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Helvetia is in its 78th year

June 2012

June – Winter Solstice - Matariki

A solstice is an astronomical event that happens twice each year when the sun reaches its highest position in the sky as seen from the North or South Pole.

The word solstice is derived from the Latin sol (sun) and sistere (to stand still), because at the solstices, the sun stands still in declination; that is, the seasonal movement of the sun's path (as seen from Earth) comes

solstice (and the southern summer solstice), it is Christmas. For the northern summer solstice, Christian cultures celebrate the feast of St. John from June 23 to 24.

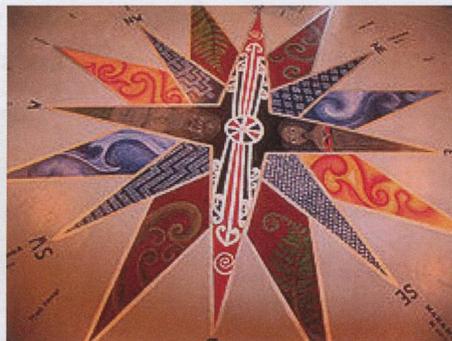
In New Zealand, Matariki is taken as the beginning of the new year. Matariki is both the name of the Pleiades star cluster, and it also signifies the first rising of that star cluster. The constellation of the Pleiades star

struct young people in the lore of the land and the forest.

Whether you call it midwinter solstice or Matariki, these short cold days are perfect for a celebration; invite a few friends to some traditional Swiss comfort food, be it a Minestrone you can eat with a fork, or a fondue, or a raclette, or some Rotkraut... And enjoy the fact that the days are getting longer again, even if you don't notice yet..



Matariki (the Pleiades) star cluster



Matariki



December 2010 northern solstice with an almost total eclipse of the moon

to a stop before reversing direction. The solstices, together with the equinoxes, are connected with the seasons. In many cultures the solstices mark either the beginning or the midpoint of winter and summer.

The day of the solstice is either the longest day of the year (in summer) or the shortest day of the year (in winter) for any place on earth, because the length of time between sunrise and sunset on that day is the yearly maximum or minimum for that place.

Many cultures celebrate various combinations of the winter and summer solstices and the equinoxes, the midpoints between them, leading to various holidays arising around these events. For the northern winter

cluster, Matariki, was important for navigation and timing the seasons. The first rising of the Pleiades and of Rigel (Puanga in Māori) occurs just prior to sunrise in late May or June. The actual time for the celebration of Matariki varies, some iwi celebrate it immediately, others wait until the rising of the next full moon, or the dawn of the next new moon - and others use the rising of Puanga/Rigel in a similar way. This year, the official date for Matariki is 21st June.

In traditional times, Matariki was a season to celebrate and to prepare the ground for the coming year. Offerings of the produce of the land were made to the gods, including Rongo, god of cultivated food. This time of the year was also a good time to in-

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