

Calendar? - But There Are So Many!

In the West, we tend to think that there is only one calendar, but there are dozens of them around the world. And what is more, there were probably hundreds of them previously. All non-operational now either because ours is more accurate or because theirs did not fit in with our commercial way of life. But that does not mean to say that people do not still use those old-fashioned, redundant calendars. Oh, no! Governments have given up their old, traditional national calendars, but in general, country folk still refer to them, even if they can no longer get hold of a printed version. I cannot go into all the calendars here, but I will mention half-a-dozen of them. Lunar Calendar - There is some indication that early man used marks on bone to record or indicate the passage of time 25,000 years ago, almost certainly calibrated by the Moon's phases. A calendar can be created based on the lunar cycles; it creates a year of twelve months (the word 'month' is from the word 'moon'), but only 354 days, which is, eleven short of the time it takes the Earth to revolve around the Sun. The Chinese still use a variety of the lunar calendar but they resolve this issue by inserting extra months every now and then to bring 'time' back into alignment with the Sun. Solar Calendar - The ancient Egyptians were the first people to employ a Solar Calendar, although it could justifiably be called a cosmological calendar. The new year began for them when Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest star in the night sky, rose in the same place as the Sun. This usually coincided with the flooding of the Nile. This calendar was of 365 days; twelve months of thirty days and five holy days. Therefore, it was only one quarter of a day off the true year. However, that meant that slowly but surely, the new year did not concur with the flood. Scientists have worked out that this calendar was taken up in either 4241 BC or 2773 BC. Julian Calendar - In 46 BC, Julius Caesar came to understand that a number of parts of the empire were using different calendars, so he instructed the dating system to be unified. Sosigenes came up with a calendar of 365 days with an extra day every four years. Therefore, in 46 BC, the longest year on record, Caesar added days to the year to bring it back into alignment with the seasons. 46 BC was 445 days long! The vastness of the Roman Empire ensured that this calendar was the defacto calendar of the Western world. Julian Day Count - In 1582, Pope Gregory XIII instituted a new calendar, but the year after that Joseph Justus Scaliger developed a system of counting days, not years. It starts with 1 on January 1st 4713 BC. On this date the Julian and the lunar calendars and the Roman tax dating system all coincided; something that will next happen in 3267. January 1st 2001 was Julian day 2,451,913. Gregorian Calendar - from at least 730 AD, it was spotted that the year from vernal equinox to vernal equinox was short of the 365.25 days in a year. This had the consequence that the date of Easter was slipping. So he dropped 10 days from 1582 by jumping from October 4th to October 15th and proclaiming that century years would only be leap years if they were divisible by 400. Therefore, 1900 was not a leap year, but 2000 was. This is the system we still use today. Interested in [astronomy](#), then why not visit our website at:

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