

Welcome to Seven Bends State Park

Attention all stargazers, the night sky is calling. Here at Seven Bends, we have great stargazing opportunities despite being so close to the town of Woodstock. This is because of the many fields we have, which give visitors unobstructed views of the night sky. Every night our sky is filled with stars, planets and constellations with unique stories to tell. Additionally, being located in the Northern Hemisphere means we have circumpolar constellations that can be viewed all year long. What are we waiting for? Let's go stargazing.

Tips for Stargazing

Most people are a bit uncomfortable in the dark. Try getting used to it by walking outside in a dark area while keeping your flashlight in your pocket.

Allow your eyes time to adjust; it takes about twenty minutes for your eyes to become accustomed to the nighttime darkness.

Use a red LED flashlight or make one yourself. In order to make your own, use red paper or cellophane to cover the white light of the flashlight. The red light allows your eyes to adapt better to the darkness than white light, while still providing visibility for safety.

A Disappearing Night Sky

Imagine looking up into the sky and seeing the Milky Way surrounded by a countless number of stars every single night. This used to be the case around the entire globe, but lights from cities, towns and highways have polluted the sky, significantly reducing the number of stars and other celestial objects that would otherwise be easy to see.

Nearly every single person living in North America and Europe lives under a light polluted sky.

"We found that about 83% of the world's population and more than 99% of the U.S. and European populations live under light-polluted skies," researchers at the World Atlas of Artificial Night Sky Brightness [said in a 2016 report](#).

Why It matters?

Artificial light can wreak havoc on natural body rhythms in both humans and animals. Nocturnal light interrupts sleep and confuses the circadian rhythm—the internal, twenty-four-hour clock that guides day and night activities and affects physiological processes in nearly all living organisms.

Studies show that light pollution is also impacting animal behaviors, such as

migration patterns, wake-sleep habits and habitat formation. Large numbers of insects, a primary food source for birds and other animals, are drawn to artificial lights and are instantly killed upon contact with light sources.

Star Gazing Smartphone Apps

Star Walk 2
Night Sky
Star Tracker
Sky Map

NOTICE:

Park Closed at Dusk

Interested in seeing Seven Bends at Night? Contact us at sevenbends@dcr.virginia.gov

Virginia State Parks

Seven Bends State Park

Stargazing



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Facing North

If you look up the northern night sky you will see a very bright pattern of seven stars that look like an old-fashion water ladle. This is Plough, or more commonly known as The Big Dipper. It consists of seven bright stars, three of which are known as “the handle” of the Dipper and the other four as “the bowl.”

The Big Dipper is one of the most easily recognizable groups of stars in the night sky and is a part of the constellation Ursa Major, the Great Bear. The Big Dipper is often confused for Ursa Major, however the Big Dipper itself is not a constellation, but only the most visible part of Ursa Major.



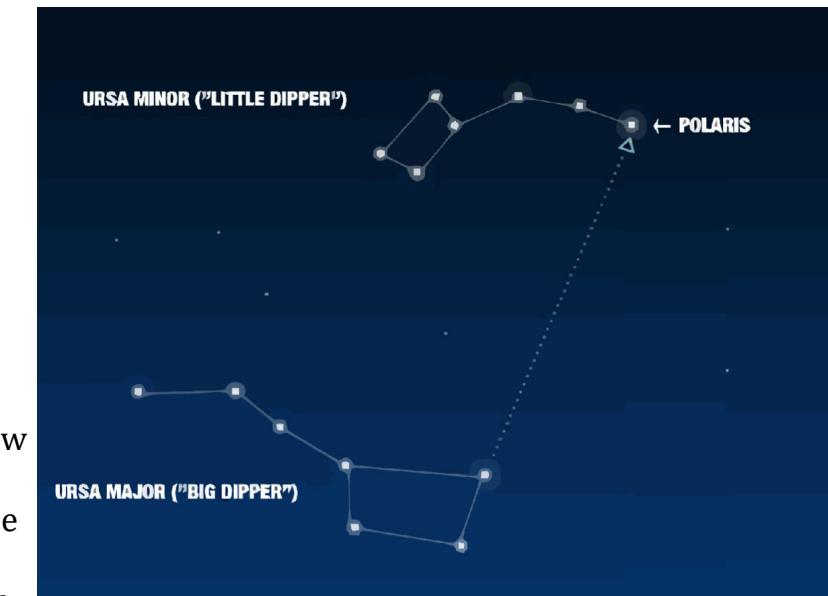
The Big Dipper is associated with a number of different myths and folk tales in cultures across the world. In East Asian astronomy, it is known as the Northern Dipper. In more recent history, black slaves in the United States knew the constellation as the Drinking Gourd and used it to find their way north, to freedom. The folk song, “Follow the Drinking Gourd,” gave runaway slaves directions to follow the Big Dipper to get to the north.

The Big Dipper can be found in different parts of the sky, depending on the time of the year. In spring and summer, the Big and Little Dippers are higher overhead, in autumn and winter they are closer to the horizon. The appearance of the Big Dipper changes from season to season as well. In autumn, it rests on the horizon in the evening. In winter evenings, the handle appears to be dangling from the bowl. In spring, it is upside down in the evening hours, and in summer the bowl leans toward the ground.

Small but Mighty

While it may be smaller and more challenging to spot the Little Dipper, it is quite important. Belonging to the constellation of Ursa Minor, the little dipper like its larger counterpart, consists of seven stars one of which is Polaris, also known as the North Star. The Little Dipper is important in navigation, as the North Star reveals the location of the North Celestial Pole. Polaris is the nearest bright star to the pole and its angle above the horizon can be used to find your latitude on earth, which used to make the North Star exceptionally useful to sailors.

To find the North Star draw a line between the two stars at the end of the ladle and then extend it about five times that length. The only bright star in the sky where that ends is the North Star. It is not the brightest star, but it is always in that location very close to the North Celestial Pole.



Make sure you take the time to correctly identify the North Star. With a little practice it will pop out from the night sky. every time you look up.