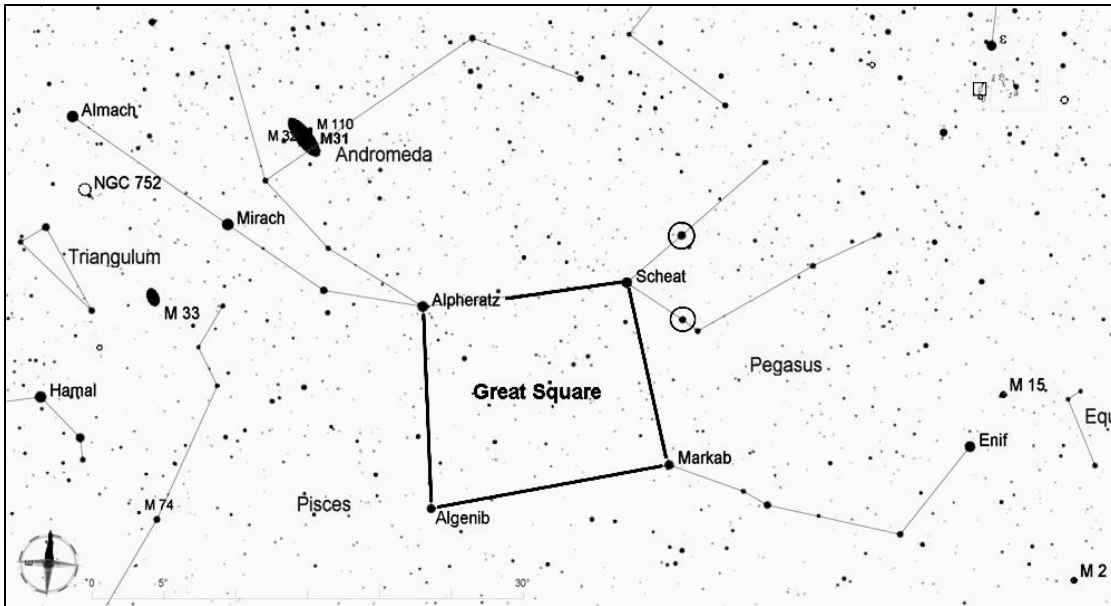


Messier 76, the Little Dumbbell Nebula

Messier 76 is called the Little Dumbbell Nebula because it has a shape that is similar to the larger and brighter Dumbbell Nebula (Messier 27). Through a telescope at medium to high power, it has a rectangular shape with a slightly narrower midsection. M76 may be about 1 or 2 light years in diameter and about 5600 light years away, but there is a lot of uncertainty about its size and distance. It is within the borders of the constellation Perseus, but a convenient star hop goes through nearby Andromeda.



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 constellation Andromeda stretches to the northeast from the Great Square, starting at the second-magnitude star Alpheratz. Using the naked eye, follow the stars of Andromeda east to Almach, another magnitude 2 star. Take a right turn at Almach to a slightly dimmer star, and then head north as shown below to the area of Messier 76. A magnitude 4 star less than a degree to the south of M76 can help to locate its position.

