

# Fun on the Moon

by Bob Vickers

When beginning amateur astronomers ask me what they should observe first, I always recommend the Moon. It's big. It's bright. You can't miss it! It also has a very big WOW factor. All those craters and mountains and rilles can really stand out and show a lot of impressive detail through a telescope. But, aside from big craters and mountain ranges, the Moon also has some "fun" features, many of which can be seen even without a telescope. These are a sort of lunar equivalent of asterisms in deep sky observing. They are markings or features which form an unusual pattern or look like something else.

On the largest scale, almost everyone has seen the "Man in the Moon," a facial pattern visible at full Moon consisting of the dark Mares Serenitatis and Imbrium as the eyes, Mare Nubium as the mouth and a curved combination of Mare Vaporum and Sinus Medii as a button nose.

A little less obvious is the "Lady in the Moon." This is a woman's profile with the face made up of the light lunar highlands, while the hair, eyes and mouth consist of the various dark mares: Serenitatis, Tranquillitatis, Fecunditatis, and Nectaris. The bright crater Tycho provides the jewel in her necklace.

My favorite large scale pattern is the

"Rabbit in the Moon," which is made up of every dark mare visible. It forms a side view of a hopping rabbit complete with Mare Frigoris as its swept back ears and Mare Crisium as its cottontail.

The "Lunar Crab," in which Mares Fecunditatis and Nectaris form the left claw and Mares Humorum and Nubium form the right claw, may require a little more imagination.

Last of the large scale patterns is the "Cow Jumping over the Moon." This is really just the rabbit again minus the ears but viewed about three days before full Moon, when the head is covered by shadow.

In addition to these naked eye curiosities, there are also quite a few telescopic ones, but I will save them for future columns. In the meantime, get a good

Moon atlas such as The Hatfield Photographic Lunar Atlas edited by Jeremy Cook, or Antonin Rukl's Atlas of the Moon, or even Moon software such as Lunar Map Pro and see what you can discover for yourself.

*Though she looks as warm as gold  
The moon's a harsh mistress  
The moon can be so cold.*

-- Jimmy Webb, The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress

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