

RED LOCKS TO TAKE OFF
Top Guns Mini-Store
(E-Y-1)



DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

In this May 20, 2012, file photo, the annular solar eclipse is seen as the sun sets behind the Rocky Mountains from downtown Denver. Destinations are hosting festivals, hotels are selling out and travelers are planning trips for the total solar eclipse here on Aug. 21.

Upstate preparing for rare solar eclipse

ERIC CONNOR

ECONNOR@GREENVILLENEWS.COM

It is known as the path of totality, and come August, Greenville will be one of the few cities in the world lying within it as a total solar eclipse sweeps across the United States from coast to coast for the first time in a nearly a century.

In totality, the grandeur of the universe and its celestial bodies is brought home to earthlings for a few short minutes, as the new moon completely blocks out the sun and casts a shadow so dark that in the middle of the day the stars appear.

People have traveled the world to be within the path — and not one millimeter outside it.

"The estimate is more than a million people from Florida upward, all the way to well past New York, will come to totality," said Greg Cornwell, who heads planetarium and public programs for the Roper Mountain Science Center, which has big



COURTESY OF CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

A group of Clemson astronomers and students try out the solar glasses that will be needed to avoid eye damage during the eclipse.

See ECLIPSE, Page 4A

Eclipse

Continued from Page 1A

plans for the Aug. 21 event. "We've already got groups that are coming from New York to our area."

There's no blueprint to plan for such a phenomenon.

Greenville, it appears, is still trying to figure one out.

The city's plans "are not finalized at this point," but officials "hope to release information soon," public information and events director Angie Prosser said.

The city's visitors and convention bureau, VisitGreenvilleSC, has created a webpage with a play on its popular hashtag #yeahTHATgreenville — with "yeahTHATeclipse" — featuring a countdown clock and the beginnings of some hotel and event packages.

At this point, hotels are beginning to book up, but no concerted plans have been put together, said Jessica Kalbarczyk, the visitor bureau's social media coordinator.

"Currently, we're just kind of in the planning stages," Kalbarczyk said. "We're working with as many people as possible and pushing it."

Greenville County Schools decided to start the first day of school a day late — the day after the eclipse. The Legislature allowed a one-time exception to start school earlier this year, which some districts requested in order to use the rare occurrence as a learning opportunity.

The potential impact on traffic is uncertain, from small city streets to busy interstates, officials say.

The Department of Public Safety said it is taking into account an expectation of increased traffic, and state troopers "are making plans in advance to monitor and assist with traffic issues that may arise," spokesman Kelley Hughes said.

At the state level, the Emergency Management Division is "in conversations" with local emergency management agencies but has yet to receive any formal request for planning assistance, EMD spokesman Derec Becker said.

"The local areas that are planning for the eclipse events are continuing to organize," Becker said.

Learning institutions are ahead of the curve.

Clemson University is planning a "mega-event" in hopes of drawing thousands to the campus that will be in the heart of the path of totality.

Likewise, the Roper Mountain Sci-

ence Center has become a command post of information in Greenville, with its own plans to showcase its campus in the biggest astronomical event of its 32-year history.

To the south, the city of Columbia, in concert with the South Carolina State Museum and local merchant organizations, has mounted an aggressive campaign to promote itself as the "total eclipse capital of the East Coast."

Now and then

Over the next couple of days, at around 2:30 p.m. and after, the sun will be in the spot that virtually every pair of eyes in Greenville will be looking come Aug. 21.

That's because the sun now is about an equal distance in days from either side of the summer solstice.

The Great American Total Solar Eclipse will begin in Oregon and sweep across the heartland, into Tennessee, through the remote North Carolina mountains and the first shades of darkness will reach the Greenville area beginning about 1:07 p.m. before heading through the Midlands and Lowcountry and off the Atlantic Coast.

The total eclipse will set in about 2:37 p.m. in Greenville and last a little over two minutes.

The path of the shadow is about 100 miles wide and travels more than 1,000 mile per hour, Cornwell said.

The center-most portion of the path will pass generally over Clemson and Anderson and provide the longest duration of darkness.

From that center line out toward either side, the intensity of the shade will decrease. The outer portions reach almost to Spartanburg to the northeast and just barely down to Elberton, Georgia, to the southwest.

The eclipse will plunge any place within its shadow into darkness, and the night sky will appear.

On that particular day, Cornwell said, the stars and the planet Venus will be visible.

The temperature will drop several degrees, he said, and animals will feel an instinct to fall asleep. Roosters might even crow once the sun re-emerges.

Observers will need special glasses for the eclipse, because staring directly at the sun can damage the eyes. Clemson and Roper Mountain will provide glasses.

The last total solar eclipse in America occurred in 1979 in the Pacific Northwest.

A total solar eclipse crossing the entire continental U.S. hasn't happened since 1918.

People with the means and motivation travel across the world to witness total eclipses, and Cornwell said the path of this eclipse will make it so that millions of Americans will be within an hour's drive to totality.

Rooms booked

While Greenville hasn't developed a full plan beyond partnering with Roper Mountain, Kalbarczyk said local hotels are beginning to book guests over what the hospitality industry hopes will be an extended weekend event, with the eclipse taking place on a Monday.

"They're already seeing a pretty big uptick on that long weekend," she said.

The Westin Poinsett hotel downtown isn't offering an eclipse package because there are so few rooms left to sell, though the hotel will provide glasses, general manager and partner Fabian Unterzaucher said.

"Guests vary from the professional eclipse chaser to the novice who wants to be part of the historic event," Unterzaucher said. "As Greenville lies perfectly in the path, it will bring a lot of people to our city to experience what is for most a once in a lifetime experience."

The Courtyard Marriott downtown still has rooms available and is offering a package that includes a viewing party on the veranda, said Daniel Lock, the hotel's director of sales.

The State Emergency Management Division expects the eclipse to be "primarily a law enforcement crowd control and traffic management event," Becker said.

The division is considering the influx of traffic to be more akin to a college football game than a large-scale movement of people like in a hurricane, he said.

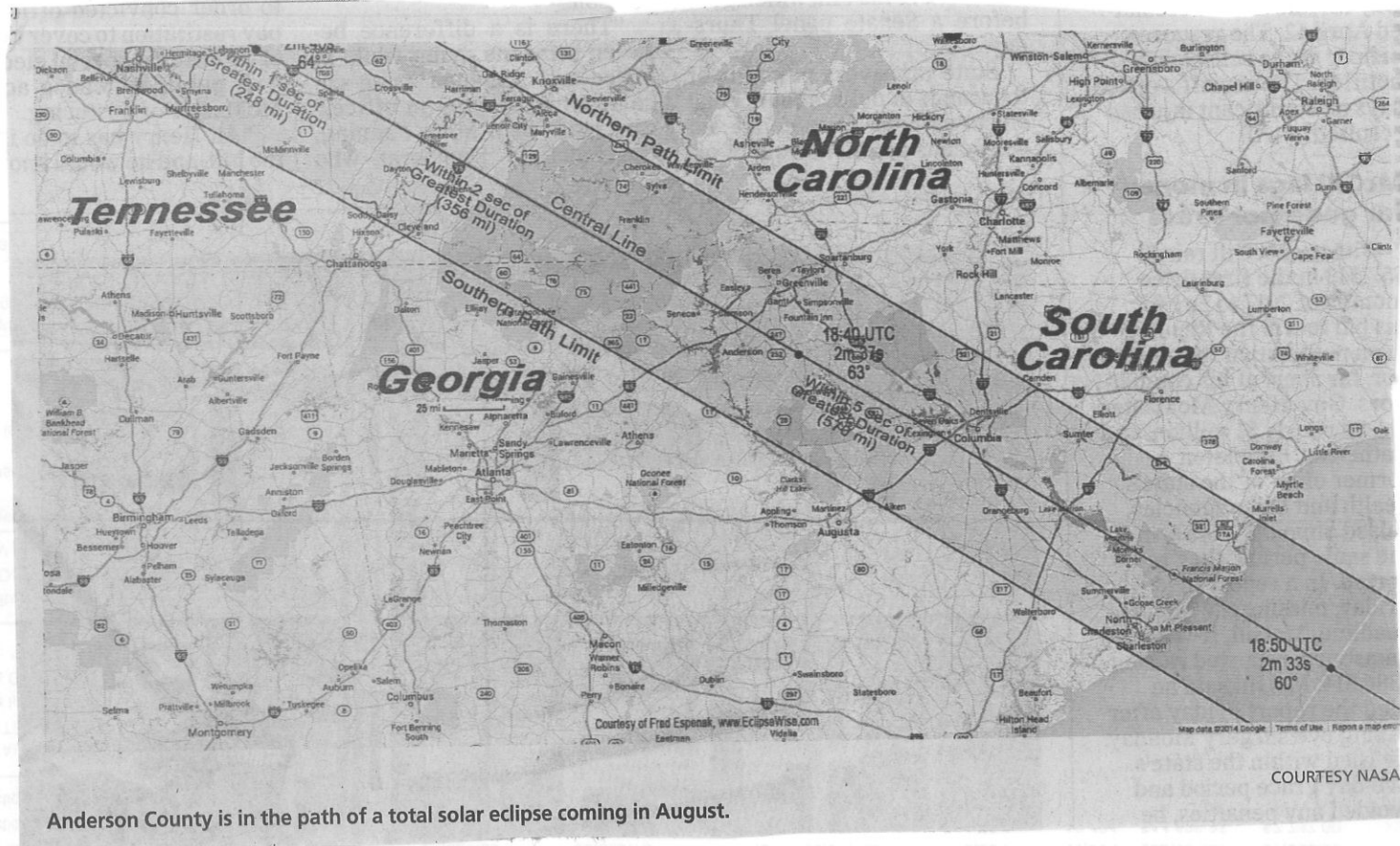
The EMD will increase its public awareness campaigns as the eclipse gets closer, Becker said.

Traffic congestion can occur on roadways as people might see a chance of clouds where they are and quickly try move to a clearer area.

The Department of Public Safety is preparing both for that and the possibility of drivers feeling compelled to stop on the interstate during the eclipse, Hughes said.

"The Highway Patrol will be asking motorists to plan ahead and designate a safe location off the roadway if they intend to view the eclipse," Hughes said. "It is not only unsafe, but it is illegal to stop in the roadway or along access controlled highways (interstates) for reasons other than an emergency situation."

Reporters Elizabeth LaFleur and Maayan Schachter contributed



COURTESY NASA