

Eclipse

Thousands turn out for E. Idaho eclipse event in extinct volcano on farm ground

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

MENAN, Idaho — The Aug. 21 total solar eclipse provided Randy South and his family a higher purpose for the extinct tuff volcano on their farm.

They've produced a few meager hay crops on the 55 acres of farmable ground within the volcano's crater. But South explained there's no way to get water inside the volcano, so his family has used it mostly for recreation — riding dirt bikes and sledding down the 500-foot-tall rim, which has a 2-mile circumference.

The volcano, however, provided the ideal setting for paying visitors from throughout the world to experience the eclipse. The South family, partnering with their neighbors, the Gundersons, started a website called Crater Adventures promoting the chance to witness the eclipse from a unique setting amid the path of totality.

An estimated 4,500 visitors from nearly every state and 25 foreign countries showed up to watch the eclipse from the volcano's rim. Most of the visitors paid up to \$30 per vehicle for eclipse parking and were shuttled to the volcano's rim to view the rare celestial event.

About 535 carloads of guests paid \$150 for RV sites and \$75 for tent sites to camp for up to four days in hay fields at the volcano's base. South said the farmer who leases his family's hay fields harvested early, and the re-growth provided good turf for campsites. More than 200 campers participated in an Aug. 18 Dutch oven chicken dinner for \$20 extra, which included sweet corn raised by the Gundersons.

South isn't certain how much revenue the event generated, factoring in costs of a special insurance policy and shuttle van and portable toilet rentals.

"Our goal was not to make money necessarily," South said. "Our goal was to have fun and have a fun experience."

The families also invited their guests, as well as the community, to a free Idaho fry feed on Aug. 20. They served about 700 trays of fries, and Rexburg-based Wilcox Fresh donated more fries when supplies ran out.

Elsewhere in Eastern Idaho, Idaho Falls Farmers' Market manager Junean Stoddard extended her normal Saturday market by two hours. She said some vendors sold out of their produce before the market even started, based on bigger orders from local restaurants.

Richard Johnson, owner of Grove City Gardens in Blackfoot, sold sweet corn from his farm as Mexican crazy corn at Rigby's Moon Fest.

Though sales were less than Johnson anticipated, he was pleased by the added exposure for his Wild Adventure Corn Maze, as well as his food booth at the upcoming Eastern Idaho State Fair.

James Hoff, an Idaho potato commissioner, said his family's side business, which fuels private aircraft at the Idaho Falls Regional Airport, also noticed extra traffic, fueling about 40 light aircraft and 80 corporate airplanes in town to view the eclipse.

Rebecca Squires, emergency manager for Jefferson County, said eclipse crowds were big, but not as large as officials had anticipated. Squires said more visitors than anticipated came just for the day, from as far away as California, and there were no significant eclipse-related problems.

Squires said her county has implemented a burning ban, which also covers agricultural burning, from Aug. 14-26, based on the eclipse traffic.



Lee Juillerat/For the Capital Press

The moon blots out the sun during the total eclipse that was seen in such out of the way places as tiny Camp Sherman, Ore.

Eclipse brings crowds to tiny town in Oregon

By LEE JUILLERAT
For the Capital Press

CAMP SHERMAN, Ore. — Surreal darkness accompanied the steady drop in temperature.

Excited shouts echoed from the neighboring homes, open fields and nearby unseen viewing places where others watched. All of them waiting, waiting, waiting for totality, the moment the moon would cover the sun.

The process that began from our eclipse viewing place in Camp Sherman shortly after 9 Monday morning seemed to suddenly accelerate.

Within a half-hour what began as a tiny nibble on the sun's northern flank had gobbled about half its surface. Wearing our special eclipse glasses we watched, excitedly barking a

series of whoops and wows.

Within another 15 minutes what remained of the sun looked like a Cheshire cat's narrowing grin.

Alternating bands of light shimmered as the coverage continued. Points of light — Baily's beads — appeared as streams of sunlight rolled across the moon.

Then, split seconds before totality, oohs and aahs echoed as the diamond ring effect briefly but brilliantly glowed around the blackening moon.

Shortly after 10 — no one was watching the time too closely — the moon fully covered the sun.

Totally. Everyone cheered, some focused on the moment, others madly clicking away photos on cameras and cell phones.

The corona, a bluish white

glow, emitted an ethereal fluorescent hue, its intensity seemingly evolving each second.

With totality, stars magically appeared, but the brightest point of light was the steady, brilliant glow of the planet Venus.

It lasted only about a minute, but the impact of totality was, well, totally involving.

Actually, the experience was days in the making. Friends and I had arrived in Camp Sherman, a small community near Bend, on Saturday, wanting to miss the feared bumper-to-bumper traffic. Tucked away in forestlands near the Metolius River, the community — like others in Central Oregon — had been preparing for the invasion for months.

The Camp Sherman Store was ready with eclipse glasses, T-shirts and other souvenirs. Its

owners organized impromptu dinners outside the store Saturday and Sunday nights. Popular trails along the Metolius River, called by some Oregon's most magical river, and campgrounds swelled with hikers and campers.

On Sunday morning, seasonal and year-around residents were joined by visitors like Steve, Allen and me for a special "Egg-lipse" pancake breakfast at the community hall.

Camp Sherman has a history. The first homesteaders arrived in 1891, mostly wheat farmers and their families from high desert areas of Sherman County seeking to escape the summer heat to camp, hike and fish along the Metolius. The Forest Service began leasing lands along the river for summer residences in 1916.

Legend says Camp Sherman got its name in unusual fashion. To guide other farmers to the community, it's said someone hammered a shoebox to a tree at a fork in the road with the name, "Camp Sherman." The name stuck.

While others stacked nearly side-by-side in freshly harvested fields in and near the suddenly populated cities of Madras and Prineville — dubbed by some television networks as the nation's best region for eclipse viewing — we and others savored the experience with a smattering of old and new friends. And even as the moon gradually yielded sunlight, we knew that — like millions of others across the nation — we had shared a mystical experience, not only the moment the sun disappeared, but the eternity of a memory.



Courtesy photo

Eclipse viewers prepare for the Aug. 21 event at Kelley Orchards in Weiser, Idaho. Ron and Kimi Kelley allowed about 20 eclipse tourists to experience the event for free in their orchard.

Farmers say total eclipse was an incredible experience

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

REXBURG, Idaho — Idaho farmers in the solar eclipse's path of totality — that area where the moon blocked out 100 percent of the sun — reported minor inconveniences, mostly related to traffic.

Or, in at least one instance, Canadian tourists who thought it would be a good idea to set up their eclipse viewing camp in the middle of a newly planted mustard field.

But those farmers also said the event was an awesome experience.

"I've never seen anything like it in my life. It was really spectacular," said Rexburg fresh potato grower Lynn Wilcox. "It's an event that I'll remember all the rest of my life and I'm glad I took the time to see it."

Wilcox shut down his potato packing facility in Rexburg for the day because of the anticipated traffic congestion and rented out viewing space on the property to 131 vehicles.

"Everybody that stayed there thought it was just awesome," he said.

When they awoke Friday morning, members of the Searle family in Shelley noticed vehicle tracks running through a mustard field they had planted three days before.

A.J. Searle followed the tracks and asked the culprits, Canadians who thought the

field was a good place to enjoy their eclipse viewing experience, if they were stuck.

"They said, 'No, we're fine,'" he said.

When Searle informed them otherwise, the group left with no problems.

Other than that unwelcome incursion, he said the eclipse was remarkable.

"It was amazing; absolutely incredible," he said. "It was definitely a once-in-a-lifetime thing."

Stan Searle, part of a different Searle farming family in Shelley, said he had planned to be cutting grain during the day of the eclipse but there was too much traffic to do that.

Traffic on the country roads near his farm was too congested to move grain trucks.

Two hours after the eclipse, traffic on those roads was still backed up and moving about 2 mph, he said.

Stan Searle thought the event was spectacular but he was also happy to see it end.

"We want it to get over with so we can go back to work," he said.

Across the state in Weiser, Kimi Kelley and her husband Ron shared the total eclipse experience with about 20 tourists they allowed to camp out in their orchard for free.

The group included some astronomers who shared powerful telescopes they brought with them.

"It was really amazing," Kelley said of the experience.



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