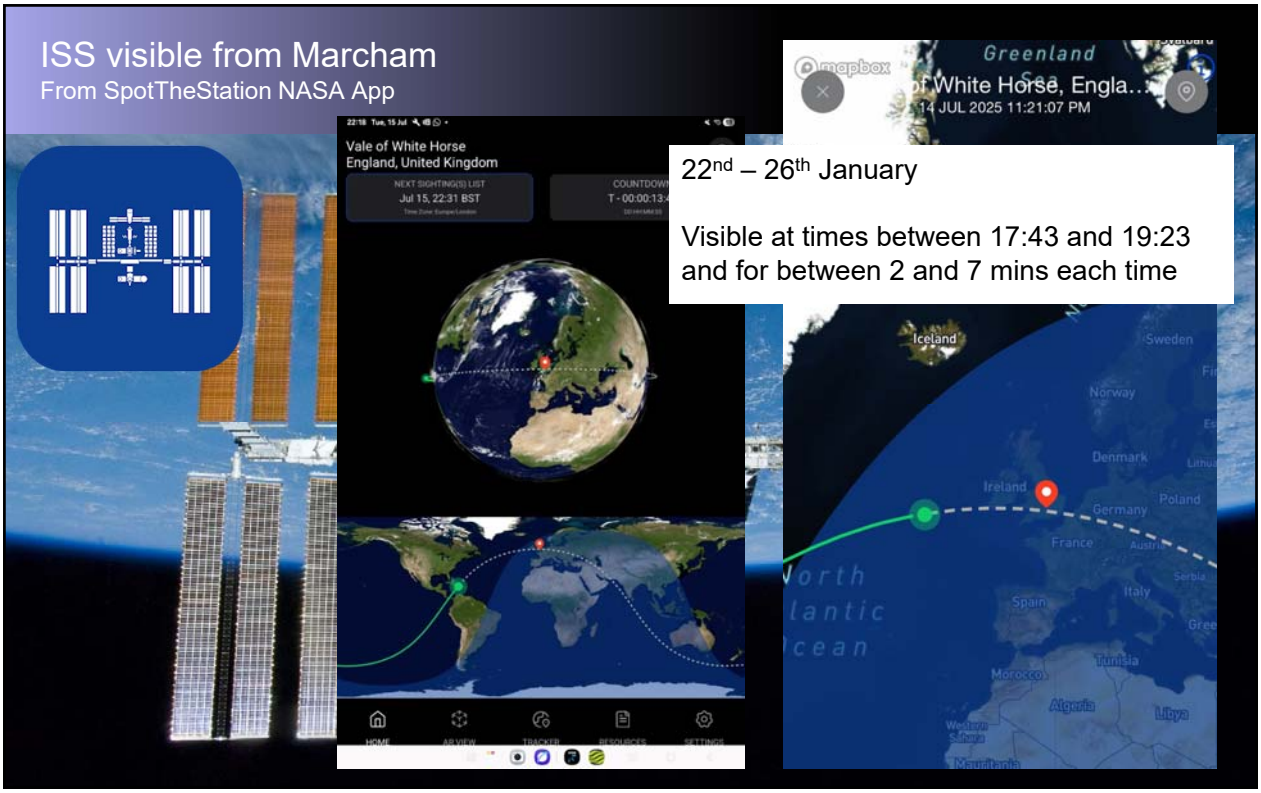
February

- 3rd: Moon… < 0.5° from Regulus (8' from edge) (03:00) 7th: …2° from Spica (05:30)
- 16th: Saturn near Neptune (<2° apart) - early evening
- 18th: Moon between Venus and Mercury (evening, after twilight and before 19:00)
- 19th: Mercury at greatest eastern elongation (18:15-19:00); highest altitude on 20th
- 26th: Venus and Mercury in conjunction (18:00) + Moon near Jupiter (evening) ~16° apart

Planets visible: Me, (V), J, S, U, N Moon: Full: 1st Feb New: 17th Feb

ISS visible from Marcham

From SpotTheStation NASA App

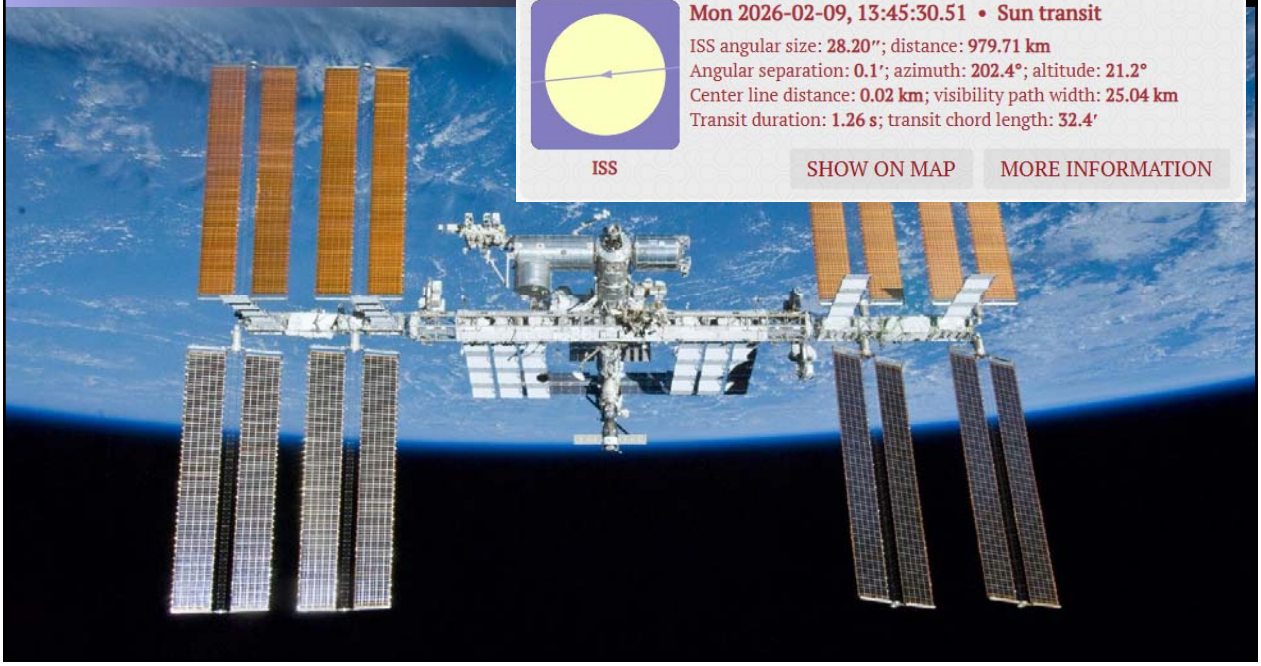


22nd – 26th January

Visible at times between 17:43 and 19:23 and for between 2 and 7 mins each time

ISS transits visible from Marcham

transit-finder.com



Future meetings…

- Feb 18th *: Focus on Saturn*
- Mar 18th *: "Games in Space"* – Mark Buckley
- Apr 15th *: "The Long Crendon Observatory"* – Gordon Rogers
- May 13th*: "Robotic exploration of asteroids, Comets and KBOs"* – Jon Pineau, Stellar Solutions

All Wednesdays at 7:30pm

Marcham ASTRONOMY

Starry Night – Family Stargazing Evening

February 20, 2026

Science Oxford Centre

Science Oxford Presents Starry Night, an evening of family stargazing, planetarium show and activities.

Science Oxford
Part of THE OXFORD TRUST

Stargazing: Step outside to gaze at the night sky and look through telescopes with local astronomers from Abingdon Astronomical Society and Marcham Astronomy Group who will share their passion and knowledge as your cosmic tour guides.

https://scienceoxford.com/whats-on/starry-night/

Marcham ASTRONOMY

New WhatsApp Group

Marcham Star Gazers – 14 members already!

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

Marcham Star Gazers

WhatsApp group