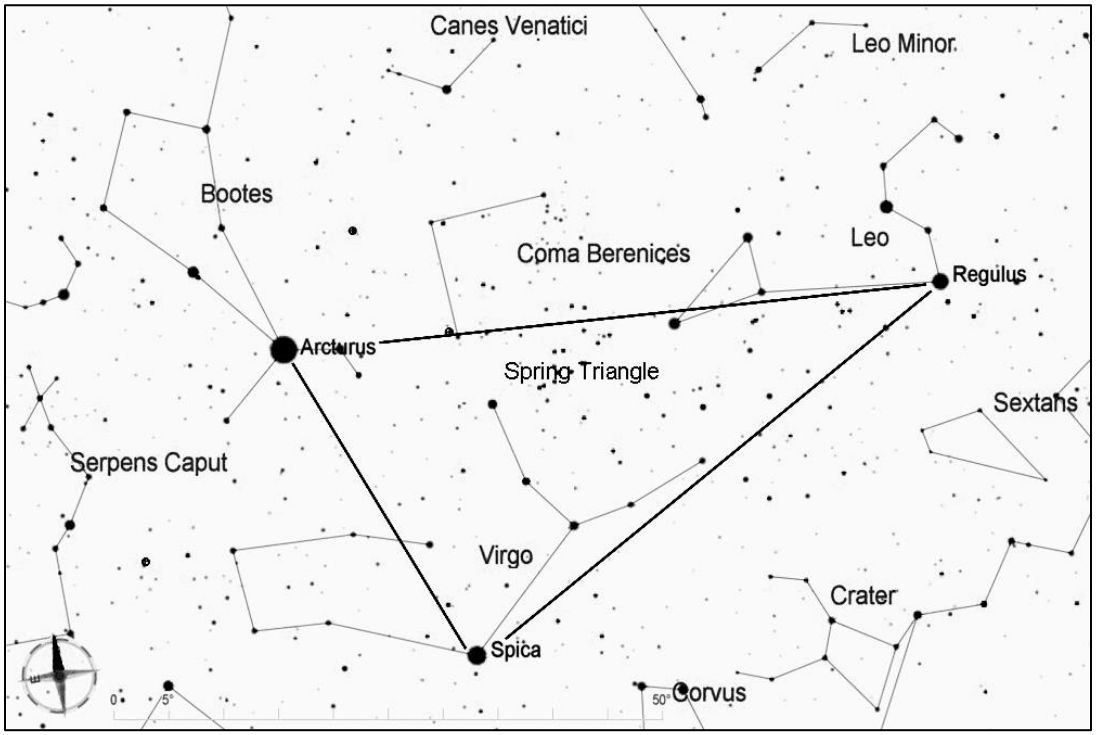
U Hydrae, Carbon Star

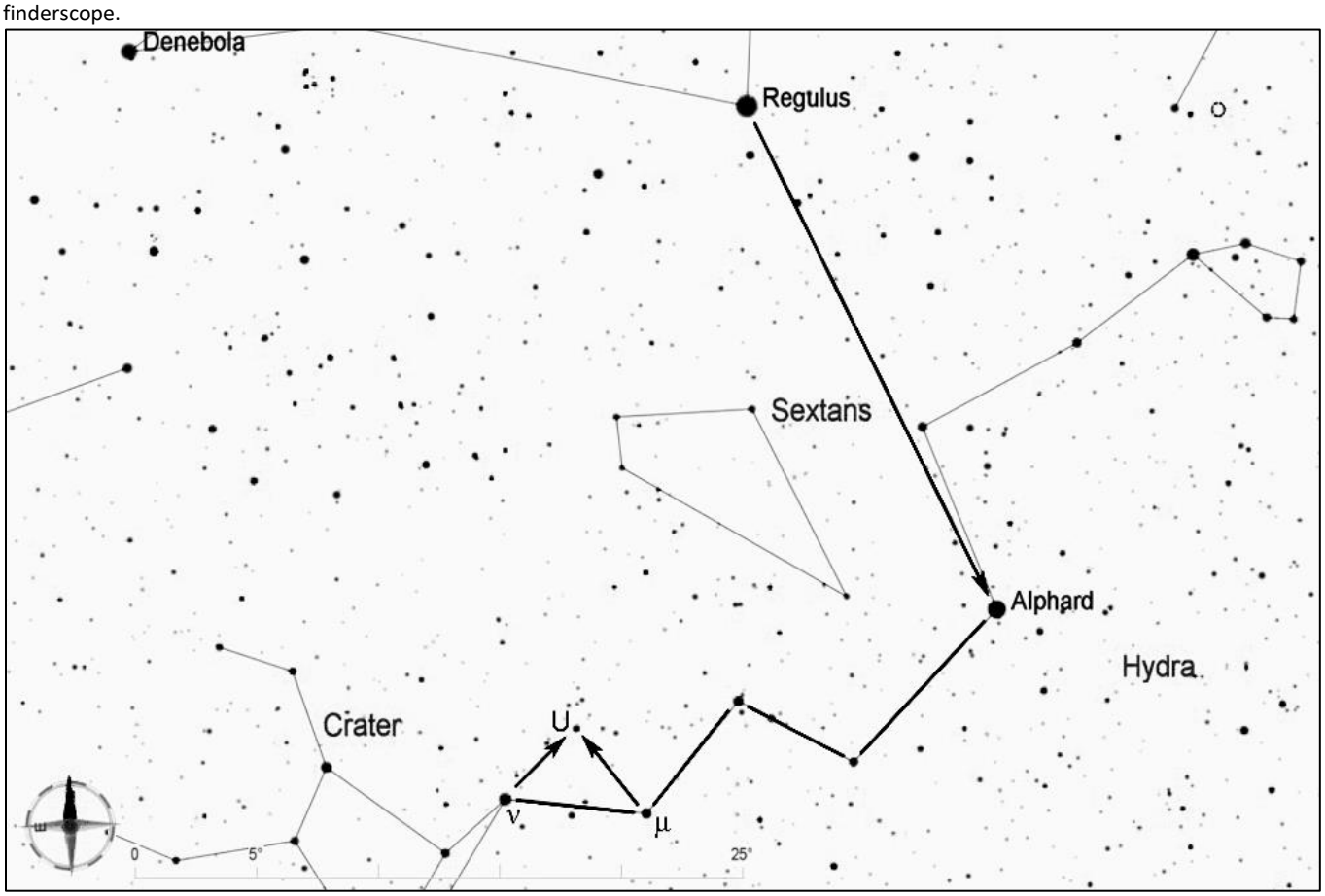
U Hydrae is one of the reddest stars in the sky. It is classified as a carbon star because there is a large amount of carbon in the star's atmosphere, which absorbs light at the blue end of the spectrum but allows the red wavelengths to pass through. It is a large and bright star, about 400 times as luminous as our Sun and about 680 light years away. Its red color is easily seen in binoculars, and it is a memorable sight in any telescope.



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 Regulus in the constellation Leo.

Look about 30 degrees to the southwest of Regulus to find 2nd magnitude Alphard, the brightest star in Hydra, the water snake. From Alphard, look east and follow a zig-zag line of stars that form part of the slithering body of Hydra. Using the chart below, find the 3rd and 4th magnitude stars ν (nu) and μ (mu) Hydrae. Use these two stars to visualize a triangle, and U Hydrae will be at the top corner. It can be easily seen in binoculars or a finderscope.



Star hop from www.skyledge.net by Jim Mazur. Star charts created with *Cartes du Ciel.*