

Great American eclipse was 'sun'sational

Tens of millions of Americans and many Canadians took Monday, Aug. 21 off to get a rare view of a total solar eclipse.

For many under age 50, it was their first time and well worth losing a day's pay. The west ended up getting the best view with regards to sky clarity and weather.

When I was down near Mann Creek Country Store and Café just north of Weiser, Idaho on Highway 95, the usual population of under 100 ballooned into thousands overnight.

Camped out on a farm with many out-of-state cars, the field that usually has horses roaming was covered with the curious from all over. With a couple from Maryland on my right and a multi-generational family from California on my left, I seemed to be the only Canadian, let alone Albertan so I got the usual "do you know so and so from Canada" and "what's it like to live in an igloo?"

Now that we had our laugh, some notable things happen during the eclipse. The temperature drops dramatically for about half an hour as much as 20 Celsius. Birds get quiet and animals such as dogs become sleepy during totality while many stars come out. We could see Venus, Jupiter and Mars for two minutes. It actually looks like dusk but with a ring of daylight around the horizon, so not true night.

The visitor next to me from Lake Tahoe, California, Stephen Birch, had



Neel ROBERTS
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planned the trip for weeks with his relatives from Long Beach, California.

"It was a real pleasure to have all of us together for such a spectacular occasion," he said. "Seeing one of the most magnificent sights of my entire life combined with seeing it with family made for a very enjoyable and worthwhile trip."

This was the typical overview of the "Great

American Eclipse."

In Casper, Wyoming, Marc and Cathy Heath of Vancouver, B.C., stayed a week in Casper and captured great totality shots including the diamond ring.

The next one is seven years away on Monday, April 8, 2024 expected to start in western Mexico, cross the southern/eastern United States and finish in Newfoundland Canada (<https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEgoogle/SEgoogle2001/SE2024Apr08Tgoogle.html>) so our turn finally.

Sky watch for the next month:

- Mars and Mercury Morning conjunction — Saturday, Sept. 16 before sun up, look NEE at around 5:45 a.m. to catch this naked eye duo.
- Zodiacal Light — Is a faint, roughly triangular, whitish glow seen in the night sky extended up from the vicinity of the sun along the ecliptic or zodiac. Discovered by the astronomer Giovanni Domenico Cassini in 1683 and later explained by Nicolas Fatio de Duillier in 1684, it's trying to find and the best time is from Monday, Sept. 18 for two

weeks in the east morning twilight.

- Fall Equinox — On Friday, Sept. 22 at 4:02 p.m. the summer's officially over.

Public Events for the next month:

Monthly Open House at Calgary's Rothney Observatory near Priddis. Mark down Friday, Sept. 15 from 8-11 p.m. There will be an array of scopes operated by University of Calgary astronomers and members of the RASC Calgary. You will have the opportunity to look through telescopes, indoor presentation and astronomers will be on hand to answer questions. Cygnus the Swan will soar overhead and is easy to find because of its alpha star Deneb, which is one of the farthest stars we can see with our eyes.

The entrance fee is \$30 per car.

For more information, contact Jennifer Howse at jhowse@phas.ucalgary.ca or phone: 403-931-2366. The website at: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/rao/> is updated regularly.

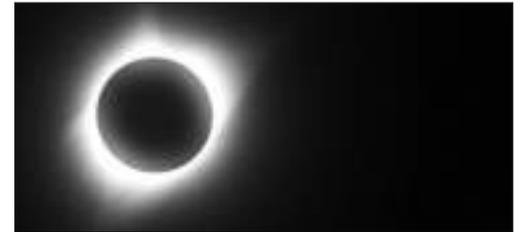
Happy Fall and shorter days.

Neel Roberts is a member of the Calgary chapter of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada — the nation's leading astronomy club founded in 1868 with more than 5,000 members and 29 centres across Canada. Neel welcomes your questions and comments at 403-560-6574 or email: Neel_Roberts@ptccanada.com. The members meet once a month on weekends at Calgary's Rothney Observatory near Priddis and you can check out times at: <https://www.ucalgary.ca/rao/calendar>. Like them at Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/272037680377/>, Twitter: <https://twitter.com/CalgaryRASC> and YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/RASCCalgary>.



Photos by Neel Roberts

Family of Stephen Birch from California ready for totality at Mann Creek Country Store and Café just north of Weiser, Idaho on Highway 95.



Above, totality reveals only three per cent of the sun dropping temperatures as much as 20 Celsius in a few minutes. Below, the "diamond on the ring" signals the beginning and end of totality. Visitors had just over two minutes of darkness which silenced birds, showed the stars and made it like night.

