Mini Mercury skips across sun's vast glare in rare transit

November 11 2019, by Marcia Dunn

This still image from video issued by NASA's Solar Dynamics Observatory shows Mercury as it passes between Earth and the sun on Monday, Nov. 11, 2019. The solar system's smallest, innermost planet resembles a tiny black dot during the transit, which began at 7:35 a.m. EST (1205 UTC). (NASA Solar Dynamics Observatory via AP)

Mini Mercury skipped across the vast, glaring face of the sun Monday in a rare celestial transit.

Stargazers used solar-filtered binoculars and telescopes to spot Mercury—a tiny black dot—as it passed directly between Earth and the sun on Monday.

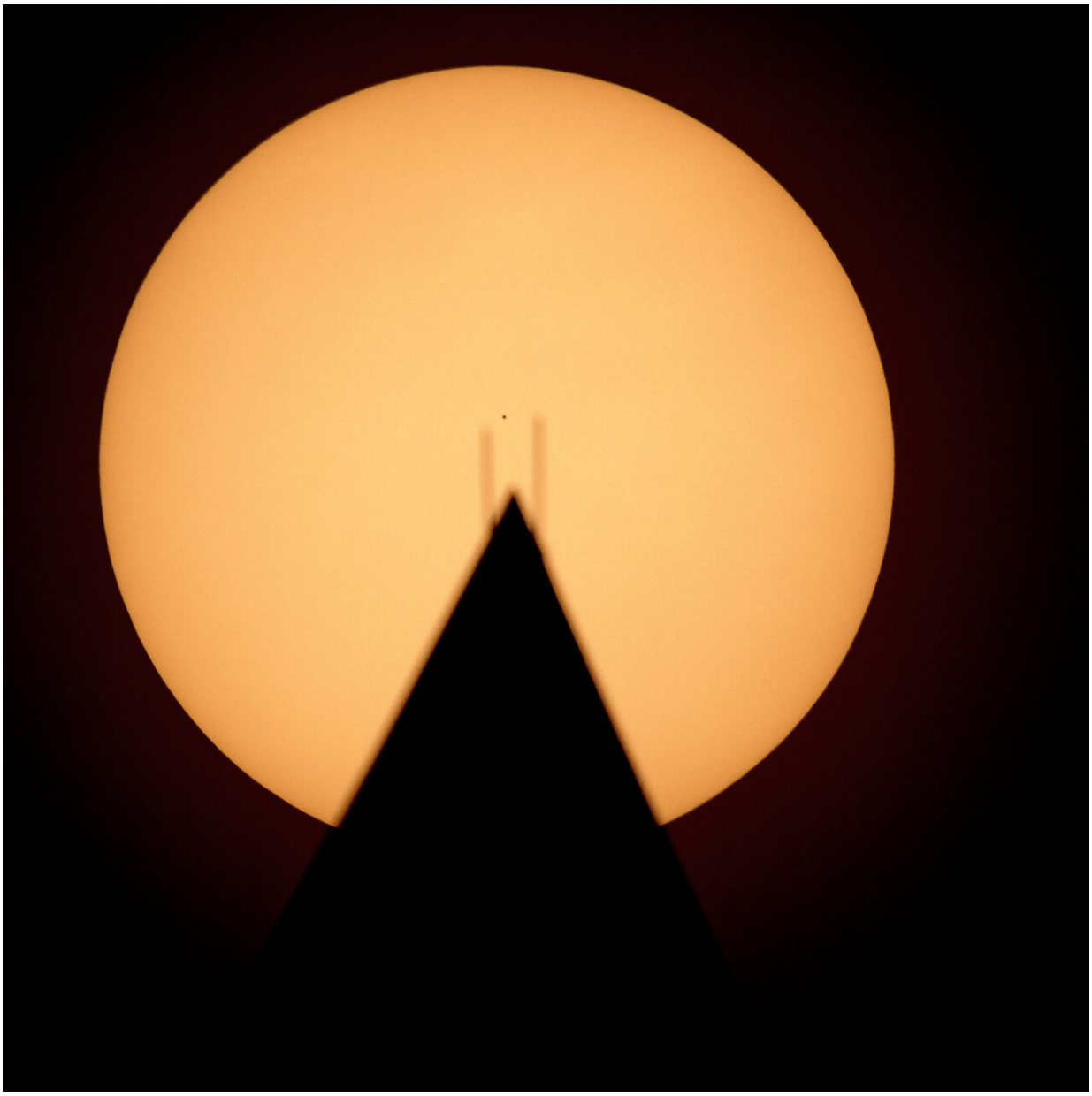
The eastern U.S. and Canada got the whole 5 ½-hour show, weather permitting, along with Central and South America. The rest of the world, except for Asia and Australia, got just a sampling.

Mercury is the solar system's smallest, innermost planet. The next transit isn't until 2032, and North America won't get another shot until 2049.

In Maryland, clouds prevented NASA solar astrophysicist Alex Young from getting a clear peek. Live coverage was provided by observatories including NASA's orbiting Solar Dynamics Observatory.

"It's a bummer, but the whole event was still great," Young wrote in an email. "Both getting to see it from space and sharing it with people all over the country and world."

At Cape Canaveral, space buffs got a two-for-one. As Mercury's silhouette graced the morning sun, SpaceX launched 60 small satellites for global internet service, part of the company's growing Starlink constellation in orbit.



This image provided by NASA shows the planet Mercury in silhouette, low center, as it transits across the face of the sun behind the Washington Monument in Washington, Monday, Nov. 11, 2019. The solar system's smallest, innermost planet will resemble a tiny black dot Monday as it passes directly between Earth and the sun. (Bill Ingalls/NASA via AP)

This image provided by NASA shows the planet Mercury in silhouette, low center, as it transits across the face of the sun on Monday, Nov. 11, 2019. The solar system's smallest, innermost planet will resemble a tiny black dot Monday as it passes directly between Earth and the sun. (Bill Ingalls/NASA via AP)

The planet Mercury is seen as a tiny dot above the mid-point of the sun during a transit across the face of the sun, partially obscured in clouds, Monday, Nov. 11, 2019, as seen from Seattle. Mercury and Venus are the only planets that can appear to pass in front of, or transit, the sun as seen from Earth. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

Viewers look on during a brief break in the clouds to see a transit of the planet Mercury as it crosses the face of the sun Monday, Nov. 11, 2019, as seen from Seattle. Mercury and Venus are the only planets that can appear to pass in front of, or transit, the sun as seen from Earth. (AP Photo/Elaine Thompson)

Planet Mercury is seen as a small silhouette, center left, as it travels across the face of the sun, near capital Nicosia, Cyprus, Monday, Nov. 11, 2019. The solar system's smallest, innermost planet will resemble a tiny black dot Monday as it passes directly between Earth and the sun. (AP Photo/Petros Karadjias)

The planet Mercury transits across the face of the Sun, as seen from Kekesteto, Hungary's highest mountain peak, Monday, Nov. 11, 2019. Stargazers used solar filtered binoculars and telescopes to spot Mercury, the solar system's smallest, innermost planet, as a tiny black dot as it passed between Earth and the sun on Monday. (Peter Komka/MTI via AP)