

January wasn't always first month

January, the first month of the new year, is the actual start of the decade of the '90s. There will be an eclipse of the sun and moon this month, but the former will not be visible from our area, and the latter will be unimpressive.

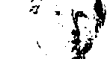
The amount of sunlight we receive will increase by 52 minutes this month.

Of the five naked-eye planets, only Mercury is visible in the pre-dawn sky. Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn are visible after sunset this month.

For many people today, January is the beginning of a new year. But in primitive Rome the new year started with the first day of spring. Ancient Persians began their year with the first day of autumn. Many other skywatchers divided their year into two parts; at the end of summer's heat and the end of winter's cold.

The custom of celebrating Jan. 1 as New Year's Day goes back to the Roman Julian calendar. The month January was named in honor of their god Janus, the keeper of the gates.

skywatch



Raymond E. Bullock

He had two faces; one looking back to the past, the other forward to the future.

It was also the Julian calendar that introduced the leap year. Since the earth takes 365 1/4 days to orbit the sun, the calendar is off by one day every four years. Julius Caesar decreed that every fourth year would have 366 days to keep the calendar in line with the seasons.

WHILE THE JULIAN calendar was a vast improvement over other calendars, it too was off by 11 minutes and four seconds each year, which adds up to one day every 128 years.

By the year 1582 the calendar was off by 10 days, so Pope Gregory revised the calendar dropping those 10 days and introducing another correction. The Gregorian calendar was not adopted by everyone at once. It wasn't until another 170 years had passed that England accepted it in 1752. By then it was necessary to drop 11 days from the calendar, much to the objection of a large number of people who started a riot, demanding the return of their 11 days.

Even the Gregorian calendar is off by 28 seconds a year. At that rate the discrepancy will add up to another full day... but not for 1,500 years.

January 1991 is also the start of the decade of the '90s. Contrary to what most people thought in December 1989, the year 1990 was not the beginning of the '90s. It was the end of the decade of the '80s.

The calendar begins with the year 1; we had to complete that year for the calendar to be one year old. Likewise, completing the year 9 did not close out that first decade; the calendar was only nine years old. It wasn't until after year 10 was com-

pleted that the first decade came to a close.

THAT SAME LOGIC holds true whether we consider the years 100, 1000, 1900 or 1990; each Dec. 31 of that year was the conclusion of the previous decade. The new decade begins after Dec. 31, 1990, after we have completed the 10th year of the '80s. We are now embarking on the first year of the '90s.

But, back to our current skywatch. Watch Mars pass the Pleiades during the month.

Planets do not actually reverse direction. Retrograde motion is an optical illusion. When the faster orbiting earth passes a slower moving planet, like Mars, the slow planet appears to move backward for a while. Eventually the illusion ends, and the slow planet appears to change direction and go forward again.

Watch the moon pass through the constellation of Scorpius on the mornings of the 11th through the 13th. On the 11th the waning (fading) crescent moon is approaching Antares.

On the 12th it is between Antares and Mercury. If you can see the moon the morning of the 13th, look five degrees above and to the left of it and you'll see Mercury. This will be the best morning for finding Mercury. It is at maximum elongation (apparent angle) west of the sun on the 14th, but the moon is a natural pointer to Mercury on the 13th.

Skiing clinic slated

Learn to cross-country ski on Saturdays in January and February at two Oakland County parks as registration gets under way for the 1991 Cross-Country Ski School.

Sponsored by the Oakland County parks in cooperation with the Observer & Eccentric newspapers, the cross-country ski clinic offer a 90-minute ski lesson followed by a half-day of open skiing.

Two county parks will host the Saturday clinics: Independence Oaks, located on Sashabaw Road, two-and-a-half miles north of I-75 near Clarkston; and Addison Oaks on West Romeo Road, nine miles north of Rochester near Oxford.

Dates for the ski school at Independence Oaks are Jan. 12, 19 and 26, and Feb. 2 and 9, from 9:30-11 a.m. or 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Dates for the ski school at Addison Oaks are Jan. 12, 19 and 26, and Feb. 2 and 9, from 9:30-11 a.m. or 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Class size is limited. Registration one week prior to class is advised. Call the park desired for a reservation. Independence Oaks at 625-0877, or Addison Oaks at 693-2432. Park hours are 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The clinic is \$6 each session, \$12 if ski rental is required. Each ski clinic will be held weather permitting.

OU chorus invites singers

The Oakland University Community Chorus, now in its 28th year of performing classical choral music, invites new adult singers to join its 130-voice mixed group, beginning Tuesday, Jan. 15, on campus near Rochester.

Opportunity to sing with the OU chorus is offered through Oakland's division of Continuing Education, under the guidance of John Devaras, director of university choruses. The

chorus rehearses 7:30-10 p.m. Tuesdays, Jan. 15-April 16, Room 134, Varner Hall. Tuition is \$30. Integrated singers may bring a friend and observe the first night of class.

Highlight for the chorus will be an April 6 performance of Haydn's "The Seasons" at Varner Recital Hall.

For information, call the Continuing Education office, 370-3120, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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Saturday, January 12
7:00 pm preview
8:00 p.m. auction
Radisson Southfield
(10 Mile Road - Lodge Expressway Service Drive)

Sunday, January 13
12:00 noon preview
1:00 pm auction
5:00 pm preview
6:00 pm auction
Ritz Carlton Dearborn
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