

An Eclipse Extravaganza set for Roper Mountain

Viewing event at science center for solar spectacle halfway to being sold out

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The 2017 solar eclipse is still more than two months away, but that two minutes of total darkness is already causing a stir.

Greenville is directly in the path of the eclipse, a 70-mile-wide path of totality that stretches from Salem, Oregon, to Charleston, South Carolina on Aug. 21, according to NASA. It will be the first total solar eclipse in the continental United States since 1979, and another one of this magnitude won't come along until 2078.

State officials are preparing for as many as 1 million visitors, but there's no historical comparison, in terms of an impact on tourism.

Roper Mountain Science Center is planning an Eclipse Extravaganza, and about half of the 2,500 tickets have already been sold, some to folks from as far away as Europe, said Michael Weeks, director of the science center.

"We expect to sell out and close the gate," Weeks said. "We have sold tickets to people all over the world, literally. It's kind of fun when the sales orders come in because you see England and Germany and Belgium and France and Massachusetts and Texas and California."

Special activities are planned for Aug. 19 and 20 at Roper Mountain, but the major events take place on Aug. 21, the day of the eclipse.

Roper Mountain will have four main viewing areas, with activities going on in each area beginning the morning of Aug. 21.

On the Living History Farm, there will be Cherokee storytelling related to the eclipse, as well as insights on how other cultures understood and explained such phenomena.

The newly renovated T.C. Hooper Planetarium will present a show created especially for the 2017 solar eclipse, and visitors can see the historic telescope. In addition, there will be live music, with the band's instruments powered by solar panels, Weeks said.

The partial eclipse begins at 1 p.m., and a scientist will be on-hand in each of the viewing areas to give a play-by-play explanation of what's happening in the sky, Weeks said.

They'll start by making sure people are viewing the sky safely, "and then as partial happens, what to expect, and

Eclipse

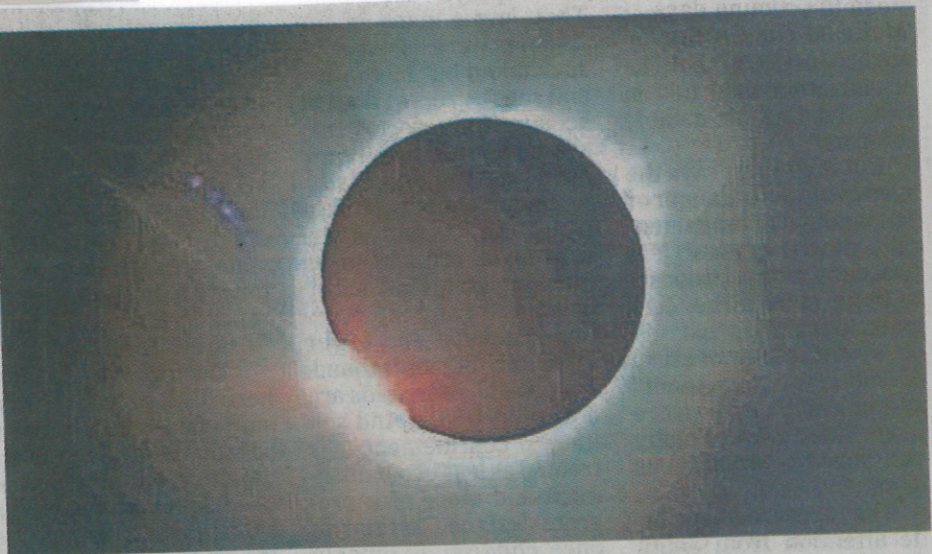
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then as totality happens, what to expect. So at what point they can take their glasses off, and they can look at the total eclipse," he said.

The total eclipse hits Roper Mountain at 2:38 p.m., and it's expected to last for just over two minutes.

"We're going to encourage everybody to arrive to Roper Mountain before noon. What we have heard from other areas that have experienced eclipses is to expect the highways to become a gridlock as you get close to 2 o'clock," Weeks said.

Greenville is directly in the path of the eclipse and will have 2 minutes and 10 seconds of total darkness. The eclipse lasts longest in Columbia,



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The Aug. 21 solar eclipse will be a rare total eclipse in the United States, with a 70-mile-wide path stretching from Oregon to South Carolina being in the zone of totality.

which will go dark for 2 minutes and 36 seconds. Other areas of the Upstate, and of South Carolina, may only experience a partial eclipse, Weeks said.

"I read somewhere

that the difference between a partial eclipse and a total eclipse is the difference between dying and almost dying," Weeks said.

Admission for the Roper Mountain Science

Center Eclipse Extravaganza is \$10 per person for ages 4 and up for Aug. 19 and 20, and \$25 for ages 4 and up on Aug. 21. For more info, go to www.ropermountain.org.