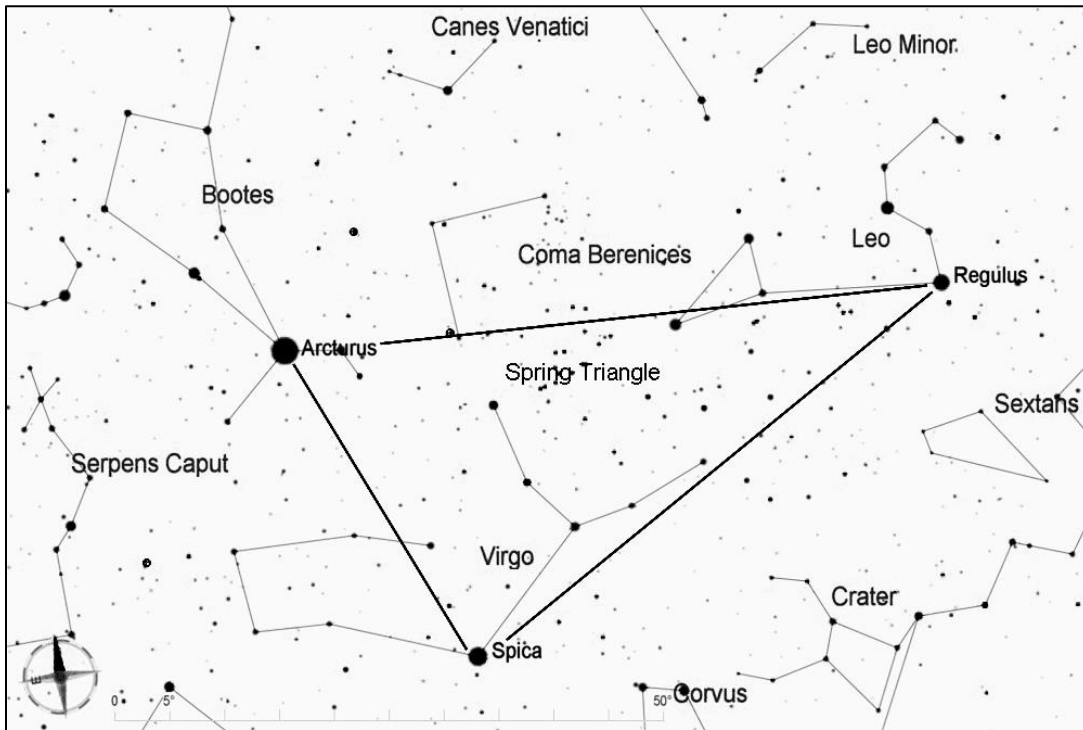


Messier 83, the Southern Pinwheel Galaxy

Messier 83 is a nice example of a barred spiral galaxy (with its arms flowing from a long central bar). It is one of the nearest spiral galaxies, about 16 million light years away. M83 is low in the southern sky for observers in the northern hemisphere, and having to view it through a thicker layer of the earth's atmosphere dims the galaxy's visual appearance. Still, on a dark night it can be an impressive sight, especially through a large scope.



Start by finding the Spring Triangle, which consists of three widely-separated first magnitude stars--Arcturus, Spica, and Regulus. The Spring Triangle is high in the southeast sky in early spring, and in the southwest sky by mid-Summer. (To get oriented, you can use the handle of the Big Dipper and "follow the arc to Arcturus").

For this star hop, begin at Spica in the constellation Virgo.

Look about 12 degrees to the south of Spica to find 3rd magnitude γ (Gamma) Hydrae, and then find 3rd magnitude π (Pi) Hydrae to its east. (To help you get oriented in this part of the sky, look for the distinctive four-sided shape of Corvus.) Once you have found γ and π Hydrae, visually form a downward-pointing isosceles triangle as shown below, and M83 should be near the bottom tip of this triangle.

