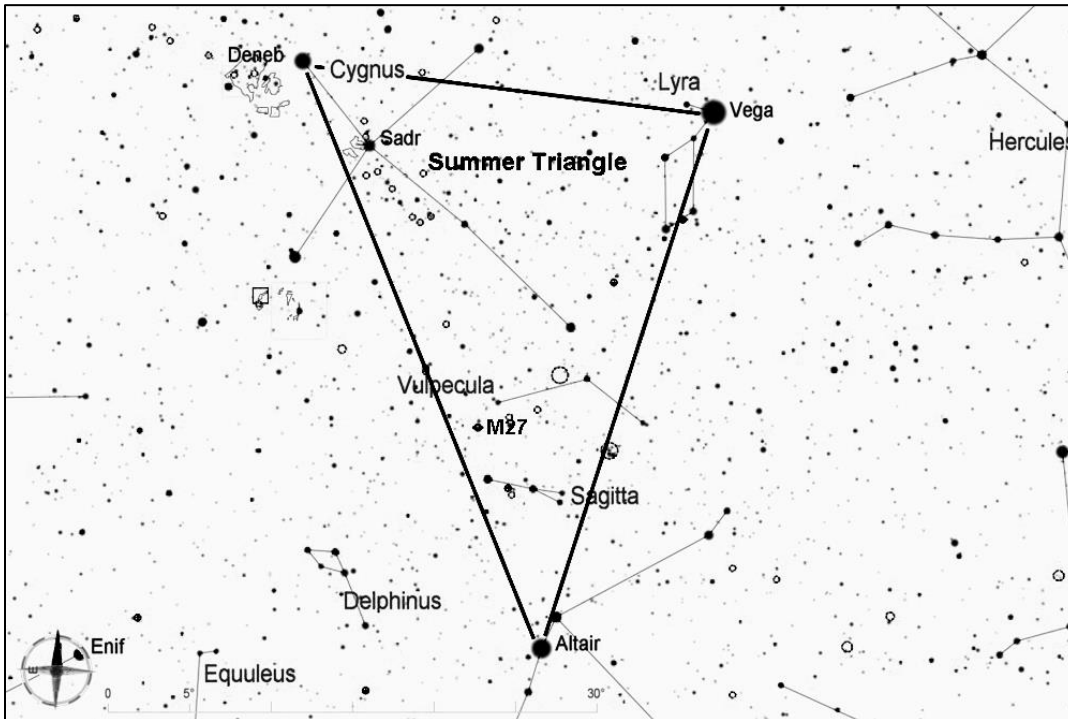


NGC 6781, Planetary Nebula in Aquila

This is a large but faint planetary nebula in the center of Aquila, the eagle. It is about 1.9' in diameter, roughly 50% larger than Messier 57, the Ring Nebula. Its distance is not well determined, but it is probably about 4,000 light years away and about 2 light years across. Through a large telescope it can show a mottled appearance, with the edges brighter than the center.



Start by finding the Summer Triangle, which consists of the three of the brightest stars in the sky--Vega, Deneb, and Altair. The Summer Triangle is high overhead throughout the summer, and it sinks lower in the west as fall progresses.

For this star hop, start from Altair in the constellation Aquila, the eagle.

From Altair, look about 8 degrees to the southwest to find third-magnitude delta (δ) Aquilae in the middle of the eagle's body. To reach the location of NGC 6781, follow a line from δ one-third of the way toward zeta (ζ) on the eagle's right wing, as shown below. Finding the right location can be difficult because there are no bright stars in the vicinity. Look at low power for a round hazy patch, and once you find it try higher power to look for details within the nebula.

