

2024 Eclipse (CNF 4/25/24)

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Anticipation...

As soon as we recovered from the awe of experiencing the August, 21, 2017, total eclipse in Oregon, we got on the internet to find out when the next total eclipse would be that we'd have a good chance of seeing and... holy moly... we found that it was April 8, 2024, and at 3:26 its path would take it right over our home in Vermont! That was 7 years to wait. Who knew what that time would bring. But still...

When we finally made it to 2023, we started giving the eclipse more attention. Concern: historically the weather in Vermont on April 8 has something like a 70% chance of being **cloudy**. Uh oh. Should we consider seeking an alternate viewing location? Before its arrival on Vermont, the moon shadow was to progress across Mexico, over our long-ago stomping grounds in Texas, then up through the south, Midwest and northern New York state. Should we ask our dear friends Bev and Jim in Ft. Worth if they have room for visitors in April? Or my Aunt Ellie and Cousin Tammy in St. Louis, not right on the path but close enough to catch with not too long a drive?

Still, if there ever was a "chance of a lifetime" (or maybe 10 or 15 lifetimes, given how often eclipses come to the same place), this was it. We could never forgive ourselves for leaving if it turned out the eclipse was visible right from our house.

Preparations...

Eclipse glasses ordered from Amazon. (As it turned out, ever-cautious Vermont made sure glasses were unavoidably available at libraries, town halls, etc.)

The day before the eclipse, sunny. Despite the fact that our house is in a neighborhood with many trees, checking the sun's afternoon location there was plenty of viewing room from the street in front of our house.

April 8 Arrives...

Morning. The forecast has become just a little iffy. Cloud cover will to be moving in from the west, predicted arrival between 3 and 4. Uh oh, what to do? Backup plan. Friends Adele and Dan live about an hour north, in Richford, VT, Dan's an avid astronomer and in particular an eclipse buff. He's been giving preparatory talks at local schools and has organized a community viewing event on the grounds of the local elementary school. The forecast has the cloud cover arriving in Richford something like an hour **later** than Burlington. What a key hour that could prove to be!

Noon. Lawn chairs and refreshments in the trunk, we're off for Richford. (As it turned out, the clouds came later and over-cautious Dennis could've watched from in front of his house. But Richford was just fine.)

Afternoon, climax. The school has plenty of room for visitors. From the license plates in the parking lot, maybe half are from out of state, one from as far as Michigan. There are a surprising number of people who have telescopes and tripod-mounted cameras which they adjust as their kids make good use

of the school's playground equipment. To the south, high cloud cover approaches, but at what appears to be at a very gradual rate, slow enough to not reach us too soon.

And here is Dan, directing pre-eclipse peaks through his telescope -- which has the needed filters so that sunspots and flares can be safely observed. At 2:30 or so Dan calls out "First Contact!" Donning our glasses, we look up to see the tiniest little black indent at the five o'clock edge of the sun. For the next hour, little by little the sun becomes a crescent, a slimmer and slimmer crescent. But even with just the tiniest little pinprick of sunlight remaining, our surroundings still have a light -- dim and off color for sure, but still light. As anticipated, the horizon all around has the colors of twilight -- like a sunset not just in the west, but also south, east and north.

And then the magic moment.

The *instant* the sun disappears, it is night. A hushed "Wow" from all assembled. Eclipse glasses off. Air from pleasantly cool to noticeably chilly. The sky not so dark as to be *filled* with stars, but to the right, maybe ten sun-black-hole distances to the southwest, Venus (with no eclipse going, on a "morning star" observable just an hour or two before dawn) and a bit farther removed from the blackened sun to the northeast and not quite as bright, an "evening star" planet, Jupiter. Most riveting, the magnificent corona of the covered sun, hidden from us *almost* eternally -- but, not this day, not for these several minutes.

We notice the curiosity of two little red dots on the darkened edge. We hadn't seen anything like this during the 2017 eclipse. Are these some extraterrestrial observer drones? We will learn later, they are *prominences*, plasma arches off the sun's surface, in this instance sticking out far enough to "peak" around the moon.

It is hard to imagine that anyone who witnesses a total eclipse is not profoundly affected. For these few minutes, fundamental reality as represented by the life-giving power of the sun, disappears. What is day becomes night, except for a dim, 360 degree sunset-like glow on the horizon.

For a hundred people or more, old and young, revered silence. Awe.

{For more than 3 minutes. No words can really describe, so why try.}

The end of totality is met with some incongruous applause for Mom Nature's show. She has done good: We offer her a Prosecco toast.

Eclipse glasses back on for another hour of the ever-decreasing partial eclipse. But even if full-sun reality is on hold, even a pinprick of sunlight has restored our sense of normalcy.

Next total US eclipse. Aug. 23, 2044. I would be 97. Not so promising.

Next total eclipse anywhere. Southern Spain, August 12, 2026.

Ole?