

# 'A primal experience': Americans dazzled by solar eclipse (Update)

August 21 2017, by Marcia Dunn

---



A partial solar eclipse appears over the Statue of Liberty on Liberty Island in New York, Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Seth Wenig)

The stars came out in the middle of the day, zoo animals ran in agitated circles, crickets chirped, birds fell silent and a chilly darkness settled

upon the land Monday as the U.S. witnessed its first full-blown, coast-to-coast solar eclipse since World War I.

Millions of Americans gazed in wonder at the cosmic spectacle, with the best seats along the so-called path of totality that raced 2,600 miles (4,200 kilometers) across the continent from Oregon to South Carolina.

"It was a very primal experience," Julie Vigeland, of Portland, Oregon, said after she was moved to tears by the sight of the sun reduced to a silvery ring of light in Salem.

It took 90 minutes for the shadow of the moon to travel across the country. Along that path, the moon blotted out the midday sun for about two wondrous minutes at any one place, eliciting oohs, aahs, whoops and shouts from people gathered in stadiums, parks and backyards.

It was, by all accounts, the most-observed and most-photographed eclipse in history, documented by satellites and high-altitude balloons and watched on Earth through telescopes, cameras and cardboard-frame protective eyeglasses.

In Boise, Idaho, where the sun was more than 99 percent blocked, the street lights flicked on briefly, while in Nashville, Tennessee, people craned their necks at the sky and knocked back longneck beers at Nudie's Honky Tonk bar.



The moon covers the sun during a total eclipse Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, near Redmond, Ore. (AP Photo/Ted S. Warren)

Passengers aboard a cruise ship in the Caribbean watched it unfold as Bonnie Tyler sang her 1983 hit "Total Eclipse of the Heart."

Several minor-league baseball teams—one of them, the Columbia Fireflies, outfitted for the day in glow-in-the-dark jerseys—briefly suspended play.

At the White House, despite all the warnings from experts about the risk of eye damage, President Donald Trump took off his eclipse glasses and looked directly at the sun.

The path of totality, where the sun was 100 percent obscured by the moon, was just 60 to 70 miles (96 to 113 kilometers) wide. But the rest of North America was treated to a partial eclipse, as were Central America and the upper reaches of South America.



Ann Kim Tenhor, of Arlington, Mass., uses protective eclipse glasses to view a partial solar eclipse, Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, on the campus of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, in Cambridge, Mass. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

Skies were clear along most of the route, to the relief of those who feared cloud cover would spoil the moment.

"Oh, God, oh, that was amazing," said Joe Dellinger, a Houston man who

set up a telescope on the Capitol lawn in Jefferson City, Missouri. "That was better than any photo."

For the youngest observers, it seemed like magic.

"It's really, really, really, really awesome," said 9-year-old Cami Smith as she gazed at the fully eclipsed sun in Beverly Beach, Oregon.



A crowd reacts as clouds move to reveal a partial solar eclipse Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, in New York. (AP Photo/Michael Noble Jr.)

NASA reported 4.4 million people were watching its TV coverage midway through the eclipse, the biggest livestream event in the space

agency's history.

"It can be religious. It makes you feel insignificant, like you're just a speck in the whole scheme of things," said veteran eclipse-watcher Mike O'Leary of San Diego, who set up his camera along with among hundreds of other amateur astronomers in Casper, Wyoming.

John Hays drove up from Bishop, California, for the total eclipse in Salem, Oregon, and said the experience will stay with him forever.

"That silvery ring is so hypnotic and mesmerizing, it does remind you of wizardry or like magic," he said.



A near total solar eclipse is seen over midtown Atlanta, Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/David Goldman)

More than one parent was amazed to see teenagers actually look up from their cellphones.

Patrick Schueck, a construction company president from Little Rock, Arkansas, brought his 10-year-old twin daughters Ava and Hayden to Bald Knob Cross of Peace in Alto Pass, Illinois, a more than 100-foot cross atop a mountain. Schueck said at first his girls weren't very interested in the eclipse. One sat looking at her iPhone.

"Quickly that changed," he said. "It went from them being aloof to being in total amazement." Schueck called it a chance to "do something with my daughters that they'll remember for the rest of their lives."

Astronomers, too, were giddy with excitement.



Belen Jesuit Preparatory School students look through solar glasses as they watch the eclipse, Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, in Miami. (AP Photo/Alan Diaz)

NASA solar physicist Alex Young said the last time earthlings had a connection like this to the heavens was during man's first flight to the moon, on Apollo 8 in 1968. The first, famous Earthrise photo came from that mission and, like this eclipse, showed us "we are part of something bigger."

NASA's acting administrator, Robert Lightfoot, watched with delight from a plane flying over the Oregon coast and joked about the space-agency official next to him, "I'm about to fight this man for a window seat."

Hoping to learn more about the sun's composition and the mysterious solar wind, NASA and other scientists watched and analyzed it all from the ground and the sky, including aboard the International Space Station.

Citizen scientists monitored animal and plant behavior as day turned into twilight. About 7,000 people streamed into the Nashville Zoo just to see the animals' reaction and noticed how they got noisier as it got darker.





A crowd gathers in front of the Hollywood sign at the Griffith Observatory to watch the solar eclipse in Los Angeles on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)

The giraffes started running around crazily in circles when darkness fell, and the flamingos huddled together, though zookeepers aid it wasn't clear whether it was the eclipse or the noisy, cheering crowd that spooked them.

"I didn't expect to get so emotionally caught up with it. I literally had chill bumps," said zoo volunteer Stephan Foust.

In Charleston, South Carolina, the eclipse's last stop in the U.S., college junior Allie Stern, 20, said: "It was amazing. It looked like a banana peel, like a glowing banana peel which is kind of hard to describe and imagine but it was super cool."

After the celestial spectacle, eclipse-watchers heading home in Tennessee and Wyoming spent hours stuck in traffic jams. In Kentucky, two women watching the eclipse while standing on a sidewalk were struck by a car, and one has died, authorities said.



Annie Gray Penuel and Lauren Peck, both of Dallas, wear their makeshift eclipse glasses at Nashville's eclipse viewing party ahead of the solar eclipse at First Tennessee Park on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, in Nashville, Tenn. (Shelley Mays/The Tennessean via AP)

The Earth, moon and sun line up perfectly every one to three years, briefly turning day into night for a sliver of the planet. But these sights normally are in no man's land, like the vast Pacific or Earth's poles. This is the first eclipse of the social media era to pass through such a heavily populated area.

The last coast-to-coast total eclipse in the U.S. was in 1918, when

Woodrow Wilson was president. The last total solar eclipse in the U.S. was in 1979, but only five states in the Northwest experienced total darkness.

The next total eclipse in the U.S. will be in 2024. The next coast-to-coast one will not be until 2045.



The Tinoco family from Cyprus, Calif., gather to watch the partial eclipse at the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)



The moon almost eclipses the sun during a near total solar eclipse as seen from Salem, Ore., Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)



The moon is seen as it starts passing in front of the sun during a solar eclipse from Ross Lake, Northern Cascades National Park, in Washington on Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (Bill Ingalls/NASA via AP)



A crowd wears protective glasses as they watch the beginning of the solar eclipse from Salem, Ore., Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)



Jonathan Moric, left, and Finn Power, both of Vancouver, get ready to watch the eclipse Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, in a park in Salem, Ore. (AP Photo/Andrew Selsky)



Schweta Kulkarni, from left, Rhea Kulkarni and Saanvi Kulkarni, from Seattle, try out their eclipse glasses on the sun at a gathering of eclipse viewers in Salem, Ore., early Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)





Mike Newchurch, left, professor of atmospheric chemistry at the University of Alabama in Huntsville, and graduate student Paula Tucker prepare a weather balloon before releasing it to perform research during the solar eclipse Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, on the Orchard Dale historical farm near Hopkinsville, Ky. The location, which is in the path of totality, is also at the point of greatest intensity. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)



A family sets up a tent at their campsite at sunrise for the solar eclipse Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, on the Orchard Dale historical farm near Hopkinsville, Ky. The location, which is in the path of totality, is also at the point of greatest intensity. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)



Catalina Gaitan, from Portland, Ore., tries to shoot a photo of the rising sun through her eclipse glasses at a gathering of eclipse viewers in Salem, Ore., Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)



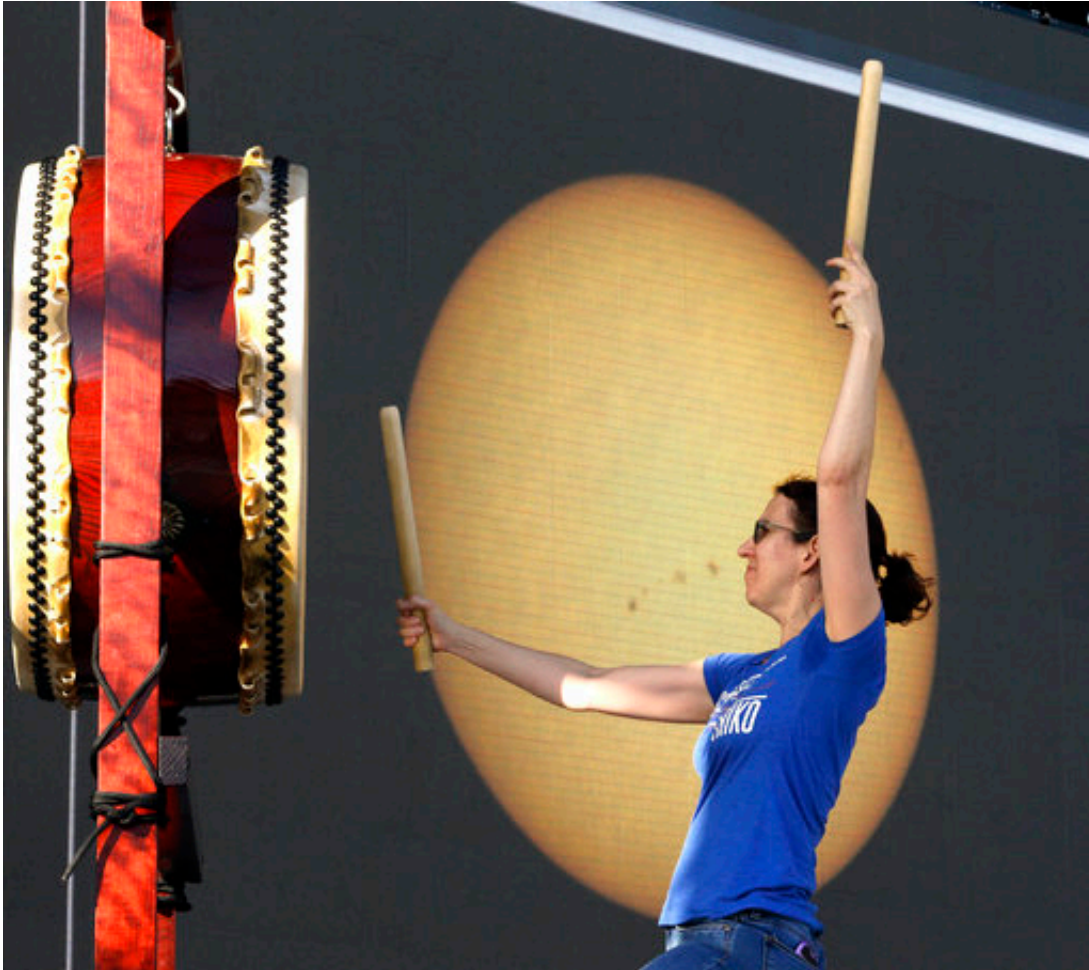
People wait in line to buy viewing glasses for the eclipse at the Griffith Observatory in Los Angeles early Monday, Aug. 21, 2017. (AP Photo/Richard Vogel)



The cross on top of the First Baptist Church is silhouetted in front of the sun on Sunday, Aug. 20, 2017, in Simpsonville, S.C. South Carolina is gearing up for a total solar eclipse, which will cross the state diagonally during a phenomenon that will be seen across the country. (AP Photo/Julio Cortez)



Ashley Ann Sander hawks solar eclipse glasses on the side of the road to tourists approaching town for \$10 a pair Sunday, Aug. 20, 2017, near Clayton, Ga., a city in the path of totality in North Georgia. (Curtis Compton/Atlanta Journal-Constitution via AP)



A large screen with a live telescope feed of the sun is visible behind Karen Tingey as she drums with Portland Taiko during a rehearsal in preparation for Monday's solar eclipse, in Salem, Ore., Sunday, Aug. 20, 2017. Salem is in the path of totality during the eclipse. (AP Photo/Don Ryan)



Jim Cleveland, of Shelbyville, Ky., sets up a camera at his campsite at sunrise as he prepares for the solar eclipse Monday, Aug. 21, 2017, on the Orchard Dale historical farm near Hopkinsville, Ky. The location, which is in the path of totality, is also at the point of greatest intensity. (AP Photo/Mark Humphrey)

© 2017 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: 'A primal experience': Americans dazzled by solar eclipse (Update) (2017, August 21) retrieved 26 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2017-08-moon-sun-sky-historic-eclipse.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.