

International Year of Astronomy 2009

Schools Projects for Autumn Moonwatch

Project 1: The Man in the Moon

Suitable for all ages, and for naked-eye observing.

From a very young age we learn about the “Man in the Moon”: the fact that the lunar surface features can appear rather like a human face. Although this is simply an optical illusion, it is nevertheless a very striking one, and is common in many cultures and traditions throughout the world.



Fig 1. Typical view of the “Man in the Moon” from Northern latitudes

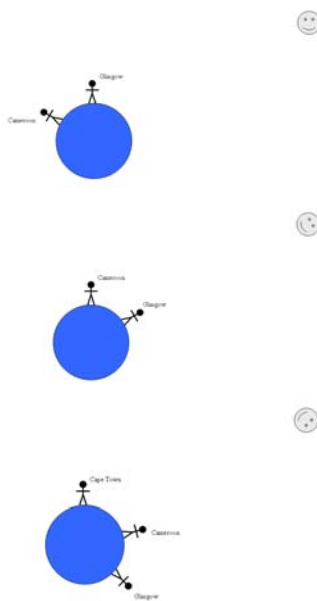


Fig 2. Changing orientation of the Man in the Moon. If the face appears upright in Glasgow, it will look upside down in Cape Town.

Exactly how this face looks to us, however, depends on where we are observing from. Because the Earth is round, observers in different countries see the Moon oriented at different angles, with respect to their local horizon.

Figure 2 illustrates this effect for observers in Glasgow, Cameroon (which lies close to the equator) and Cape Town (which lies well south of the equator).

Notice how the Man in the Moon would look upside down to an observer in the Southern hemisphere, compared to one in the Northern hemisphere.

When the Moon is full, take a photo or draw a sketch of the “Man in the Moon” as seen from your location. Email your photos and sketches to: scottishsolarsystem@astro.gla.ac.uk, with a note of when – and from where – they were taken.

We hope to collect “Man in the Moon” photos from around the globe. We will post them on our website, so that visitors can see for themselves how the “Man in the Moon” changes appearance.

