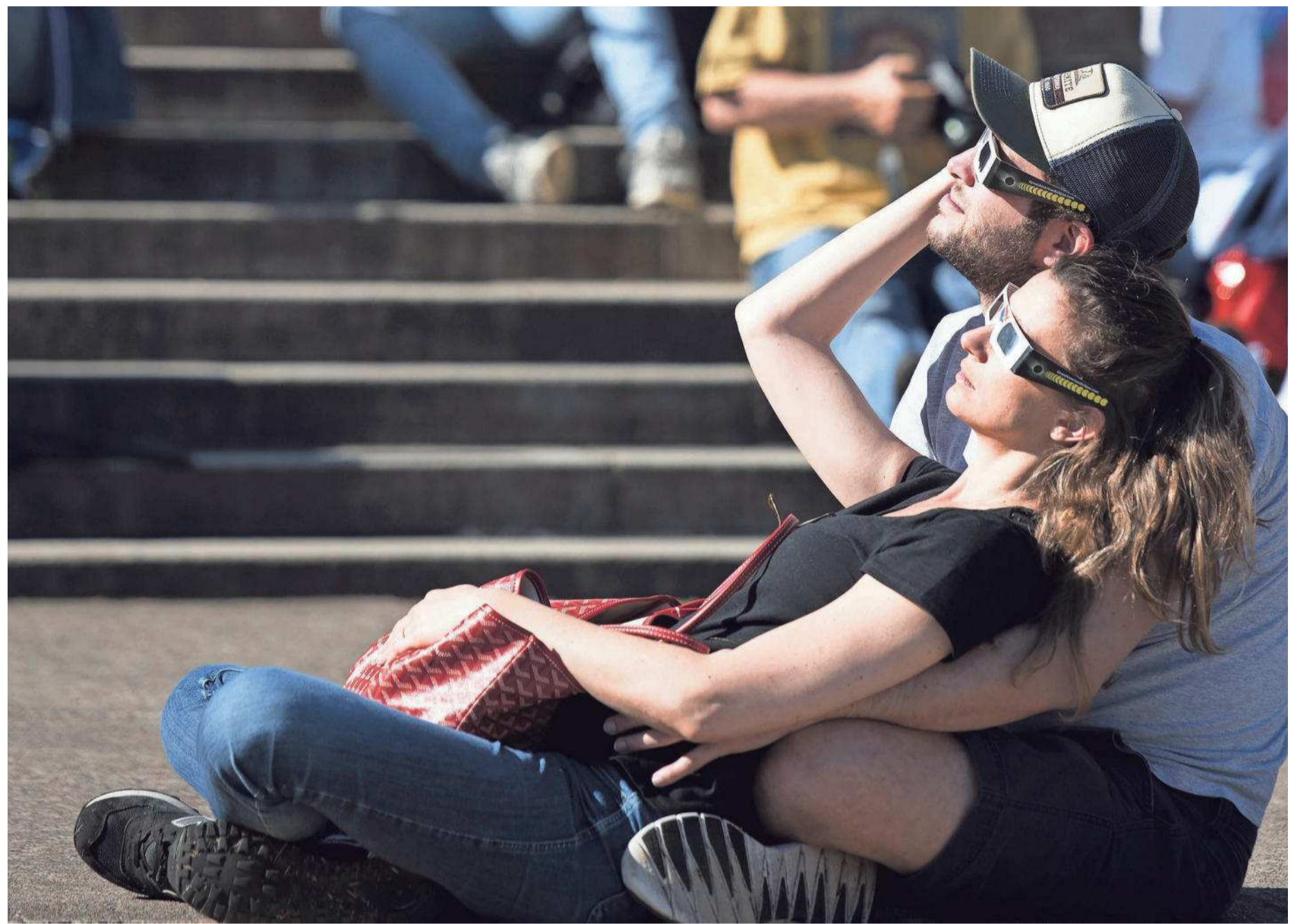


Life *in the* Valley

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DANIELLE PETERSON/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Allan and Maira Raicher of California get cozy on the steps of the Oregon State Capitol to view a total solar eclipse, also known as the Great American Eclipse.

Oregon's solar eclipse bonds family, friends and strangers

APPEAL TRIBUNE

It seemed every aspect of the total solar eclipse presented the gathered masses with a different, yet equally thrilling sight from atop Marys Peak Aug. 21.

Some let out exclamations and held hands with their partners as the moon first began carving a bite out of the sun.

The buzz grew louder as unnatural darkness began falling around them, building with each passing minute.

When the sun was a mere sliver in the sky, the chatter grew to a roar, then exploded into applause and cheering when totality struck.

Then collective silence. Unexpected emotion. Reflection.

Here on Oregon's tallest coastal peak, hundreds of science aficionados, outdoors enthusiasts, amateur astrophotographers, families with young children, and many more came together from across the nation to spend several minutes looking at the exact same point in the sky.

Jennifer Simpson from Seattle spent her 36th birthday on the mountain, with a balloon tied to her backpack, a shiny birthday hat on her head and a piece of cake in her bag.

Much of her family and friends would be watching the eclipse, too — her sister by her side, her parents as it passed over Chattanooga, Tennessee, and some close friends would catch a glimpse in St. Louis.

"It still kind of makes it a party," she said.

On a totally clear day, the Pacific Ocean is visible from the mountain's top, but during totality all people could see was a white ring where the sun used to be and a glow of pinks, blues and oranges all around.

Tears came to people's eyes and gasps and camera shutter clicks filled the now quiet and cooler air.

Many across Oregon were similarly shaken.

Finding words to describe the experience wasn't easy for campers at Solartown just north of Madras.

"Short of the birth of my kids, it was the most beautiful thing I've seen in my life," said David Wiza of Beaverton. "I'm an emotional baby anyway, but holy cow."

He and his wife, Kathy, hugged — but only after totality had passed.

Karri White, a banker from Santa Cruz, California, choked up and wiped away tears after she, her family and friends did a group hug during totality. "It was the most beautiful experi-



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David Wiza tears up as he describes the feeling of watching a total solar eclipse in Solartown, a solar eclipse campground just north of Madras.

ence I've had," she said. "In the midst of it, I teared up. It was just a glorious feeling."

At Baskett Slough National Wildlife Refuge west of Salem, the birds went strangely quiet as darkness enveloped the area. Joanna Picchi wished it had lasted longer.

"It was beyond expectations. But it all happened so fast. I just wanted it to stay for a while to soak it all up," she said. "It was really a spiritual experience."

And then, after months and sometimes years of planning, it was over. Science and stopwatches tell us totality lasted about 83 seconds at Marys Peak, but few describing it later would say it was more than 30.

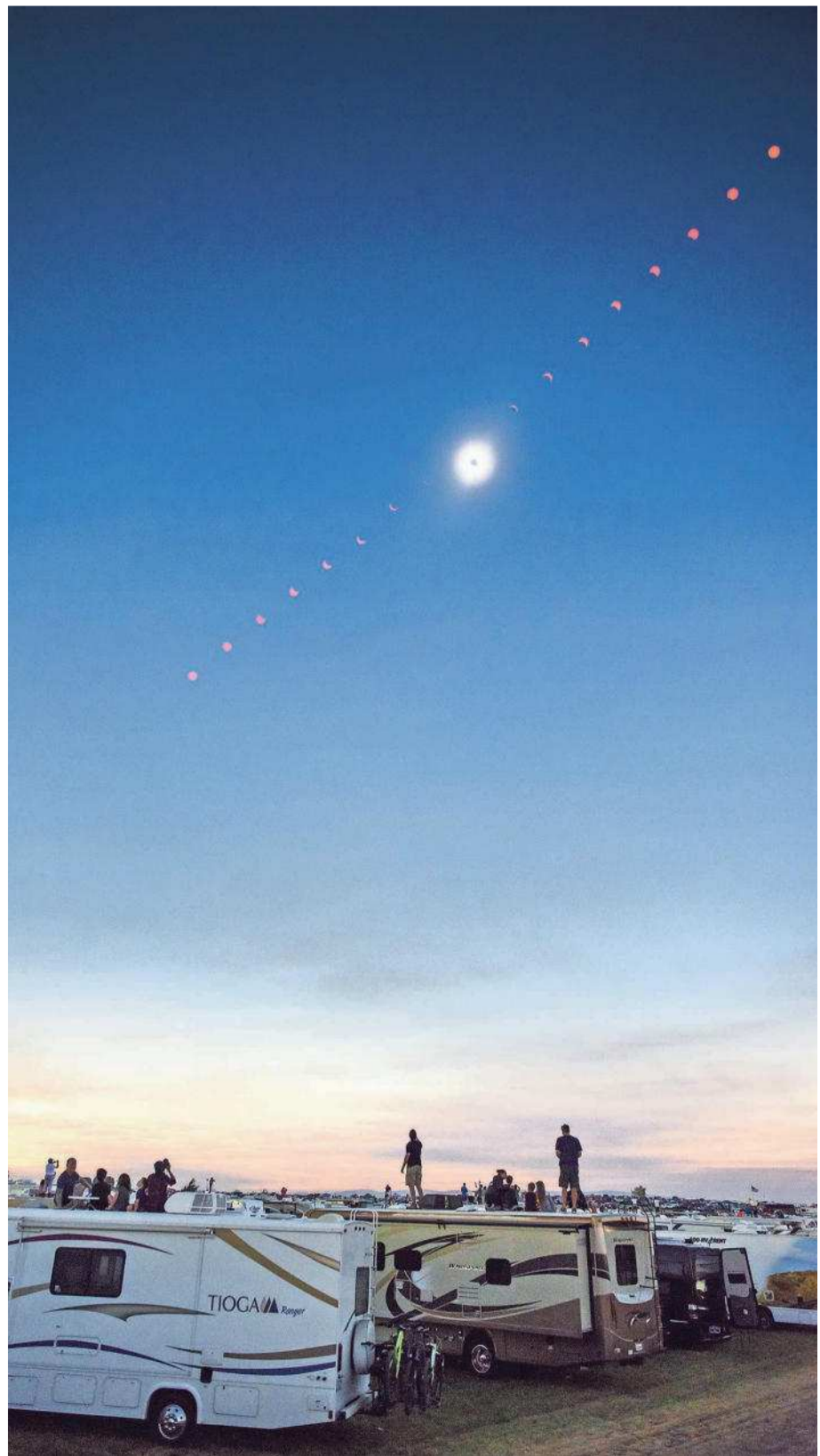
In Salem, it lasted almost 2 minutes.

But still, no one seemed to have words to fully articulate what happened, even when speaking to someone who had just witnessed the same phenomenon.

Some saw the solar eclipse as a way to bring perspective to what they see as an increasingly apathetic world. An event of this magnitude, they hope, will give the shortsighted and the disinterested some reason to take notice of the world around them.

"So many kids are not awed by nature any more. But I know this has knocked some socks off," said Eugene resident Donald Burton.

"I'm still looking for my socks," his friend Steve Pobutsky replied.



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A composite photo shows the progression of the total solar eclipse through the sky from Solartown, just north of Madras.