

GET OUT & GO

# Stargazing IN GRANT COUNTY

# explore LIKE A LOCAL



TANNI WENGER PHOTOGRAPHY STUDIOS PHOTO

## GRANT COUNTY HAS SOME OF THE PUREST NIGHT SKIES A PERSON COULD ASK FOR

You can pack up your telescope, binoculars or other stargazing gear and head to a high point, or simply bring a pillow and a blanket into the backyard - you will find the stars either way.

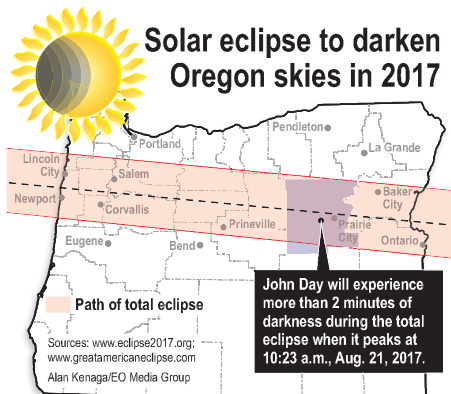
Once you are out in the darkness for about 15 minutes, you will be surprised at how well your eyes adjust and how much you can see. You can find a lot of information with a little bit of online searching, and online charts, which are updated by month, will usually have the planet positions shown along with the stars.

While an impromptu visit to the night sky is always an adventure, there are several meteor showers every year if you want to plan ahead. However, coming in August 2017 is a rare celestial event every stargazer, seasoned or not, should plan on seeing, and you won't even have to stay up late for it.

For the first time in over two decades, a total solar eclipse is coming to North America, and its path couldn't be more convenient for viewers who live in or travel to Grant County.

A total solar eclipse occurs when the shadow of the moon obscures the sun, and during any one eclipse, totality, where the viewing is greatest and longest, is at best only in a narrow track on Earth.

The trajectory of totality for this particular eclipse arcs across a swath of Oregon. No Oregon county has greater land mass in the prime viewing path than Grant,



with the path covering all but a sliver of our turf.

Even better, the show will be mid-morning, when clear skies are more than likely. Combine that with our wide open spaces and big sky, and it looks like this will be one of the greatest places to view the eclipse.

Although the total length of time to view the phenomenon as it passes the United States is only about an hour and a half, and viewing time as it passes overhead roughly two minutes, the memory of seeing an astronomic spectacle of this caliber will last a lifetime.



SCOTTA CALLISTER PHOTO

## JOHN FIEDOR

If you see John Fiedor standing outside at night somewhere, staring up at the night sky, he's fine — just a little "lost in space."

Fiedor, a passionate stargazer, refers to stars as "lights above, that you know so well, who greet you as old friends, put on a show for you, comfort you and dare you to wonder."

What he enjoys most is that "at a certain point in the hobby you become so familiar with the night sky that you lose all fear of the night."

Countless times he's pulled up to his house at night, and on his way to the front door, stopped and gazed up at the starry night sky — often for a half-hour or more — before heading on inside.

Fiedor, now retired after 17 years with the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, has lived in Dayville for over 20 years. He's been passionate about stargazing ever since his Boy Scouting days in the 1960s when he attended troop stargazing programs he thoroughly enjoyed.

"I learned to recognize the constellations and in my early career as a park ranger in the 1970s, I used to give similar stargazing programs for visitors," he said.

He developed night sky programs — which he still presents — for the public featuring the Fossil Beds and its connections to the night sky.

His nighttime sky thrills include seeing his first galaxy (other than the Milky Way) in 2004, — the Andromeda, 2.5-million light years away.

"In my imagination, to see something so far away that even the Starship Enterprise couldn't reach to explore, was a thrill, he said." First laying his eyes on Uranus and Neptune a few years ago were also memorable moments.

For local stargazers, Fiedor has great news.

"Grant County has one of the most pristine night skies in the lower 48 states. It's easy to find a good stargazing location here. Just find ground with a view of the horizons and away or shielded from all lights, and you are set to watch as the dusk fades. All you need are your eyes for the grand view and perhaps a pair of binoculars."

Telescopes can come later as the passion grows, but while they bring you in for a closeup look, the grand view gets lost, he said.

And as for the Aug. 21, 2017, total solar eclipse set to pass over central Grant County? Fiedor is more than ready for the stellar occasion.

"To have a 75-mile-wide dot of total blackness pass directly over your home, of all the places on this large earth, well that makes it special," he said.

"I can't wait."