

Star Guide: Capturing the total eclipse – again

By Tony Berendsen

I've been married to a wonderful woman – Jackie – for 45 years this September. She is not the geeky one in the family. I hold that distinction. For our 25th anniversary I booked a Sky and Telescope Astronomy Tour on the Holland America Ryndam to see a total solar eclipse off the coast of Barbados: would you expect anything less from the Star Guide?

On the morning of Feb. 26, 1998, about 1,600 miles from our port of departure Ft. Lauderdale the Ryndam slowed to a halt. The captain announced the eclipse was beginning and invited everyone to the upper deck. At first the only evidence of the moon covering the sun was our view through special glasses, and announcements through the P.A. system by the captain. But soon the bite of the sun by the moon became so big that the warm Caribbean air began to noticeably cool.

The top deck of our ship filled with 1,200 passengers watching as the horizon started to dim sending a shadow lunging across the water toward us; so quietly, but so powerfully. In a whisper, the last bit of sun was hidden and our prize, the beautiful corona, blazed above us as planets and bright stars shown in the darkened sky.



Total eclipse from Wieser, Idaho, in August. Photo/Ryan Berendsen

It was 19 years later on Aug. 21 the experience repeated itself for me on a dusty farm field in Wieser, Idaho. I had traveled from Reno the day before with my son, Ryan, and our friend KC Rodrigue to watch the totality of the Great American Eclipse. We had left early in the morning on Sunday anticipating miles and miles of traffic jams along our path, but instead drove the speed limit through Nevada, Oregon, and Idaho to reach our destination.

We hadn't anticipated the heat and dust of our eclipse camp in Wieser, so we headed to the local hardware store for a large tarp and gazebo where we met other eclipse travelers, who like us were buying heaps of supplies to the delight of the town merchants. I'm sure it was a banner day for sales in Wieser.

The field where we camped for \$50 a night was filling with campers in anticipation of Monday's eclipse. There were people from all parts of the United States, with a couple campers from Japan and Germany. Sunday night's sky was filled with

clouds along with some really bright street lights that ruined Ryan's plans for astrophotography. But the forecast for the morning looked good.

Monday morning we awoke to a beautiful clear blue sky. Partial eclipse began at 10:10 MDT that morning as we watched with our special glasses and telescopes fitted with solar filters. Soon, as before in 1998, the bite of the sun by the moon became large enough that the temperature dropped noticeably and the sky began to dim slightly.

I took a picture under a nearby tree of hundreds of projected eclipse images on the ground as the eclipse progressed. Ryan and KC were taking pictures with their cameras getting ready for totality. Then the last bit of sun slid behind the moon and the corona appeared. I didn't see the shadow coming this time, but it became dark enough for street lights to come on during the day.

So for the second time in my life I was able to look at the sun with my unfiltered eyes and see one of the most beautiful sights in my life. KC told me, "It was so amazing that I instantly looked up when the next one will take place."

Two minutes and 4 seconds later totality was over and the sun began to return. We watched again with our special glasses until the bite of the moon was completely gone. The experience reminded me of the closing line of an Emily Dickinson poem "Dissolved as utterly, As birds' far navigation, Discloses just a hue; A splash of oars-a gaiety, Then swallowed up to view."

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