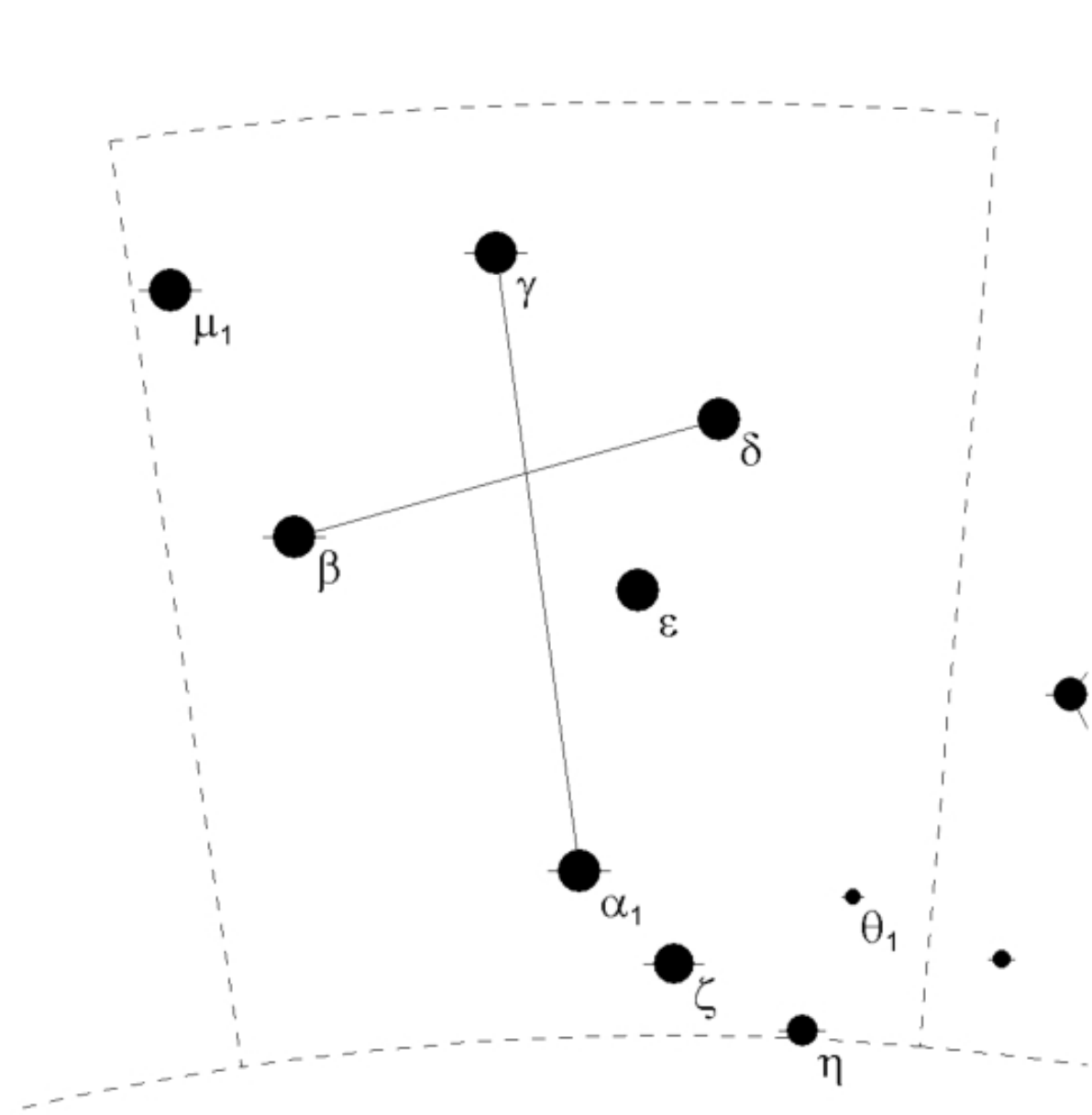
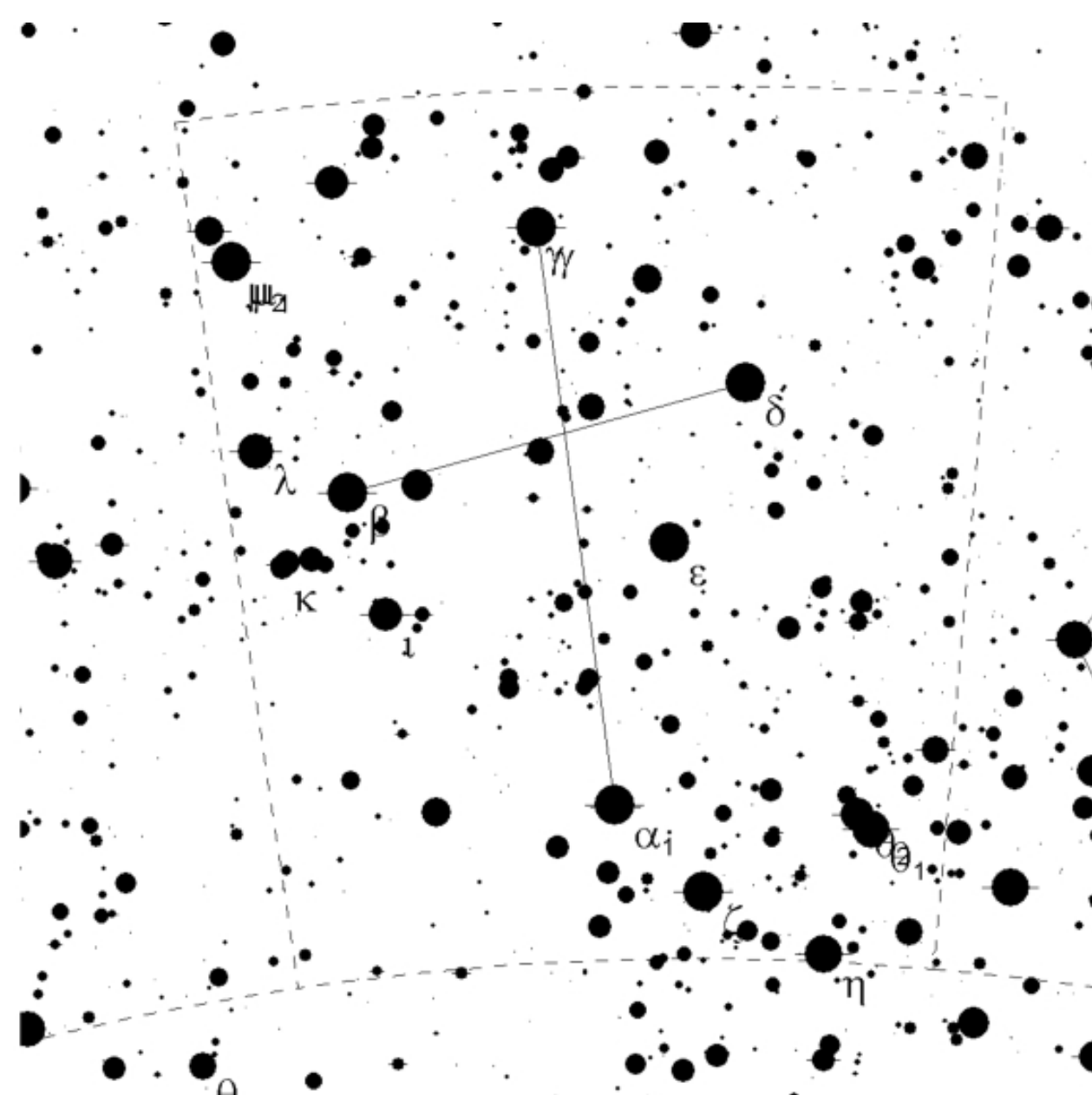


BASIC TIPS FOR ASTRONOMICAL OBSERVING

Before you start your astronomical observations,
you need to make a few decisions



Naked eye observation



Binocular observation

How skilled am I?

If you are a novice, it is prudent to begin with naked eye observations.

What do I want to achieve?

It is useful to know your way around the Celestial Sphere and be able to identify the constellations that are visible to you before you start observing.

When is it best to observe?

Dark nights when the moon is below the horizon are best. The first quarter moon sets at about midnight and the last quarter moon rises at about midnight. Select the phase of the moon that best suits your programme. If you want to observe early in the evening, select the period between the new moon and the last quarter moon. If you want to observe early in the morning, select the period between new moon and the first quarter moon.

Which observation site should I use?

If you intend observing from a dark site, you should have no problems but make sure that it is safe and that you are not alone. If you observe from home, select a site where you are not bothered by street or other lights and, if possible, you are out of the wind and weather.

How do I make my eyes sensitive to faint light (dark adaptation)?

Allow your eyes at least 20 minutes to become sensitive to faint light. Use a torch with a faint red light to read your Star Map. Red cellophane covering the torch's lens works well.

Should I stand or sit while observing?

Sit in a sturdy, reclining chair that provides a comfortable seat while looking up at the sky. Binoculars mounted on a tripod are far steadier than hand-held binoculars.

How should I dress?

Dress warmly, use mosquito repellent, tread carefully, beware of rocks, plants, dogs, hose pipes and anything else that can trip you up and cause you to fall!

Should I plan my observations?

Choose the objects that you plan to observe carefully. Make sure that they are in your field of view for the time that you have allocated for your observations. Identify a known guide star to help you find the observation target and develop a plan to star-hop from the guide star to the observation target.

Should I use a Star Map?

Star Maps and the 'Astronomical Handbook for Southern Africa' are excellent guides to help you find your target stars and constellations. You can complement these guides with new computer programmes, such as *Stellarium*.

Should I use binoculars?

Yes. The above diagrams show the difference between naked eye observation and binocular observation of the same star field.

Should I record my observations?

Whenever you do an observation, you should record the following data:

- Date and time
- Observation target's identity
- Guide star used
- Weather and visibility
- Your personal impression of the object
- Any lessons learned
- Do you intend repeating the observation.