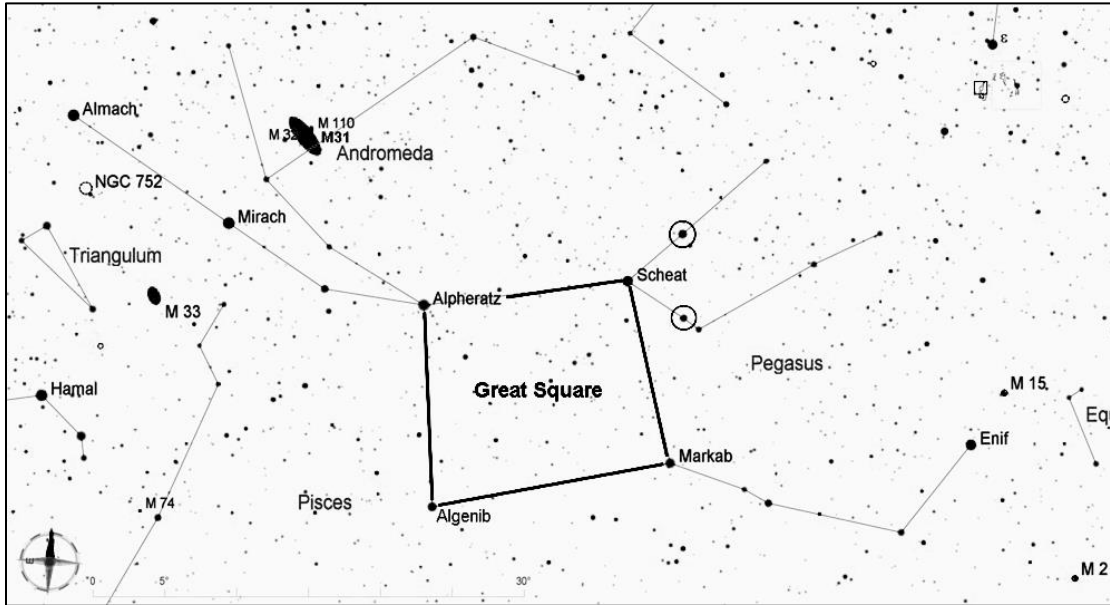


Messier 34, Open Cluster in Perseus

Messier 34 is a bright open cluster about 1/2 degree in diameter. It has about 10 or 15 bright stars and dozens of dimmer ones that can be seen through a typical amateur telescope. The size of this group is about 15 light years across, and it is about 1500 light years away. It is a nice view through binoculars, and even better through a telescope.



Start by finding the Great Square of Pegasus, which rises in the eastern sky during the early fall evenings, is high overhead later in the fall, and sinks in the western sky during early winter. To be sure you know how the square is oriented in the sky, look for the two stars outside the northwest corner of the square (circled in the chart here) that form a small triangle with Scheat.

The stars of Perseus are fairly bright. The shape I see is some sort of animal with a curved tail. Whatever shape you see, look for the bright star Algor and the somewhat dimmer star to its north. As shown below, form a slightly elongated triangle with these two stars as the base, and the third point of the triangle will show the location of Messier 34. This is a bright cluster that should be easy to see in binoculars or a finderscope.

