



Astronomy of the Milky Way

by Mike Inglis

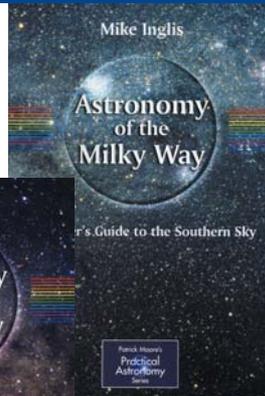
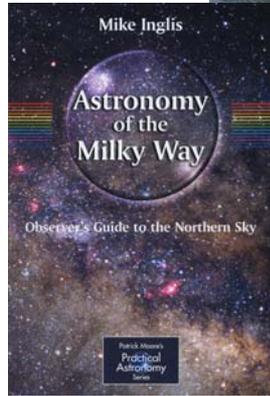
Springer–Verlag, 2004. Vol. I: ISBN 1-85233-709-5. Pp xiii + 242 (pbk), £19.95; Vol. II: ISBN 1-85233-742-7. Pp xiii + 236 (pbk), £19.95.

The last few years have seen a proliferation of popular books on deep-sky observing, but until now there has not been a book specifically on the Milky Way. This book – or rather two books – in the Springer *Practical Astronomy* series, fills that gap. One volume covers the northern sky, and the other the southern; constellations being grouped in the order at which they transit at midnight. The northern volume covers the months July to December, while the southern one covers January to June.

At the end of each chapter is a summary table listing all the objects, along with their coordinates and a very brief description.

The boundary used for the Milky Way is that determined by Anton Pannekoek from his star density work. Many of the objects described can be seen with the naked eye from a dark site. Others, like the numerous star clusters within the Milky Way, will be visible in binoculars. Fainter objects, such as many of the planetary nebulae, will need a reasonable size telescope.

The idea for the book is good, with an interesting selection of well described objects. What lets it down are the star charts. The author states in his introduction that a star atlas such as *Norton's*, *Sky Atlas 2000* or *Uranometria* will be needed, and that the star charts are not meant to take the place of a star atlas but are 'simple pointers in the right direction'. These charts, which form a significant portion of the two books, are of very



little use. They are no good as finder charts – and are not intended to be – and they offer nothing that a decent atlas

doesn't show better. The text on the charts is so small as to be almost unreadable. One often has to search the chart to find the object described and there is no indication of the magnitude of the plotted stars. If charts are to be included, then for a practical observing guide, which this is, they should be detailed charts clearly showing the object under discussion and preferably with a typical eye-piece view superimposed so the observer knows what to expect.

There are no drawings, but numerous black and white and a few colour photographs are included. These have generally reproduced well. There are several typographical errors. For ex-

ample, star chart 4.34 (Vol. 1) refers to NGC2023 in the figure heading but NGC2022 in the text. The table on Orion (Vol. 1 p.216) has a misplaced row and in Vol. 2 another gremelin has crept into a table where the star Ras Alhague is described as 'quite a lot actually!' There is sometimes a lack of consistency of spelling and style in the text and tables.

There is repetition between the two volumes so each can be used independently. This means that the introductory chapters and appendices are duplicated. Appendices are brief and cover such topics as stellar classification, the magnitude scale, the coordinate system, double stars and star clusters. An appendix on nebula filters is slightly confusing in its description of narrow-band filters. Another appendix lists books for further reading, along with the addresses (including web sites) of astronomical organisations such as the BAA and the Webb Society. One nice feature is a coloured fold-out panorama of the entire Milky Way, with constellation outlines.

There is no biographical information about the author, although in his earlier book, *Field Guide to Deep Sky Objects*, published in the same series, it is stated that he works in the Department of Astrophysics at Princeton University. In summary, this is a useful pair of books on an interesting topic. They include enough objects to keep observers busy for many a clear night. It is just a pity that the star charts are so poor.

Stewart Moore

Dr Stewart Moore was recently appointed Director of the BAA Deep Sky Section. A keen visual observer, he has a particular interest in planetary nebulae.

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