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OUR VIEW



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Patricia Johnson of Sacramento uses a pair of homemade eclipse viewing glasses on Monday in John Day.

Eclipse experiences

We sat back in our lawn chairs like they were front row seats at a Bruce Springsteen concert, sipping Bloody Marys, two dogs eddying around us. Showtime was an hour hence. Giddy and expectant, the seven of us lounged in a meadow near Galena, in Grant County.

Monitoring the ever-growing bite out of the sun, our discussion ranged to and fro, from rattlesnakes to vampires. Someone started singing, “You are my sunshine” and everyone joined in.

Camping next to us, seven photographers readied their cameras. My camera, however, would stay in its bag. On Sunday afternoon, while fording the shallow middle fork of the John Day River with camera slung around my neck, the strap broke and my Canon tumbled into the water. Glug. My horror evolved into acceptance by eclipse time as I rationalized the experience could actually be more meaningful unencumbered by a camera.

As the moment neared, camera forgotten, conversation stopped. The sun and moon aligned and a glow rimmed the pair. Hushed awe, punctuated by sounds of wonder.

“Wow.” “I’m getting chills.” “What a rush.”

As a skeptical journalist accustomed to ignoring hyperbole, I realized this event had actually lived up to the hype. Yes, what a rush.

— Reporter Kathy Aney writes about health and human interest

Having already decided to stay in Pendleton rather than seek a spot in the path of totality, I spent the weeks leading up to the solar eclipse wondering aloud what the difference would be between 98 percent coverage and 100 percent.

A lot, it turns out, but that doesn’t mean the eclipse wasn’t a memorable in-town experience.

Rather than bathe the city in total darkness, Pendleton’s partial eclipse culminated in a heavy pall, as if the world’s contrast settings had been temporarily lowered.

As the eclipse began to crescendo, a man from a nearby office asked if he could use my glasses to peek at the diminished sun.

I happily obliged, because this temporary bout of celestial weirdness should be a communal experience.

Unlike previous total eclipses, technology gives us the benefit of watching Monday’s eclipse repeatedly and on-demand with unmitigated clarity.

But even with that in mind, millions of us took the time Monday morning to put on silly paper glasses and crane our heads toward the sky.

— Antonio Sierra covers Pendleton.

Emily Olson and I left Pendleton at 6 a.m. for Baker City, posting updates to the *East Oregonian* Facebook page along the way.

Once in the zone of totality, we pulled off on a gravel road and parked alongside a wary band of horses, the Elkhorn Mountains to our west and the Willows to our north.

Then, over the course of an hour, the world as we knew it became a world we did not know.

It’s hard to name the feeling. As totality approached, we watched the surrounding mountains drop into darkness. There was a sunsetish tint in every direction, but the colors were more purple and gray. The light became hazy and then it was sharp and precise, then hazy again.

And then it was dark. The corona of the sun danced and sparkled, small and high in the sky. In utter confusion, I looked at it and then at my hands, the ground and the outlines of the mountains. I made circles of looking.

And just like that it was over. The veil fell back into place, the old world reappeared with its comfortable clarity.

Still, though, I won’t forget what I saw under that veil.

— Tim Trainor is opinion page editor

The *EO*’s “Eclipse plans for procrastinators” was resonating a little too strongly for me when, as of Friday, I was without a pair of those all-important eclipse glasses.

A stranger on Facebook had offered to sell me a pair in a grocery store parking lot for \$10 but I wasn’t sure if the glasses’ ISO rating would be the only shady thing about the deal.

Luckily, my brother and new sister-in-law made a last-minute request to stay the night on their way home from their honeymoon, and were willing to spare a pair in exchange for lodging.

The moment I put on the glasses Monday, I could see what all the fuss was about. The flimsy little spectacles took the experience from “overcast day” to “heavenly pageant.”

I texted a fellow procrastinator and invited him to stop by while I was interviewing other eclipse-watchers at Hermiston’s Butte Park and take a peek, but he insisted he was fine with brief looks upward in dark sunglasses.

“Don’t yell at me but my eyes are beginning to hurt,” he texted me a few minutes later.

— Reporter Jade McDowell covers west Umatilla County for the *East Oregonian*

I think I’d like to keep a total solar eclipse in my pocket, for days when I doubt that the world contains wonder and magic.

The eclipse’s power is revealed subtly. In the moments before totality, colors fade and shadows elongate. The temperature drops and birds cease singing. The world is still as every watcher holds her breath.

Then it’s there — an ineffable spectacle of indigo sky, rosy horizon and shock-white corona dancing around the void. It’s gone before you can comprehend it, the duration just short enough to rob you of satisfaction.

But it leaves a wake of collective cheering, laughing, bewilderment and disbelief. You’re both aware of your infinite inconsequence and empowered by the solidarity. You somehow feel accomplished, like you communed with celestial beings.

And you forget, for just a moment, all that’s happening with North Korea and Steve Bannon and confederate statues and your own unstable future. For that precious, fleeting minute, the world is full of wonder.

— Emily Olson is the newspaper’s summer intern

I wavered for months, weighing the convenience of partiality against the experience of totality. Would a momentary dimming of the sky, highlighted by a bizarre ring of viewable sunlight in the center of it, be worth the hassle of getting in and out of the “zone” on a Monday morning? My inner cynic and inner child were at war.

The kicker, though, was my daughter, Anna, who is a week away from entering first grade.

She has no specific interest in astronomy, but the general fascination with all things that comes with the age. She and I packed up Sunday night and hit the road for my mother-in-law’s house in southern Sherman County, where we camped on the front lawn and watched the stars.

I bumbled through a dad-worthy explanation of how the orbits and rotations of the universe work and went to sleep in anticipation of seeing something remarkable.

And that was indeed what happened. It is explainable, but not describable. As we watched the moon nibble away at the sun, then cover it entirely, we were in awe. As it crossed to the other side, we couldn’t believe it was over.

Anna immediately wished we could see it again. It was a powerful lesson on seizing the moment when the stars align.

— Daniel Wattenburger is managing editor of the *East Oregonian*.

OTHER VIEWS



Discovering the limitations of statues

I believe I have an answer to our statue problem.

There are two ways to look at what happened last week in Charlottesville, Virginia. One is as a crisis over racism, anti-Semitism and violence. The other is as a crisis over the removal of Robert E. Lee on a horse. We know where our president went. “Sad to see the history and culture of our great country being ripped apart with the removal of our beautiful statues and monuments,” wrote Donald Trump.

Sure, a different president — oh God, for a different president — would have had a larger vision. But for the moment let’s think small and focus on the statue. The nation has around 700 public memorials to the Confederacy, and most people would say that’s more than plenty. But getting rid of statues, any statues, has become very difficult. “They become sacrosanct once they’re erected,” said Kirk Savage, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh who’s an expert on the subject. “It’s as if the monuments had been dropped from the sky.”

Pittsburgh, for instance, has a truly awful 100-year-old statue of Stephen Foster, the composer of “My Old Kentucky Home,” looking down in white benevolence on what was commissioned to be “an old darkey reclining at his feet strumming negro airs upon an old banjo.” But city officials haven’t been able to make it go away.

In New York we have the problem of Dr. J. Marion Sims in Central Park. Sims is known as the father of American gynecological medicine, and he pioneered a surgical procedure to repair tears that some women suffer during childbirth.

It wasn’t until fairly recently that people living around the statue learned that the way he had perfected his technique was by experimenting without anesthesia on slave women. The city is wrestling with that one, aware that it’s managed to get rid of only one statue in modern history — Civic Virtue, a fountain depicting a large naked man standing (virtue) astride vanquished female figures representing vice and corruption. (A politician named — yes! — Anthony Weiner held a press conference demanding that it be evicted.)

There have always been ways of getting around the problem of unwanted statuary. Erika Doss, a professor in the American studies department at Notre Dame, pointed out that when the American Revolution began, New Yorkers pulled down a memorial to King George III in Bowling Green. It shouldn’t be all that difficult, she said. “Memorials and monuments have a life span, not unlike



GAIL COLLINS
Comment

We could use a more efficient way to cycle out the statues that have overstayed their welcome.

the human body. They’re symbols at certain moments. Values change, histories change.”

But these are sensitive times, and we could use a more efficient way to cycle out the pieces that have overstayed their welcome. Suppose they just had expiration dates? Every 20 years, a statue would come up for renewal. A commission could hold hearings, take public comment and then issue a decision. Evictees could go off to a new life at museums or private collections.

It would be a good way to get rid of the huge overrepresentation of military men. When I walk my dog in the morning, I almost always run into the Civil War general

Franz Sigel, sitting on a horse looking out over Riverside Park. Actually, the neighborhood only knows about the horse, since our view is mainly equine *derrière*.

And we could whittle down the politicians. A little later I pass Samuel Tilden, who was governor of New York in the 1870s and an unsuccessful candidate for president. The statue was

built from the estate of, um, Samuel Tilden.

Both men were fine Americans, and you wouldn’t want to disrespect them. But if they had due dates it might be possible to give somebody new a turn. We’ve never, for instance, had a statue of Elizabeth Jennings Graham, a black city teacher whose refusal to get off a whites-only trolley car in 1854 led to the legal integration of New York City mass transit a century before Rosa Parks refused to give up her bus seat.

Didn’t even know about Graham, did you? But maybe you would if she had a statue.

Trump, of course, just likes white guys on horses. “The beauty that is being taken out of our cities, towns and parks will be greatly missed and never able to be comparably replaced,” he moaned in a Robert E. Lee tweet.

Future generations are never going to see a bronze version of Trump astride his mount. Besides the detail of being perhaps the worst occupant of the White House in American history, our president doesn’t ride. He did once buy a racehorse named Alibi. One of Trump’s former executives has claimed that the colt had to have part of his hooves amputated when his owner forced him to be exercised over the trainer’s objections.

Gail Collins joined *The New York Times* in 1995 as a member of the editorial board and later as an *Op-Ed* columnist. In 2001 she became the first woman ever appointed editor of the *Times*’s editorial page.

YOUR VIEWS

Trump is a movie villain president come to life

There was a light-hearted movie made a few years ago in which the President of the United States, facing very low approval numbers, started a war to divert attention from his poor performance. It was made in the same spirit of the classic black comedy film *Dr. Strangelove*. We all remember that one, as it involved nuclear war.

Now, we are in a real-life situation that rings similar. In my opinion, President Trump, recognizing the investigation on the Russian involvement with the Trump presidential campaign is leading to the White House, intentionally made his incendiary “fire and fury,” and additional, remarks to divert attention from the investigation.

President Trump’s provocative remarks were confirmed by his senior staff to be “improvised.” In other words, his remarks came out of the blue, without so much as a brief discussion with his military and diplomatic advisers beforehand. Here is a guy with absolutely no military strategy expertise or experience spouting off threatening and belligerent remarks right and left.

The president and his North Korean counterpart are worse than two fourth-graders out in the playground, trying to come up with

the toughest talk. The world can only hope against hope that the situation will not escalate into more than what it is now. “Locked and loaded?” “A firestorm such as the world has never seen?” Hollywood would have to dig deep to come up with better scripted words than this.

Then when all the bombast is over, the Russian collusion investigation will still be there, narrowing in on the White House and its chief resident.

Bob Shippentower
Pendleton

While country fights against drugs, Oregon expands them

Seems odd that Umatilla County Health wants to see more oversight over tobacco and nicotine to keep them out of the hands of underage kids. The whole country is in a prescription painkiller drug panic.

But here in Oregon our own Governor Kate Brown takes the most addictive and illegal drugs known and makes it a misdemeanor to use and abuse them. It may keep the prisons a little less full, but at what cost to destroyed lives, petty theft, overloaded mental health organizations?

Randy Holman
Pendleton