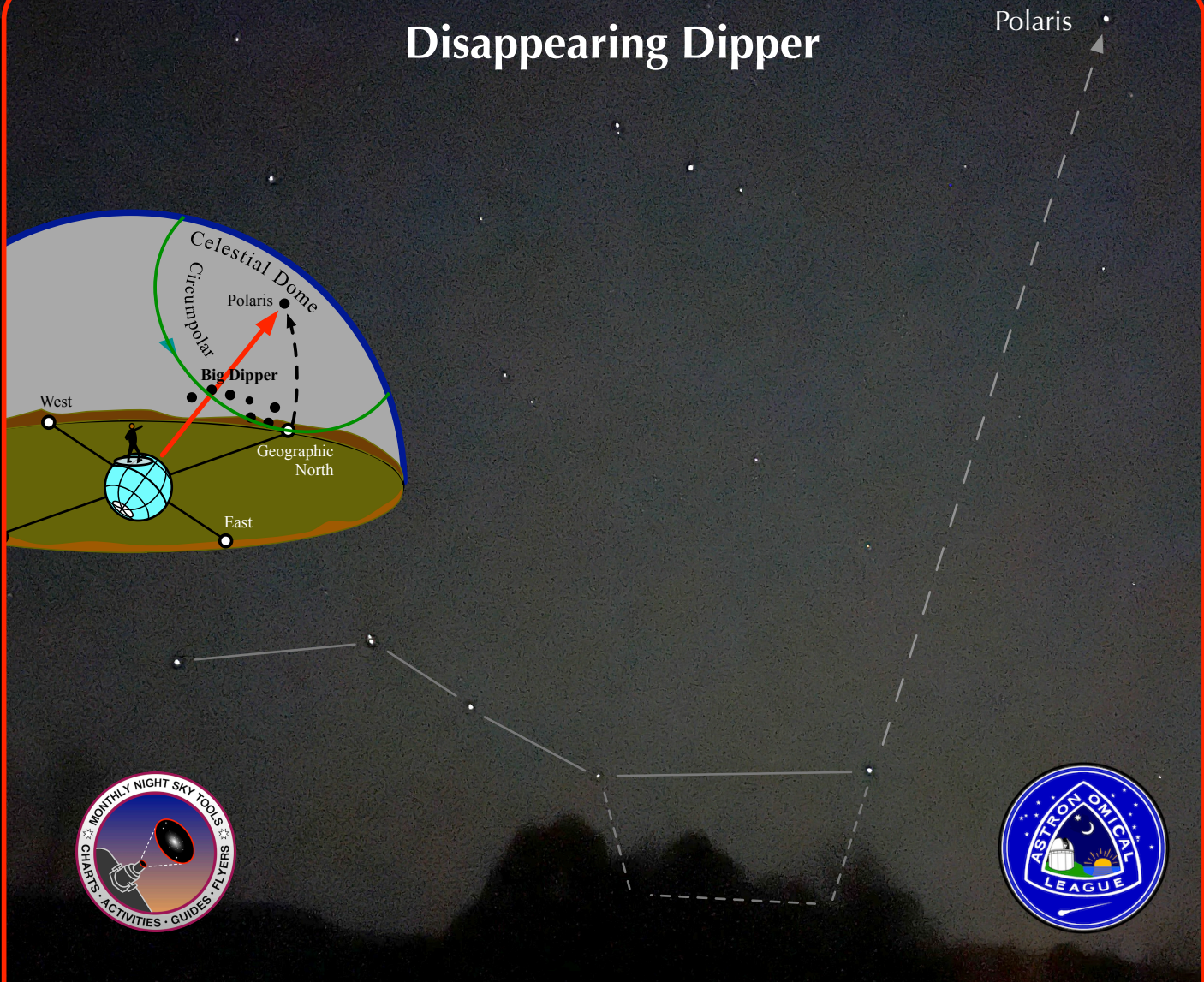


Disappearing Dipper



An early memory of many stargazers is seeing the Big Dipper. They fondly remember family members or friends pointing out this fanciful pattern of seven stars (eight, if you include Alcor) in the early evening in late spring, summer, or early fall. The Dipper stood prominently in the sky and was a great assist identifying the North Star. Every year hence, those stargazers welcome their celestial friend, and confidently point it out to others who are just beginning their journey under the stars.

Tonight, however, at first glance it is nowhere to be found – until you look due north. You'll see it no longer high in the sky, but hugging the horizon, perhaps with its lower bowl stars or end handle star having dropped below the tree line. If you are in the southern half of the United States, you'll see even less of this famous asterism.

After it swings below Polaris around midnight, the Big Dipper climbs in the northeast in the early morning hours, again being easy to locate. These stars are near the southern extent of being circumpolar where they would be always above the horizon.