

Ursa Major

Ursa Major, aka the Great Bear, the Big Dipper, the Wagon, Charles's Wain, or the Plough is a easy to find onstellation in the Northern Sky. It was one of the original 48 constellations listed by Ptolemy in the 2nd century AD, and was recognized before that by earlier Greek, Egyptian, Babylonian and Assyrian astronomers. It's the third largest of the 88 modern constellations.

Ursa Major is primarily known from the asterism of its main seven stars. Asterism being a recognizable shape or pattern and a great Scrabble word!. Two of Ursa majors stars, Dubhe and Merak, the right side of the dipper itself, form a line towards the place of the current northern pole star, Polaris, which also marks the tail of Ursa Minor, the little bear.

Several bright galaxies are found in Ursa Major, including Messier 81 (one of the brightest galaxies in the sky) and Messier 82 above the bear's head.

We have been illustrating the sky for a long time! Our European ancestors illustrated based on the bears they had seen, ones with a long tail, not the bear we know today or the bear that Indigenous North Americans observed and also saw in the night sky. In this work I illustrated the European Ursa Major with bicycle ball bearings, oriented Ursa Minor to it also with ball bearings. Then I denoted some of the other smaller constellations that surround the Big Dipper. Just for fun I threw in planet Earth and the moon and gave the Great Bear something to look at in the form of a passing space probe.

