

Local

The Great American Eclipse



Submitted Photo.

Chloe Goodale said yes to Alex Dyke's proposal of marriage beneath the total solar eclipse Monday.



Kerry McQuisten / The Baker County Press

Mike Holden sat outside the Visitors Center Friday helping to distribute eclipse glasses and answer questions for travelers.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

The estimated influx of more than 50,000 visitors didn't quite materialize according to a year of predictions, nor did the travel patterns of those who did arrive.

Exact numbers of visitors were hard to establish before print. However, according to the Oregon Department of Transportation, August 16-21, 52,188 vehicles entered their Region 5, which includes over one-third of Oregon geographically, spanning the entire eastern part of the state from its top to bottom borders. At an average of three people per car, that would be 156,564 people for that large area. 29% of those travelers were logged on August 20. 28% on August 21 before 10 a.m.—and only 3% August 16.

The Wednesday prior to the eclipse showed a marked increase in travelers within the Baker City limits especially, and false rumors began to circulate through social media that gas stations were running out of gas and couldn't schedule refueling—which was never the case.

Thursday, activity seemed to slow according to several downtown business owners—then it picked up again Friday.

The heavy traffic jams mid-week were primarily in Central Oregon where the Symbiosis event in Prineville drew over 100,000 participants to a mini-Woodstock-like gathering.

Baker City Police Chief Wyn Lohner said, "There really was a low impact on the City other than traffic moving through town."

Lohner said, "As for scheduling, we ran the two extra DUII cars for four nights in a row (10 hour shifts), totaling 80 extra hours of patrol time. Lt. Newman and I both worked all weekend, just in case."

Out in the County, the Baker County Sheriff's Office and Baker County Emergency Management prepared as well.

Throughout the weekend and during the event, multiple local, state, and federal agencies gathered at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) located in Baker City.

The EOC operated as a support system and provided assistance with planning, logistics, and dispersing of public information throughout the weekend and into Monday.

One major area of concern was unskilled campers

off the beaten path on public lands, and the potential for human-caused wildfires that might bring.

By Sunday, camps were set up even in some of the more remote areas of the County, with no corner left undiscovered.

The visitors primarily came from Washington State and California, but plates from Texas were also seen parked on top of Dooley Mountain.

NASA sent a team of scientists to document the eclipse from the grounds of Burnt River School in Unity.

According to Sheriff Travis Ash, "Throughout the weekend, the Baker County Sheriff's Office operated approximately 16-23 personnel with the majority being scheduled for Monday.

"Deputies were assigned to patrol specific areas and remained in those designated areas throughout their shift. Baker County Dispatch was staffed with an additional dispatcher on each shift throughout the weekend. Several staff members were also dedicated to the Emergency Operations Center.

"Although data is still being compiled, we have estimated that deputies contacted hundreds, if not thousands, of visitors and citizens. I'm extremely pleased that we were afforded the opportunity to host thousands of visitors, with only one major crash that required law enforcement and medical resources."

The crash Ash referred to happened just after the eclipse concluded when a green car left the overpass above the freeway west of Durkee, and landed on its side, trapping the driver inside. Medics and deputies had to "snake their way through traffic," as they said over the radio, to the scene.

National Guard soldiers, including Spc. Kyle Knight and Sgt. Bo Hansen of Baker City, had been positioned at every exit from Durkee to Lime to Weatherby—and they helped clear a place for Lifeflight to land and transport the lone female occupant.

Around that same time, another fender-bender about two miles down the freeway in the opposite lanes, sent two to the hospital with minor injuries.

The National Guard were set up to provide humanitarian services such as handing out water and helping advise drivers which roads were and weren't passable.

(One surprising moment for the unit came when a red Jeep full of men pulled

off the Lime exit and asked where an appropriate place to sacrifice their goat during the eclipse might be.)

Jason Yencopal of Baker County Emergency Management said, "I took dinner over to Unity for the Medical Reserve Core team of four and the AMR ambulance of two, and on the way over Dooley Mountain there weren't that many vehicles parked in the pull-outs. Then on the way home I went over Dooley at 9:30 p.m. and there were vehicles pulling off ... setting up tents for the night. I don't think I have ever gone over Dooley and had so many cars going in the opposite direction before.

"The Oregon Eclipse Camp had near 1,000 and I think Lime and Weatherby probably almost became the second largest communities in Baker County with over 300 cars parked there—I would bet each car had two to four people in them.

"We had the National Guard stage 27 guardsmen between Durkee and Huntington to provide information and aid should it have been needed. They also provided two to serve in the EOC ... We also had four airmen with the Blackhawk that was an eastern Oregon resource staged in Baker."

Baker County Commissioner Mark Bennett of Unity also assisted with Emergency Management.

Bennett was also impressed with how smoothly the event went.

"There were about 2,000 visitors to the Burnt River area," he said. "And relatively few incidents—barring the 400-lb. naked man running around Denny Flats. There were only two medical calls—one heat exhaustion the other an 80 year-old who had been ill for the past week but still wanted to see the eclipse. Community members stated that the roads were open and the visitors did not leave trash around—and no fires."

Bennett did express initial concern from City Hall on Monday morning, when a caravan of about 300 cars were lined bumper-to-bumper from Baker City up to the Interpretive Center.

Bennett thought about 3,000 people ended up at Lime before the end.

One popular rumor circulated about several couples planning to conceive at Lime during the eclipse—Bennett wasn't aware if they truly attempted or were successful.

Another rumor, that of an eclipse suicide pact locally, was debunked prior to the event by Lohner.

Yet another eclipse happening that was not a rumor was a romantic proposal of marriage—Alex Dyke and Chloe Goodale became engaged during that celestial moment.

After the eclipse came the biggest, most noticeable traffic issues.

Lohner said this Wednesday, "Sunday afternoon traffic picked up as people moved in for the event and then Monday morning our officers were very busy directing people to open areas and away from private property. The only real issue was the traffic backup after the event. We had bumper to bumper traffic from the Highway 7 entrance into the city all the way through the city to the 304 on-ramp, on Campbell Street, for over two hours. Once that cleared everything slowed down again and today we are back to normal."

By late afternoon, traffic in the area was flowing well again.

Lohner concluded, "I think the best part was just how respectful and patient people were as they were trying to get through town to head home."

Bennett added, "I have spoken with a number of citizens who felt our little town responded well to the visitors."

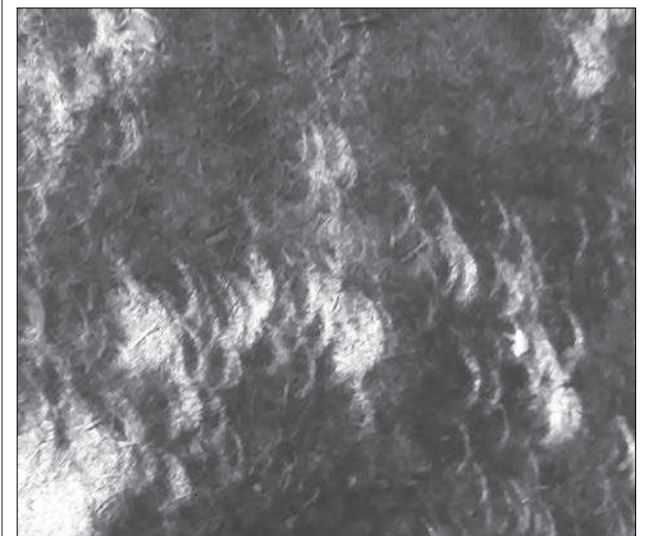
Shelly Cutler, Executive Director of the Chamber of Commerce and Visitors Bureau said guests logged there came from: Utah, Texas, South Carolina, California, Washington, Australia, Hawaii Idaho, Alaska, Michigan, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Louisiana, Kansas, Arizona, Ohio, Oklahoma, British Columbia, France, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, and the Netherlands.

Baker City's Jim Howerton put to words what many others expressed, "It was the most tranquil feeling I've ever had watching totality... and having my family watching it beside me made it even better."

For those looking for a way to dispose of their extra eclipse glasses, the Baker County Public Library is collecting them for the Astronomers Without Borders redistribution program, which will send them to schools in South America and parts of Asia for their 2019 solar eclipse event.

While other total solar eclipses are scheduled for elsewhere in the globe—and even elsewhere in the U.S.—as soon as just seven years from now, another will not pass over eastern Oregon until June 25, 2169—152 years from now.

Pioneer Days doubles as eclipse celebration



Eileen Driver / The Baker County Press

Backward shadows filled with a crescent pattern were noted by so many beneath the eclipse.

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"Amazing!" was the consensus of the crowds lining the streets, yards and formerly vacant lots of Huntington for arguably the most epic astronomical phenomenon of this century—the total solar eclipse.

Visitors came from all corners of the world to witness the two minutes and nine seconds that the moon completely covered the sun turning day into night. Locals said they had never before witnessed so many people gathered together with but a single thought and purpose.

Everyone was quiet and still with solar glasses in place and all eyes trained on the sky.

At the moment of totality, a mass cheer reverberated thru the town and if there was a soul left who did not know that a momentous event was occurring they knew it then.

During the one and a half hours leading up to totality and the one and a half after, another interesting and fascinating event occurred on the lawn of Lion's Park.

Millions of small crescent-shaped lights appeared among the shadows of the trees and was a marvel to behold. Pictures taken did not begin to due the celestial light show justice.

For the days leading up to the eclipse locals and visitors alike enjoyed the annual Pioneer Days Celebration with live music in the park rocking out till midnight every night, with among others, some favorite bands from the Boise area including Raketooth, Captain Snafu and Tim Swanson & the 80s Show.

The "Balloon Man" roamed the park making balloon animals for young and old alike and with the vendor and food booths available no one had time to be idle or hungry.

The kids enjoyed beating the heat in the water park with the 16 foot-tall water slide and bouncing the day away in the Bouncy Castle.

Visitors were shuttled between Farewell Bend State Park, Pioneer Days, the Huntington Historical Museum and the Trapper Rendezvous on the Burley Farm by the Snake River Sternwheeler bus.

The Chamber of Commerce would like to thank the following sponsors for making this event possible: 420ville, Burnt River Farms, Hotbox Farms, Indianhead Electric, Burnt River Junction, T & T Country Store and The Harriman Family.

PD gives DUII grant results

The Baker City Police Department participated in a high-visibility enforcement campaign to locate and aggressively seek out impaired drivers during the Solar Eclipse weekend, August 17th thru August 21st. Utilizing grant funds awarded through Oregon Impact, overtime patrols were in place to augment regular patrol shifts in the search for impaired (DUII) drivers.

The Baker City Police Department made three DUII arrests and issued 113 tickets which include citations and warnings. BCPD also issued five citations for Minor in Possession of Alcohol during this time period. Baker City Drug Recognition Evaluators (DRE) also conducted three evaluations on impaired drivers under the influence of controlled substances.

Law enforcement agencies throughout Oregon participated in this nationwide effort to get more impaired drivers off the streets — making the crackdown during this unprecedented event count by saving lives that might otherwise be lost.

The Baker City Police Department joined forces with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and other State and local law enforcement and highway safety partners in conducting the crackdown campaign, which featured high-visibility enforcement combined with a variety of outreach activities, including \$14 million in paid national advertising.

For more information, visit the High-Visibility Enforcement Campaign Headquarters at www.StopImpairedDriving.org.