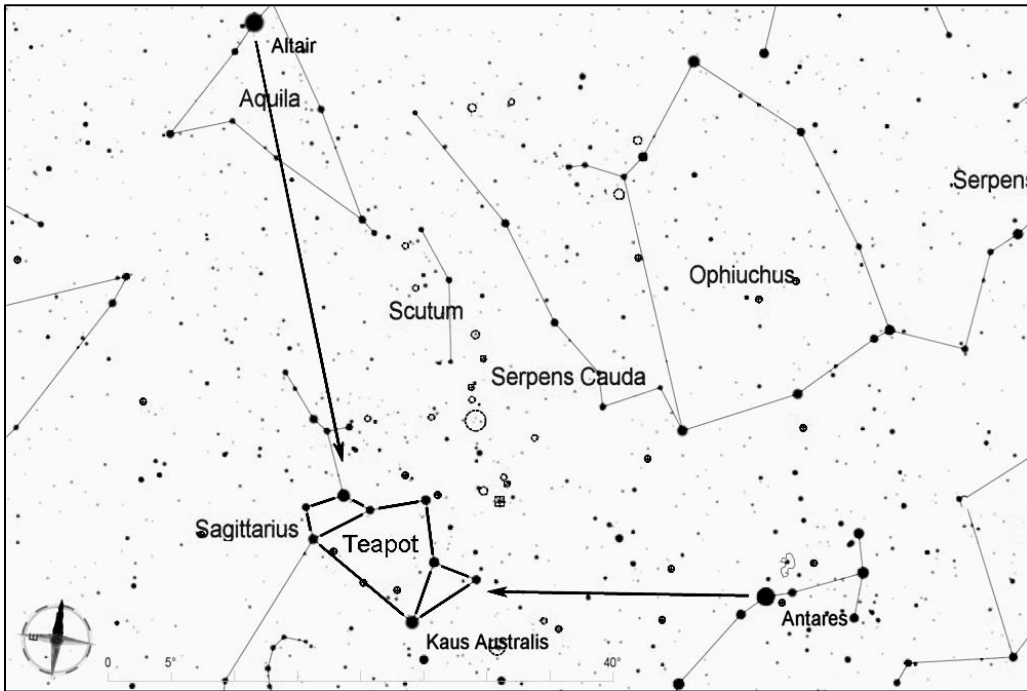


Messier 54, Globular Cluster in Sagittarius

Messier 54 is a unique object because it is one of just a few globular clusters that is easy to observe but not part of our own Milky Way galaxy. It resides beyond the far edge of our galaxy, near the center of a small satellite galaxy called the Sagittarius Dwarf Elliptical Galaxy. The dwarf galaxy is one of the closest companions to the Milky Way galaxy. M54 is about 87,000 light years away, so far that its individual stars are hard to resolve in even large amateur telescopes.



From mid-summer to early fall, the distinctive teapot shape of Sagittarius can be seen low in the southern sky during the evening. It is about 50 degrees south of Altair (part of the Summer Triangle) and about 30 degrees east of bright red Antares. It is well worth learning to recognize the teapot, for it can guide you to dozens of beautiful deep-sky objects.

Find ζ (zeta) and ϵ (epsilon) Sagittarii, the two bright stars that form the base of the teapot asterism. M54 is just inside a line between these two stars, about 2 degrees from ζ . If you have trouble locating M54, use a few of the dim stars nearby to guide you.

