

Upstate to see total eclipse

Earth's shadow will cover the moon early Tuesday during longest night of the year

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Upstate residents will be able to catch a total lunar eclipse in the early morning hours Tuesday if clouds don't get in the way.

"The thing that makes this

one kind of special is it's available to everybody in the U.S.," said Doug Gegen, staff astronomer with the Roper Mountain Science Center.

"The eclipse will happen at times when folks out on the West Coast and all the way across the nation will be able to

see this," he said.

The total lunar eclipse will begin here at 2:41 a.m. and end at 3:53 a.m. with the heart of the eclipse occurring at 3:17 a.m., said Neil Dixon, meteorologist with the National Weather Service at the Greenville-Spartanburg Airport.

Dixon said Tuesday is also winter solstice, and it's rare to have a total lunar eclipse on that day.

The forecast calls for partly to mostly cloudy skies with a temperature of around 32 degrees during the eclipse, he said.

Gegen said weather conditions are important for viewing an eclipse, and they would like it to be "as clear as possible."

"If it were to get cloudy, then we would have a tough time,"

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he said.

Gegen said it's the condition of the atmosphere that "really makes a big difference in what we see in the sky."

"What determines the actual view is going to be how much ash there is in the air and just the general state of the atmosphere,"

Gegen said.

He said a total lunar eclipse "happens as the moon in its natural orbit around the earth enters the earth's shadow."

He said if people wanted to try to see the entire eclipse they would need to be out at about 1:30 a.m. Tuesday and could watch it through almost 4 a.m.

"The fun thing about lunar eclipses is the fact that you can see them pretty easily," Gegen said.

He encouraged people who are interested to just step out into their backyards.

"You can look at it with your eyes and see the moon change," Gegen said.

"You don't need any optical equipment, but it certainly helps to have a good pair of binoculars."

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