Aaron Clevenson
aaron@clevenson.org

Getting Started with the AL Observing Programs

The Astronomical League Observing Program Division

I don’t even know where to start…

- Well, you have joined your local Astronomical Society. That is a great first step.
- Most Astronomical Societies are part of the Astronomical League (AL). So, You are likely part of the AL.
- You have also already found the AL website:

www.astroleague.org

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Observing Program Division
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Where to go first.

- Check out the blog.
  - Current news and Information
  - News on Upcoming Observing Program changes.
  - Note that older entries are available.
- Note the links at the bottom. More on this later.

Observing Program Coordinators needed

(12/30/2025) - 12/30/2025 The Astronomical League needs you! The Observing Program Division is looking for a few people to join our team as Observing Program Coordinators. If you have the time and the interest, we would love to talk with you. There may be multiple positions open, but we know that we need a Herschel II Observing... **Read More...**

Hubble 35th Anniversary Observing Challenge

(11/29/2025) - The last month of the challenge is upon us. For those who were quick to check, there was an error which has been corrected for the Northern Hemisphere list. Please check it again. Aaron https://www.astroleague.org/nasa-observing-challenges-special-awards/ **Read More...**

New AI Observing Challenge – 3I/Atlas

(11/26/2025) - Coming up in December (December 19, 2025) is the closest approach for 3I/Atlas. The Challenge is to observe it. Check out the full instructions and rules for this challenge (#15) on web page: https://www.astroleague.org/al-observing-challenge-special-observing-award/ **Read More...**

AI Live – Smart Telecopes in Citizen Science

(11/21/2025) - Please join the AL for the next AL Live on December 5, 2025. Topic will be Smart Telescopes in Citizen Science with Jericho Kuehl. Details are on the attched flyer. https://www.astroleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/20251217-Kuehl-Jericho.pdf **Read More...**

Fraudulent Emails – Beware

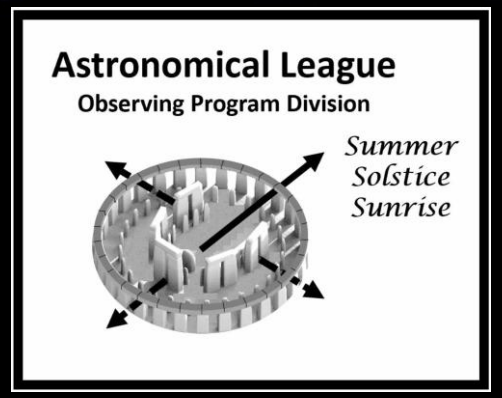
(11/7/2025) - Like everything and everyone else on the internet, the AL is being targeted by fraudulent emails. Please be very wary, do not clicck on any links, and if you ahve questions, please communicate with us searately for confiration. Please see the attached flyer. https://www.astroleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/AL-Bad-email.pdf **Read More...**

RASC Handbook and Calendar

(11/4/2025) - See notice for information on how to get your copies. https://www.astroleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/2026-Handbook_Calendar-ad.pdf **Read More...**

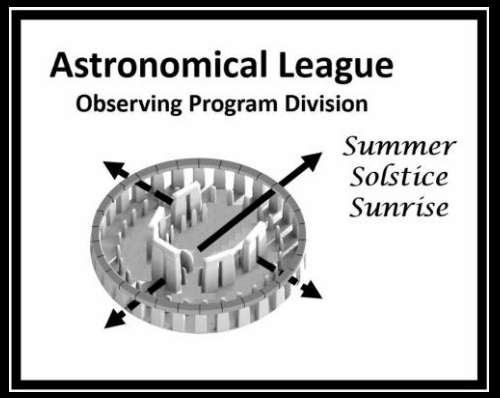
These news items scroll off this main page quickly.

More Astronomical League News can be found HERE



What's First.

- Check out the AL Website: **www.astroleague.org**
- Review your Observing Program options.
- Select those of interest.
- Get a book to use as an observing log.
- Create a binder with tabs to hold the requirements for your chosen Observing Programs.

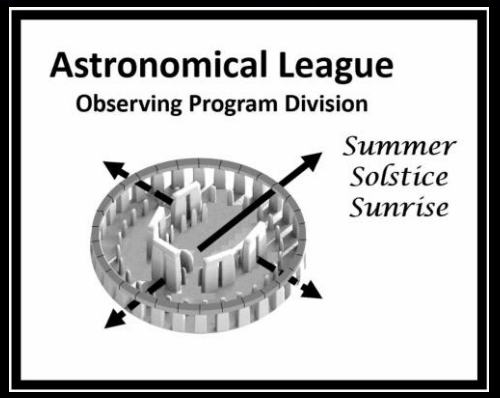


Observing Programs.

- There are thousands of things to see in the sky.
- Maybe you are new to observing…
- Or you always look at the same objects…
- How do you know where to even begin?

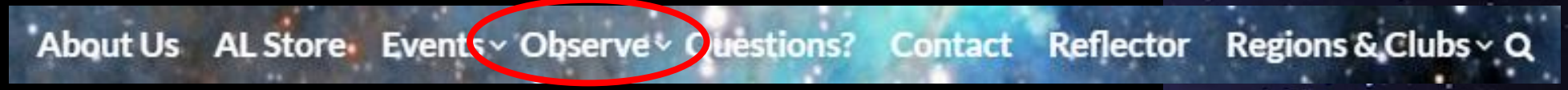
- **The Observing Program object lists.**

- Something for everybody.



Where are they?

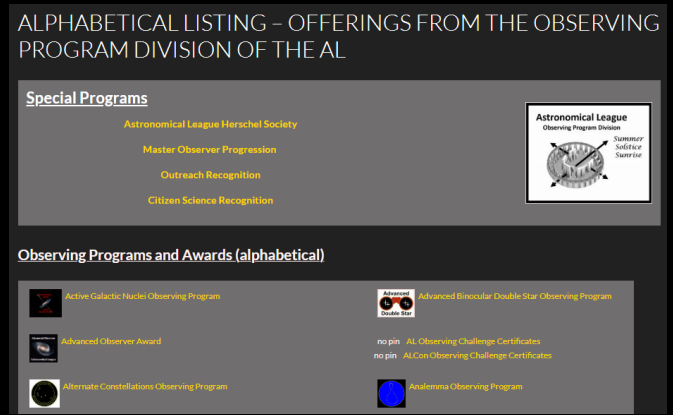
- Hover over OBSERVE near the top of the Home Page.



- Select the Alphabetical Listing.

Observing Programs (listed alphabetically)

- This is the Master List of the Observing Program related offerings.



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Too many options to choose from.

- There are many Programs to choose from.
- The right one for you depends on many things:
  - What Equipment do you have?
  - Manual or Automated?
  - How experienced are you (novice, intermediate, experienced)?
  - Where will you be observing from?
  - Imaging or Visual Observing?
  - What am I interested in observing?
  - Start with something small?

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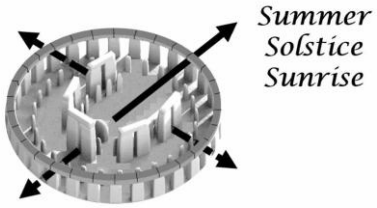
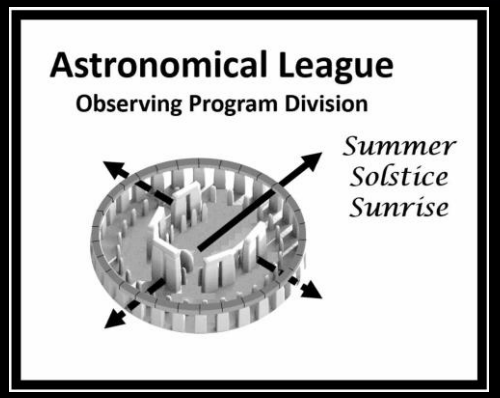


How to Begin

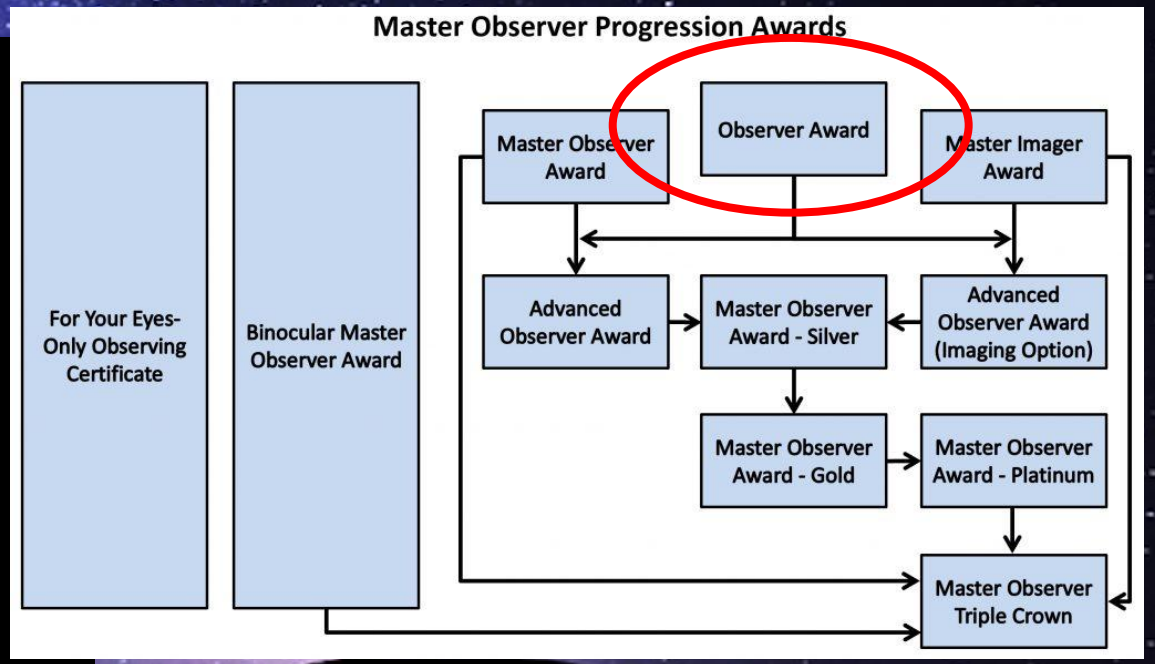
- The first list most people tackle is the Messier Observing Program.
- But… This is not really the best place to begin.
- Enter the Master Observer Progression.
- Even if you have no interest in becoming a Master Observer, it includes a progression, so,

where to start.



The Master Observer Progression

- **Observer Award**
- Master Observer Award
- Master Imager Award
- Binocular Master Observer Award
- Advanced Observer Award
- Master Observer Award – Silver
- Master Observer Award – Gold
- Master Observer Award – Platinum
- Triple Crown Certificate



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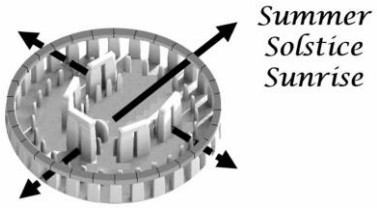
Observing Program Division



The Observer Award

- You can go for the Award, or use it to know which Observing Programs are entry level.
- Must complete a total of 5 Observing Programs
- Required Observing Programs:
  - **Constellation Hunter – Northern Skies**
  - Messier, Binocular Messier, or Bennett
  - **Lunar**
  - **Solar System**

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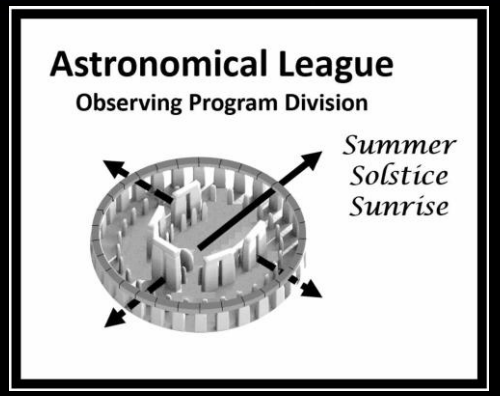


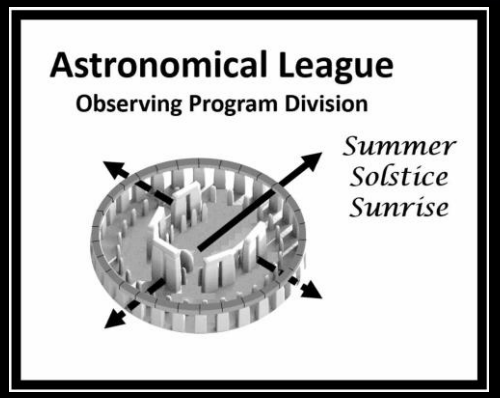
But I have no Equipment. For Your Eyes Only Award

Must complete any 8 of these:

- ‡ Alternate Constellations
- Analemma
- Astronomy Before the Telescope
- Constellation Hunter – Northern Skies
- Constellation Hunter – Southern Skies
- Earth Orbiting Satellites
- * Galileo
- * Lunar
- ‡ Meteor
- * Solar Neighborhood
- * Solar System

‡ - gold level

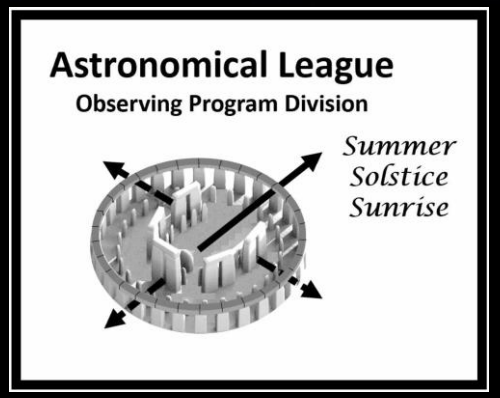
* - eyes only level



But I do have a pair of binoculars…
The Binocular Master Observer Award

M 45

- **Must complete a total of 8 Binocular Observing Programs:**
  - Binocular Double Star Observing Program
  - Advanced Binocular Double Star Observing Program
  - Binocular Messier Observing Program
  - Binocular Variable Star Observing Program
  - Deep Sky Binocular Observing Program
  - Galileo Observing Program - Binocular Certification
  - Lunar Observing Program or the Lunar Binocular Observing Certificate
  - Solar Neighborhood Binocular Certification
  - Solar System Binocular Observing Certificate
  - Southern Skies Binocular Observing Program



And Telescopes…

- Types of Objects:
  - Asterisms
  - Asteroids
  - Bright Nebulae
  - Carbon Stars
  - Comets
  - Dark Nebulae
  - Double Stars
  - Galaxies
  - Globular Clusters
  - Jupiter
  - Mars
  - Meteors
  - Novae
  - Occultations
  - Planetary Nebulae
  - Space Weather
  - Satellites
  - Variable Stars

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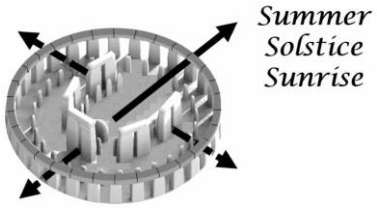

And More For Telescopes…

- The Moon:
  - Lunar
  - Lunar II
  - Lunar Evolution
- The Sun:
  - Sunspotter
  - H-Alpha

- Galaxies:
  - Active Galactic Nuclei
  - Arp – Northern and Southern
  - Flat Galaxies
  - Galaxy Groups and Clusters
  - Local Galaxy Group

- Constellations:
  - Northern Skies
  - Southern Skies
  - Alternate Constellations

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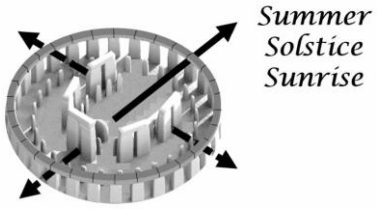

And Even More For Telescopes…

- Object Groups:
  - Bambury 600
  - Bennett
  - Caldwell
  - Galileo
  - Hershel
  - Messier
  - Urban
  - Universe Sampler

- Special Programs:
  - Analemma
  - Astronomy Before the Telescope
  - Beyond Polaris
  - Radio Astronomy
  - Sketching
  - Sky Puppy
  - Space Weather
  - Youth Astronomer

- Non-Observing:
  - Dark Sky Advocate
  - Library Telescope
  - Mentoring
  - Outreach

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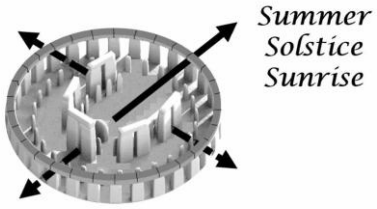
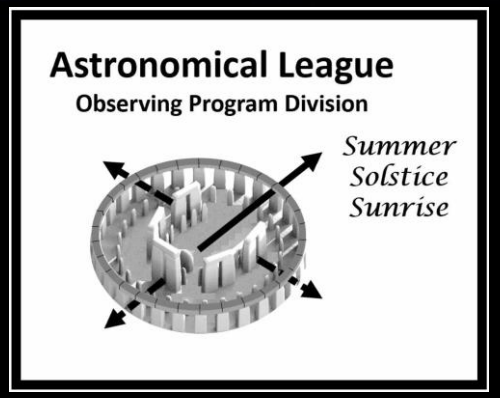


What if I do not want to do 100 objects?

- Observing Challenges (certificate only, usually):
  - Small number of observations
  - Includes an Outreach Activity
  - Short time span (usually)
  - One-time Events
  - Submission Deadlines
- Astronomical League Observing Challenges
  - Special Events related to Astronomical Objects
- NASA Observing Challenges
  - Special Events related to Space Missions



And, What's Happening NOW!

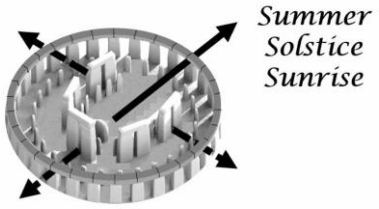
- General Information
- Documents:
  - What's Up Doc, Tonight?
  - Astronomy for Mere Mortals
- Monthly Downloads:
  - Sky Charts
  - Specific Information
  - What's Up Doc? Newsletters

January 2026

- Navigating the mid-January Night Sky as a PDF File
- Navegando por el Cielo Nocturno de Enero PDF File
- Navigating the mid-January Morning Sky as a PDF File
- Navegando por el Cielo Matutino de Enero as a PDF File
- What's Up Doc – Eastern Time Zone (Washington DC) as a PDF File
- What's Up Doc – Central Time Zone (Houston TX) as a PDF File
- What's Up Doc – Mountain Time Zone (Boise ID) PDF File
- What' s Up Doc – Pacific Time Zone (Seaattle WA) as a PDF File

ASTRONOMICAL LEAGUE NIGHT SKY TOOLS

CHARTS · ACTIVITIES · GUIDES · FLYERS

MONTHLY SKY CHARTS,
CELESTIAL EVENTS & TOOLS

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