



THE GREAT AMERICAN SOLAR ECLIPSE 2017

Eclipse: Celestial event happened during busy month

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"It's eerily quiet," said David Horning, wildland fire supervisor at the state Department of Forestry's Astoria office, on Sunday.

Fire was a major concern leading up to the eclipse — and, with the mass of people traveling to Oregon, emergency responders worried about traffic gridlock that would not only increase fire danger but also make it almost impossible to move crews, fire engines and equipment to where they were needed.

In Clatsop County, out of the path of totality, state and local officials mostly worried about fire and emergency situations that could occur in the days before and after the eclipse when people were traveling to and from their viewing locations. Local forestland and campground managers prohibited all campfires, and the Astoria Department of Forestry Office began staging crews and equipment at key spots across the county last week.

One firefighter stationed near the county's southern border was prepared to camp for several days in case traffic was so bad that it didn't make sense for him to return to the office each day.

By Sunday, the whole thing felt more like a test run for this weekend's Hood to Coast relay than a response to the eclipse. When fire crews near Forest Grove asked for assistance with a wildland fire there, the Astoria Department of Forestry office was easily able to



Photos by Colin Murphey/The Daily Astorian
People gaze up at the sky near the Astoria Column on Monday morning for the solar eclipse. Hundreds of people flocked to the iconic landmark to witness the event.

send a few people down.

In Astoria, businesses downtown were no busier than they normally would be during a summer weekend. Area campgrounds were full or near capacity — as they are every August, eclipse or no eclipse.

The celestial event happened right near the end of a busy month, beginning with a beach volleyball tournament in Seaside the week before and Hood to Coast this coming this weekend. The popular recreational Buoy 10 fishery has drawn hundreds of anglers to the area all month long.

On a whim

People who wanted to experience the full eclipse had

already traveled south to watch it glide along the path of totality. Those who remained to watch it at North Coast landmarks — the Astoria Column, Peter Iredale shipwreck and Haystack Rock — were largely a mixture of locals and vacationers who happened to be passing through the area.

Libbie Stobely and Jeff Skinner of Seattle made reservations at the Hallmark Resort and Spa in Cannon Beach a year in advance. Regulars at the hotel, the two did not consider booking a room in the path of totality.

When pondering whether they should have made plans inside the path or away from possible cloud cover, both

had the same response: "Who cares?"

Others, like Tom Chmielewski and Sharon Russel, of Madeira Beach, Florida, ended up making their eclipse plans on a whim. They were visiting Astoria as part of a two-week West Coast trip celebrating their upcoming 30th anniversary. Though they knew of the eclipse, it didn't factor much into the plans they made Monday morning.

"We stumbled upon this and we said, 'Let's go see the totem!'" Chmielewski said. Later that day, they witnessed the eclipse from the Astoria Column.

Tom Barnum of Astoria had already witnessed the 1979



People start to gather at the Astoria Column for the solar eclipse on Monday morning. The location proved to be a popular place for viewing the phenomenon.



Porsche Brunzell, left, and Juliette Moore, right, prepare for the solar eclipse at the Astoria Column. The two had a spot staked out early in the morning and were soon joined by many others who chose the location to witness the event.

eclipse, and he considered traveling south. Instead, he and his wife parked their camping chairs and took photos from the Column.

Maybe they will someday witness the total eclipse as part of a foreign vacation, Barnum said. "I'd rather go to Australia than Albany."



Claire Withycombe/Capitol Bureau
Gov. Kate Brown, a former Campfire Girl, chats with Girl Scouts at the Oregon Capitol before the total solar eclipse Monday morning.

Capitol: Gov. Brown hosted a group of Girl Scouts from around Oregon

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Olle Frykstam, 23, came to Salem with a group of other amateur astronomers from his home country, Sweden. At 9 a.m., just over an hour before the sun was due to be obscured, Frykstam said, "I hope for total darkness."

He got his wish. Gov. Kate Brown hosted a group of Girl Scouts from Salem and Woodburn and other guests — ranging from the state forester to the secretary of state — for a morn-

ing eclipse viewing party on a terrace outside her ceremonial office.

Brown said guests had converged on the capitol terrace from places as far-flung as Chile, Peru and "the state south of Oregon."

After she was presented with a special commemorative stamp, Brown and her guests took in the eclipse.

Things grew quiet as the air cooled and the moon began to obscure more of the sun.

During the event itself,

though, crowds at the Capitol Mall and nearby Willamette University could be heard making noise. The Girl Scouts screamed.

"The sun is winning!" said Secretary of State Dennis Richardson as the moon continued its journey. People applauded and cheered after the darkness lifted.

Afterward, Brown appeared in awe.

"It is a euphoric feeling," Brown said. "It was absolutely stunning. There is no way to describe it in words."

John Day: Next total solar eclipse in Oregon won't happen until 2108

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watchers who made the trip to witness the once-in-a-lifetime event. A large crowd gathered over the weekend at the city's airport industrial park, where campers reserved their spots months in advance to experience the eclipse in its full glory.

According to travelers, it was well worth the trip.

Mike Ziemke, of Merrill, Wisconsin, drove two full days to John Day where he met his friend, Chuck Stewart, of Vancouver, Washington. The two astronomy buffs settled in Wednesday and spent every night stargazing through their telescopes and eagerly awaiting Monday's eclipse.

Ziemke, who watched the 1979 total solar eclipse from his home in Wisconsin, described the experience as life-changing.

"It's something that's just unbelievable," he said. "To think of all the people across the country coming together today, just to watch ... you've got all walks of life."

Kevin Knowles, an astronomy teacher at Mount Si High School in Snoqualmie, Washington, wore his enthusiasm on his sleeve — literally — with not one, but two shirts adorned in planets and galaxies. He said he first heard about the eclipse in March while attending the National Science Teachers Association

conference in Los Angeles and made his arrangements.

"I would have loved to have this a few weeks later so I could have brought my whole class," Knowles said. "Definitely, this brings alive everything I teach."

For others, traveling to the path of totality was a last-minute decision. Patricia Johnson, of Sacramento, California, drove up to Oregon with her adult son, Edek Sher, who was home visiting from Rhode Island.

The two were not able to find eclipse glasses on such short notice anywhere in Northern California. Fortunately, they were able to stop at the Powerhouse Science Center in Sacramento, where they learned how to make their own using paper and popsicle sticks. The center also provided the proper viewing lenses.

"We were embarrassed," Johnson said with a smile. "But we wanted to come prepared."

A number of visitors traveled not just cross-country, but across an ocean to see the uniquely North American event. Bart Verbrugge and his wife, Véronique, came all the way from their native Holland with their two children, Isabel, 11, and Jurien, 9.

Bart Verbrugge said he has witnessed two other solar eclipses in his life — one in northern France and the other in Zambia, Africa.

But he wanted to be able to share the experience with his kids, so they flew together to Vancouver, British Columbia, about three weeks ago for vacation and made their way to John Day by Friday.

"We wanted to show the kids this awesome experience," he said. "I just want to share with them this magical moment."

Bernd Schatzman also flew in to the U.S. from Germany, where he met friends in Los Angeles before coming up to the path of totality together.

The feeling of watching an eclipse is incomparable, he said.

"It's like some special kind of gray darkness," Schatzman explained. "At the same time, the sun gets this silvery kind of shine."

After totality, some at the industrial park decided to stay while others hit the road right away. Worries of severe traffic backups were perhaps overblown, according to Tom Strandberg with the Oregon Department of Transportation, who said only minor delays were reported along highways 395 and 26.

"It's actually been a lot calmer than we anticipated," he said. "People seem to be behaving, for the most part."

The United States will not experience another total solar eclipse until 2024, and Oregon will not see another until 2108, when one is expected to graze along the coast.

Trees: 'It's not like in five years these trees will be the same trees'

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Director Angela Cosby, and is a way to provide "intelligent stewardship," added Dart-McLean.

"We're going to be playing catch-up for probably a year or two," Cosby said, adding that, in the long run, the inventory will save the department money.

This is good news for a parks department plagued by financial woes in the

recent past.

"I'm glad to hear some positive news from the parks department," City Councilor Zetty Nemlowill said.

While the department's facilities, responsibilities and costs have grown over the years, its revenue and full-time staff have not kept pace. Cosby has had to cut some programs and considered closing the Aquatic Center this summer. Over the past six months, the City Council discussed numer-

ous ways to sustain the parks department into the future, finally settling on an increase to the lodging tax as the main way to bring in more money.

A master plan finalized last year was an attempt to focus the parks department's efforts and resources. The department had no system in place before that to guide how it developed existing parks or established new ones. As a result, some parks and projects slipped through the cracks over the years.

It was a similar story with the trees, too. Park staff dealt with obvious problems — safety hazards created by fallen trees or the issues with the Violet LaPlante maple — but had no overall sense of tree health or maintenance needs across the city's parklands.

The parks department is in the process of hiring a grounds coordinator. The coordinator will be required to obtain arborist certification 18 months after being hired, and continue the

work highlighted in the inventory. Though the department will likely continue to contract out big and more complex projects, Cosby said more projects can be completed in-house with a trained arborist on staff.

The comprehensive inventory also came with software to help the department track a given tree or, in heavily wooded areas like Cathedral Tree Trail where identifying each individual tree wasn't possible, a representative sample of an area.

Park staff can use this software to constantly update information about the trees.

After all, Dart-McLean pointed out, the inventory is a snapshot of a certain point in time in the lives of these trees. In five years — or even after winter storms this year — everything could change.

"It's an interesting thing to manage for," Dart-McLean said. "It's not like in five years these trees will be the same trees."