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Wednesday, August 11, 1999 Published at 18:58 GMT 19:58 UK

Earth wonders at heaven's gift



The eclipse as seen from an RAF Hercules at 11.11BST

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It was an event that left few in its path untouched.

The century's final solar eclipse gave people across Europe and South Asia the chance to know in the most spectacular way that, whatever happens on Earth, it is part of something bigger.

Starting off the American coast, the shadow of the Moon raced across the Atlantic at 2,400 kph (1,500 mph).

A sound picture of the eclipse across the globe from BBC's [World At One](#)

A million people had travelled to Cornwall, south-west England, so they could stand in line with the Sun and Moon. For them, the first contact between the two came shortly before 10.00BST.

While others in Europe waited, across the UK outside the zone of totality, people left offices and stood outside to be part of the partial experience.

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Buddhist monks gathered at the Eiffel Tower

But the main prize - to witness the very last bead of light being extinguished, to see the Sun's heavenly crown explode, and then to behold the rebirth of the Sun - was denied those in Cornwall.

Joining them in the straight line to the Sun was heavy cloud cover. Crossed fingers, prayers and even sun dances had all been in vain.

Across the Channel in northern France there were clear skies, though, as there were in Munich - right until the moment of totality. A torrential downpour picked perhaps the worst moment of all to fall.



The streets of Ramnicu Valcea, the south-central city in Romania where totality could be seen the longest, were crammed.

In Egypt, Muslims shut themselves away on the orders of clerics. Others flocked to mosques as earthquakes and an out-of-season hailstorm intensified unease.



The BBC's Nick Bryant: "Tens of millions looked to the skies"

Jordan and Syria declared a national holiday. Russian TV found many Muscovites more concerned with domestic difficulties. One woman said: "I'm not really interested in the sky."

Anita Modjahedpour, from the Iranian capital Tehran, e-mailed BBC News Online's Talking Point to say: "My eyes have a little smart pain but it isn't important because the eclipse was so valuable for me and I know it will happen only once in lifetime."

Spectators in Pakistan and Bangladesh suffered the same fate as those in the UK, having their views obscured by clouds and having to resort to television.

Teenager Lubna Hamid, who waited on top of her house for an hour for the eclipse, said: "It is very unfortunate to miss such a rare spectacle."

And residents in Afghanistan painted a similar picture - too busy with struggling for survival against poverty and the conflict to bother with the eclipse

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Turkish commandos watched the eclipse while on guard in Sivas

"More important for us is our stomachs and safety," said shopkeeper, Gul Agha.



Cornwall's St Michael's Mount during the blackout

In some Indian villages, priests rang temple bells and took turns beating steel plates with sticks to ward off evil.

But, like Pakistan, cloud cover meant most of India saw the eclipse departing the way it had arrived - obscured.

It finally ended in the Bay of Bengal at 12.36GMT.

But the disappointment of many of those who missed out could not hide the wonder of living through one of nature's greatest spectacles.



[Watch the first contact as the Moon appears in front of the Sun](#)

Cheers and tears had followed it along its path. On the Cornish beaches, people kissed, some danced, others sensed an eerie calm as the lights went out and came back on.

And considering the truly astronomic coincidences involved in seeing a total eclipse, it is perhaps no wonder. On no other planet in our solar system will the Sun and a moon appear the same size.

For that event to happen where there is life to appreciate it seems truly miraculous.

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Wednesday, August 11, 1999 Published at 14:35 GMT 15:35 UK

European watchers faced eclipse lottery



One of the best views could be had on TV

As the shadow of the eclipse sped its way across northern Europe, eclipse watchers were left at the mercy of the weather to determine the quality of the view.



In Stuttgart and Munich, totality proved a total washout

downpour washed away the view for some.

Above the clouds

In Cornwall in south west England - the first land to experience totality - cloudy skies and periodic rain obscured the view but failed to dampen enthusiasm.

The last eclipse of the millennium was greeted with fireworks, cheers and whistling.

In Germany thousands travelled to the southern city of Munich to witness the event, but as the Moon's shadow approached the heavens opened and a torrential

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In Munich, and across much of Germany, the best view to be had was transmitted back to Earth from aircraft circling high above the cloud cover.



[Watch German TV's commentary on the eclipse \(in German\)](#)

Hundreds packed roadside rest areas along the A8 highway, nicknamed the 'Eclipse Autobahn,' because it follows the path of the Moon's shadow.

Germany was also the scene of one of the first reported eclipse accidents, when a student suffered severe burns after climbing an electricity pylon in an effort to get a better view.



In Paris, crowds gathered at the famous landmarks

As the shadow raced across France at more than 2,000kmh, heavy cloud also proved a problem although most continued to stick to advice of using protective spectacles or pin-hole cameras.

Each small and short-lived break in the cloud sparked cheers and applause from crowds across the country.

In Paris, which experienced 99% totality, city landmarks such as the Eiffel Tower and the Arc de Triomphe proved the focus of the eclipse watching hordes.

And in the town of Reims, American opera singer Jessye Norman sang He's Got the Whole World in his Hands.

Tying the knot



In Belgrade, Jovan the chimp takes a look at the partial eclipse

In the town of Ermenonville, north of Paris, two French astrophysicists tied the knot just minutes before the eclipse so that they could witness the union of Sun and Moon as man and wife.

In Romania watchers basked in perfect conditions and enjoyed the longest totality of anyone - apart from those who parted with a lot of money to shadow-chase on Concorde.

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The BBC's Jeremy Cooke reports from Romania, which experienced the longest period of totality

Those who could afford it sipped champagne high above the clouds as two of the supersonic aircraft alternately caught up with and on occasion overtook the eclipse.

Witnesses in Bucharest, many dressed in traditional costume, said spontaneous applause broke out as a surreal purple light surrounded them and the Sun disappeared for nearly two-and-a-half minutes.

Economic boost

Tourism officials are expressing quiet satisfaction at a mini boom the eclipse has bought to a country still struggling to improve its fragile economy.



Romanian women don traditional dress in perfect eclipse-watching weather

With the Moon completely covering the Sun, Romanians and the thousands of visitors who had travelled from across Europe got a spectacular and rare view of the Sun's mysterious atmosphere, or corona, which burns at more than one million degrees centigrade.

That was the main lure for scientists who gathered at remote sites across the continent to get the best view, free from Earth-based pollutants.

Even the Holy See gave way to the eclipse as Pope John Paul II cut short his weekly audience with pilgrims in the Vatican, saying: "I'm finishing up now, because I know that some of you are in a hurry to see the eclipse."

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Wednesday, August 11, 1999 Published at 16:29 GMT 17:29 UK

Eclipse seekers flock to Iranian town



Iranians and foreigners watched the eclipse in Isfahan

Eclipse watchers flocked to the town of Isfahan in central Iran on Wednesday.

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They went there in unprecedented numbers after the US space agency Nasa said it would be one of the very best places to watch the solar event.

The visitors filled the town's majestic square and its hotels.

"It's total frenzy, it's jam-packed everywhere, on the main square and the two banks of the Zayendah Rud River," said one French tourist.

As middle of the night descended for two minutes into the middle of the day, crowds shouted "God is great!" - and whistled in honour of the spectacle.

On the balcony of the historic Ali Qapu palace, scientists equipped with high-tech cameras gazed at the phenomenon which could be seen for nearly two across a band 100km (60 miles) wide.

Celestial celebrations

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But for millions, the event signified a spiritual, solemn time. Muslim clerics called for special Shiite 'namaz-e ayat,' prayers offered at times of natural phenomena to celebrate God's glory and power.



Muslim tradition holds that the prophet Mohammed, the founder of Islam, prayed for the duration of an eclipse.

In the Iranian capital Tehran, which witnessed only a partial eclipse, tens of thousands of people heeded the call to mass prayers and gathered at mosques.

"The great Iranian people must show their humility before the all-powerful one and creator of the universe and perform the prayer of divine signs," said the spiritual leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

'End of the world'

In Jordan, the mood was more sombre as doomsayers predicted the end of the world.



The moon covered 80 per cent of the sun in Jordan

In Amman, a preacher at the capital's King Abdullah Mosque, said: "This is a sign of doomsday and it should be a lesson to all to stick to the word of God."

Jordanian shopkeeper Samir Qalaji, 47, was reported to say: "We are scared that the sun will never rise again."

Entering into the spirit of the event, Lebanon's electricity company promised to suspend power restrictions so that television broadcasts could be

watched uninterrupted.

Since Israeli bombs damaged a power station in June, many homes have been without electricity for hours during the day.

State of emergency

Minor earthquakes and an unseasonal hailstorm accompanied Egyptians as they flocked to mosques in the capital, Cairo.

The Egyptian authorities put government hospitals and fire brigades on alert, apparently fearing widespread injuries among eclipse spectators.

Senior clerics issued an edict forbidding people to look at the Sun directly because it transgresses Islamic law to harm

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Wednesday, August 11, 1999 Published at 16:57 GMT 17:57 UK

Asian fear and wonder at eclipse



Wonder mixed with traditional fears for many in India

Thousands of people in India carried out sacred rituals as the eclipse passed over South Asia, while others ignored traditional fears to witness a unique wonder of nature.



Hours before the eclipse touched the sub-continent, devout Hindus were flocking to the holy city of Kurukshetra to take a ritual bath in two sacred lakes.

People were also reported to be gathering at holy sites along the River Ganges.

According to Hindu mythology, the eclipse represents the demons Rahu and Keta locked in celestial combat and eating the Sun.

Some texts say the eclipse presages widespread destruction.

The authorities made a concerted effort to dispel some of the myths, organising special lectures in schools and colleges across India.

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Hindus bathed at holy sites

But even in the commercial capital, Bombay, offices and shops closed early as working during the eclipse is considered bad luck.

Pregnant women and children are discouraged from seeing the eclipse, and conservative families across India refrained even from cooking food on the day of the eclipse.



A farmer sets up a scarecrow to repel evil

"We have closed up our kitchens. No cooked food has been left around and whatever there is will be given to the poor and to beggars," said Bombay diamond exporter Praveenshankar Pandya.

In western India, along the path of totality, there was near total darkness for just over a minute at 1800 local time (1230 GMT).

Despite cloudy weather and traditional fears, large numbers of scientists, amateur stargazers and tourists took up position in towns and villages to

watch the eclipse.



[The BBC's Sanjeev Srivastava: An eerie silence](#)

The BBC's Sanjeev Srivastava, reporting from the path of the eclipse, says there was an eerie silence as the shadow of the moon completely covered the sun.

The temperature dropped, and birds flew to their nests.

But he says that for many scientists camping out to watch the phenomenon, the cloudy weather meant they did not get a clear view of the sun.

Elsewhere, there was also disappointment because of the weather.

In the Pakistani city of Karachi, thick cloud covered the sky, forcing many people who had gathered on rooftops for a glimpse of the eclipse to watch it on TV.

Mosques throughout the city were reported to be packed with

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worshippers offering special prayers. In some parts of the Bangladeshi capital, Dhaka, monsoon clouds and the haze also spoiled the view at dusk.

The eclipse finally ended over the Bay of Bengal at 12.36GMT.

Animals were temporarily disorientated

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Tuesday, August 24, 1999 Published at 13:20 GMT 14:20 UK

Eclipse shadow unveils scientific mysteries



A satellite image shows the Moon's shadow on Europe's western edge

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The drama is over and the Moon has passed over the Sun, but for scientists the work is just beginning.

From the UK to the India, they harnessed the darkness of the August 99 total solar eclipse to try to solve mysteries about the Sun and its effect on the Earth, generating masses of data which must now be interpreted.

How solar storms strike the Earth and knock out satellites, why the Sun's atmosphere is much hotter than its surface and how the Sun's heat drives the Earth's climate are just some of the questions the researchers are asking.

And new mysteries have also been thrown up. Professor Mark Bailey, Director of the Armagh Observatory, UK, observed the eclipse from Alderney in the Channel Islands. He told the BBC: "As the eclipse grew towards totality, we had very unusual phenomena in the sky. Two very dark bands stretched right across the sky, bracketing the Sun like parallel lines, which I have never heard reported before."

Champagne scientists

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In the Romanian city of Ramnicu Valcea, where totality lasted longest, scientists from Williams College, in Massachusetts, US, cracked open bottles of champagne as the Sun began to reappear.



"It worked great," said Jay Pasachoff, director of the Hopkins Observatory at Williams College. Working from the roof of a hotel, he and colleagues carried out experiments on solar heating, the Sun's corona and the Sun's magnetic field.

The 1999 solar eclipse will lead to greater scientific understanding

The 1999 solar eclipse will lead to greater scientific understanding, largely because its track across Europe and South Asia allowed astronomers many vantage points with clear skies. Also,

the Sun is nearing the peak of its 11-year activity cycle, so the corona should be more active than during previous eclipses.

The eclipse is an important scientific opportunity for two main reasons. Firstly, it completely cuts out the Sun's light for short a time which can be precisely predicted. This means that the effect of the Sun on the Earth's atmosphere can be measured.

Radio waves

For example, the ionosphere is a little-understood outer layer of the Earth's atmosphere. This is where the Sun's energy first affects Earth. Radio waves bounce off the ionosphere much better in darkness than in light, so they can be used to probe the behaviour of the enigmatic layer.



Secondly, the Moon perfectly blocks out the body of the Sun, leaving its outer atmosphere, or corona, in perfect view. Normally, the Sun's intense light means the corona is nearly impossible to observe in detail.

During an eclipse, scientists can see the violent magnetic storms in the corona which might explain why the corona is two million degrees Celsius, whilst the Sun's surface is a relatively cool 6,000 degrees

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During an eclipse scientists can see the violent magnetic storms in the corona

Celsius.

Even in areas where cloud blocked a clear view, scientific experiments were successful. At Land's End in the UK, Dr Barrie Jones, head of Physics and Astronomy at the Open University, was searching for waves of pressure changes in the atmosphere.

"These are believed to be generated because the Moon's shadow cools the atmosphere," Dr Jones told BBC News Online. "I know I'll have some good data and hope to detect these waves for the first time."

Cause and effect

Dr Jones's equipment is highly sensitive and has to detect pressure variations of just a hundredth of a millibar. These pressure waves are in the atmosphere all the time, generated by sunsets and sunrise and by the wind going over mountains.



Dr Barrie Jones says his experiments were not spoiled by cloudy skies

"They are important ways of carrying energy around the atmosphere and so of importance in the general understanding of weather," said Dr Jones, a veteran of five eclipses.

"The beauty of the eclipse is that you know exactly what is causing the waves, and where and when. So you can link a specific wave train back to a specific cause. Usually these waves are caused by such a mixture of events you cannot link cause and effect. This will give a much better understanding of the process."

Dr Jones's experiment worked well but was his enjoyment of the spectacle spoiled by the cloudy skies? Not at all. "It was actually very impressive, a great wall of darkness flying over the Atlantic towards us and really nice orange and pink colours around the horizon."

This page was prepared for the 1999 total solar eclipse on 11 August. The next total eclipse can be seen across southern Africa on 21 June, 2001.



It is extremely dangerous to look directly at the Sun. For advice on safe viewing click here



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Wednesday, August 11, 1999 Published at 17:58 GMT 18:58 UK

Under the Moon's shadow



From under the Moon's shadow, BBC correspondents relay their experiences of the eclipse

Justin Webb was with an animal experiment in Soisson, France.

Here in Soisson what they did was gather a group of animals at an aerodrome on some high ground.



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They were farm animals, about a dozen of them, with their hay and little pens. A lot of people came and looked at them. It was anything but an ordinary day for the animals right from the word go because they were being poked and prodded in a manner that they probably weren't used to on an ordinary day on the farm.

Anyway, when darkness fell, people were moved away from the animals because there was a feeling that they might behave oddly, might even be dangerous. But I have to say nothing untoward happened, indeed nothing much happened at all.

The animals simply looked as if they were preparing to go to

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View from the Arc de Triomphe

sleep in a quite sensible fashion and that is what one or two of them did. The chickens stopped clucking and the donkey stood very still and so did the cows. When it got light again they just seemed to wake up again.

I talked to a vet afterwards who said that, frankly, in his view the result of the experiment was that animals do not behave oddly in eclipses. He said that all the literature saying that they do was mistaken. It was

probably the result of non-objective people looking at these things.

Certainly, from the point of view of this experiment in northern France, the lesson of the day is that animals do not do anything strange. There is a bigger question mark, I guess though, about the humans.

Caroline Wyatt felt the downpour in Munich.

The omens weren't good. Early morning sunshine in Munich rapidly disappeared behind gloomy skies with weather forecasters predicting just a 30% chance of viewing the eclipse.

The tens of thousands of tourists who had flocked to the main city for the event found themselves in need of umbrellas and raincoats alongside their eclipse viewing glasses.



A damp day for Munich

In Munich's Olympic stadium, where the main event was held, families huddled together under umbrellas to watch music and dance from around the world.

Even the efforts of the Ghanaian drumming group appeared to be in vain. But then, just as the moon began to pass across the face of the sun the clouds cleared and people rushed to put on their viewing glasses.

In town, shops and factories shut punctually at mid-day to give employees the chance to see the developing eclipse. But it was not to be. Just as the totality reached Munich, the heavens opened and there was a torrential downpour.

In the eerie twilight that enveloped the city, spectators were

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forced to watch their television screens broadcasting pictures from above the cloud cover. It was the closest most people in Munich got to view the only total eclipse in this region within their lifetimes.

Jeremy Cooke in Ramnica Vellcea, Romania.

After a cloudy start to the day the conditions for viewing the eclipses here in the town of Ramnica Vellcea were perfect.

The total eclipse here lasted longer than anywhere on Earth. The crowds, many of them in traditional Romanian costume, clapped and cheered as the Moon shadow completely covered the Sun.



Romanians dress for the occasion

And then there was a strange quiet for some two minutes and 23 seconds until the first solar rays could once again be seen.

During the eclipse the Sun's spectacular atmosphere was clearly visible, causing delight not only for Romanian people but for the thousands of overseas visitors, some of whom had travelled thousands of miles to be here for an experience which lasted less than three minutes.

It was, though, a truly remarkable sight and one that will never be forgotten by those who witnessed it.

Romanian officials will be delighted that everything has gone so well. The country drew great pride from the fact that it was to be the sight of the longest eclipse.

Major initiatives to increase tourism seem to have been successful in a country that so badly needs to improve its fragile economy.

Chris Morris in Turkey.

From a high mountain path in Central Turkey, hundreds of people cheered and clapped as a wall of darkness rushed towards us across the plain below.

For about one and a half hours, the Moon had been eating away at the edge of the Sun. Suddenly it was dark - not the deep darkness of night, but a cloak of grey. As the Sun disappeared, the temperature dropped. A halo of light danced around the edge of the Moon.

The planet Venus was visible in the sky - it was mesmerising.



Turkey takes a peak

In a little more than two minutes the total eclipse was over. The first narrow crescent of the Sun reappeared from behind the moon.

The darkness gave way to a strange purple half-light. Everything seemed luminescent. As the darkness raced away from us towards the Iranian border, the immense power of the Sun quickly brought normal light conditions back under clear blue skies.

The farmers in the fields below us resumed their work.

Sanjeev Srivastava in Hudco village near Bhuj, India.

Astronomers and amateurs shouted in joy at the time of the total solar eclipse. For more than a minute there was near total darkness and an eerie silence as the Moon completely covered the Sun.



There was also a perceptible drop in the temperature, and the breeze blowing over this desert village suddenly felt a lot cooler. As the Moon's disc began to leave the Sun, it was light again, and birds, which had flown to their nests only minutes earlier, came chirping out again.

In India, there are several myths attached to an eclipse. According to some religious texts, the solar phenomenon is a sign of the Sun's anger and is

followed by widespread destruction. Pregnant women and children are discouraged from seeing the eclipse, and in conservative families across India, even food is not cooked on the day of the eclipse.

In the run up to the eclipse, a concerted effort was made to dispel these myths and special lectures were held in schools and colleges across India.

The campaign to spread positive awareness seems to have had an impact, and together with scientists and astronomers, thousands of amateur stargazers and students turned out to watch this amazing celestial event.

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Tuesday, August 24, 1999 Published at 13:19 GMT 14:19 UK

Eclipse experience starts flood of e-mail



The view from Hull, UK, e-mailed by the creative team at Kingston Internet

ECLIPSE 1999



Special report

11 August

Wallpaper

Media

The majestic spectacle of the total solar eclipse is thrilling millions and has prompted a torrent of e-mails to BBC News Online. Delights, disappointments and photographs have been flooding in since just after totality drew darkness over the UK.

Many hundreds have already sent messages and the flow is increasing as people across the European continent begin to share their cosmic experiences. By noon on Wednesday, more than 20 e-mails were arriving every minute, and the rate was increasing.

The total eclipse also prompted the most intense usage ever of the video streamed by BBC News Online, of the UK eclipse and then following totality eastwards.

The site is also bringing the latest news from Cornwall to India, plus comprehensive background. Users can also relive the eclipse through recorded video files.

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Eclipse by e-mail



Colin Myles sent in his view from Cambridge, UK

Nicky Hill, in Sweden, told BBC News Online how e-mail had added to his enjoyment: "It was an amazing sight, but the most amazing thing was continuously comparing notes via e-mail with my brother David who lives in North Wales. Isn't technology great!"

In England, Ian Gow said the total eclipse made our small presence in the Solar System particularly obvious: "It was a rare occasion when you actually felt the magic and sheer presence of space and

the planetary movements at first hand."



The eclipse was only partial in Switzerland, from where Jim Burns told BBC News Online: "Through gaps in the clouds, I glimpsed a beautiful, cold light from the Sun."

E-mails from countries further afield have also come in including Canada, Iceland, Russia and Pakistan. BBC News Online has even had emails from Brazil, where the eclipse is not visible at all, praising the coverage.

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Thursday, August 12, 1999 Published at 14:13 GMT 15:13 UK

UK touched by history



All eyes: Rare sunshine in Cornwall ahead of the eclipse

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Special report

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For two minutes, Britain stood still in awe.

Millions of people stopped work to watch the last eclipse of the century and experience a once in a lifetime moment.

Cloudy skies meant observers in Cornwall - the only part of mainland Britain which witnessed "totality" - were unable to see the phenomenon in all its beauty.




Watch highlights of the BBC's eclipse coverage

But the eclipse's effects were dramatic nonetheless. The temperature dropped and darkness fell in Falmouth at 10.11GMT (11.11BST).

For some people it was a spiritual moment, for others a scientific one. But for everyone it was unforgettable.

Calls to hospitals



Despite warnings about not looking

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[Peter Hunt reviews the day's events in Cornwall](#)

directly at the sun, some eye hospitals received calls from worried eclipse-watchers.

Across the UK, millions of people took a break from work to witness the eclipse and when they went back to work the National Grid reported a record-breaking power surge.



[The BBC's Nicholas Witchell: "A once in a lifetime experience"](#)

Hundreds of people who gathered on the Isles of Scilly were the first to witness the heavenly phenomenon. One holidaymaker described it as "awesome and incredible" because the event had "nothing to do with man".

As Cornwall was plunged into darkness for two minutes and six seconds, couples kissed on the beaches and drew suns in the sand.

Darkness greeted with fireworks

Crowds cheered loudly and celebrated the moment of totality with fireworks.



More than 300 people gathered at the feet of the Angel of the North in Gateshead

TV astronomer Patrick Moore, watching in Falmouth, described it as a "strange, weird experience".

He said: "The temperature dropped suddenly and the light dropped and there were strange atmospheric effects too, a strange kind of breeze I have not felt before."

Two women in Alderney, who had witnessed the last eclipse in 1927, said this time the sky had not gone as black and the temperature had not dropped as much.



[Listen to the eclipse: Reactions from two locations in Cornwall](#)

The hoped-for view of the Sun's corona framed by the shadow may have been obscured by a band of heavy cloud and rain but skywatchers refused to let it dampen their spirits.

"It was absolutely fantastic, a wonderful experience," said Andrea Simmons from Penzance.

Wall of darkness

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A wall of darkness swept towards Europe at 1,522 miles per hour (2,400km/h), closely followed at one point by two Concorde aircrafts, which had set off from London's Heathrow Airport early in the morning.



[The BBC's Jane O'Brien: "A moment of magic"](#)

Two hundred passengers were treated to a trip of a lifetime as they chased the shadow of the moon at twice the speed of sound.

Earlier, 40,000 people in thousands of boats set sail from Cornwall to Hampshire to view the eclipse from the sea, setting a record for Britain's biggest ever maritime gathering.



In London, the eclipse was 96.5% of totality but eyewitnesses in the capital said they could see little because of the cloud cover.

But hundreds of workers and shoppers in Leeds unexpectedly witnessed the solar spectacle, after a lucky break in the clouds.

Weather forecasters said Yorkshire and Humberside was one of the best places to view the phenomena outside Cornwall.



As the eclipse fever that had gripped the country began to abate, helplines at two specialist eye centres started to take calls from people worried they had damaged their sight by looking at the sun.

The Sun plays hide and seek with the Moon



[John Hegley offers his eclipse poem](#)

A schoolboy is recovering after plunging around 20ft from cliffs as people gathered to watch the eclipse at a beauty spot on Merseyside.

The 10-year-old was taken to hospital with abdominal, head and leg injuries after falling from a cliff at Wirral Country Park.

Back in the West Country roads are already becoming snarled with traffic as thousands of spectators make their way home.

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Thursday, August 12, 1999 Published at 13:53 GMT 14:53 UK

Eclipse eye damage reports rise



Viewers like these reduced the risk of eye damage

Patients with eye damage caused by the eclipse will continue to arrive at UK hospitals well into the weekend, say experts.

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Moorfields Eye Hospital, one of the UK's top centres, has already answered 400 calls on its helpline, and helped 40 people in the accident and emergency department.

And Birmingham City Hospital has had more than 200 calls, and 30 arrivals at casualty.



The BBC's Bob Sinkinson: "Some people ignored the advice"

A spokesman for Moorfields said that the symptoms of eye damage often took up to 48 hours to appear, and predicted a steady stream of casualties.

Ophthalmologists throughout the UK are contributing to a massive research programme gathering information about eclipse-related eye problems.

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists is coordinating the effort.

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Even though thick cloud covering much of the area of totality offered some protection to eclipse-viewers, an NHS helpline reported increased calls.



Looking at the Sun can cause damage to the retina of the eye

NHS Direct in the West Country is the health advice line covering Cornwall, Devon and Somerset. Its spokeswoman said the number of calls on Wednesday had risen by 30% compared to the day before.

"There have been a lot of calls from people who have viewed the eclipse and need reassurance," she said.

Permanent eye damage



[The BBC's Jane O'Brien: "Many have risked blindness"](#)

Elsewhere, an eye casualty unit at Queen's Medical Centre in Nottingham reported a sudden increase in the number of calls following the eclipse.

At Queen's Medical Centre, clinical nurse specialist Ian Smith said: "Almost straightaway after the eclipse we started getting calls from people who were worried about having looked at the Sun.

"Some of those people have been advised to attend, but it is a little early to tell the full extent of how many people will be affected."

Despite widespread warnings about the dangers of looking directly at the sun, even when it is partially obscured, it was feared that many people could suffer permanent eye damage.


[Nurse Lucy Butler explains why people have been concerned about their eyes after watching the eclipse](#)

Radiation from the Sun can burn the back of the eye, producing a condition known as solar retinopathy which leads to blurred vision. But it is unlikely that anyone would be completely blinded.

Consultant Ophthalmologist Lucy Butler, from Birmingham City Hospital said the symptoms people should look out for were a black spot in the field of vision, along with blurring.

Many hospitals were reporting small numbers of patients either calling for advice or arriving at accident and emergency within a few hours of the eclipse.

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However, on Friday morning, eye surgeon Stephen Charles said that while 70 people had contacted the Royal Manchester Eye Hospital, most could be reassured and sent away.

But he said: "It's definitely not hype. In 1984 we had a partial eclipse and 11 people in the Greater Manchester area alone suffered permanent eye damage. It's potentially a major health issue."

Crucial 48 hours

The true toll of the eclipse on the nation's sight will not be known for some time.

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists' project should yield valuable evidence about how long people can look at the sun without suffering permanent damage.

Barny Foot, who is helping coordinate the project, said: "It's something that has captured the imagination of ophthalmologists, even though the information won't be of any practical benefit for at least 70 years.

"But it's an opportunity not to be missed."

The UK Government's chief medical officer Professor Liam Donaldson had advised people not to look directly at the Sun at anytime, even during totality, when many people say it can be viewed safely.

Professor Donaldson said the eclipse would be best viewed on television.

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Tuesday, August 24, 1999 Published at 13:17 GMT 14:17 UK

Eclipse sparks record power surge



The UK's biggest surge happened in just a few minutes

A record-breaking power surge hit the National Grid as life returned to normal after the solar eclipse.



Even England's 1990 football World Cup shoot-out with Germany was put in the shade by a massive 3,000 megawatt rush.

This was the equivalent of meeting the demands of an additional four million people, or five million cups of tea, said National Grid.

Demand for electricity plummeted between 11am and 11.30am as the country downed tools to watch the sky

show.

But as hoards returned to work, logging back on to computers or factory machines, the combined effect was the UK's biggest increase in demand.

A National Grid spokeswoman said: "This was the largest increase in demand we have experienced on our system, and it occurred in a matter of minutes.

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Top 5 surges (Megawatts)

- 1. 3000 Mw**
Post solar eclipse
1999
- 2. 2800 Mw**
England v Germany penalties
1990
- 3. 2600 Mw**
The Thornbirds, final episode
1984
- 4. 2200 Mw**
The Thornbirds
1984
- 5. 2100 Mw**
England v Argentina, 1998
Equal to 'Dallas' in 1984

"At 10.30am, as interest in the eclipse picked up, demand was 35,500 megawatts.

"By 11am this had dropped by 500 megawatts and at 11.15am demand was at its lowest point at 33,150 megawatts.

"As the sun reappeared and people returned to their homes, offices and factories, electricity demand swiftly increased and within minutes reached 36,150 megawatts - a rise of 3,000 megawatts.

"About 1,000 megawatts of the increase was in relation to television pick-up - the audience switching on kettles

for a cup of tea as life returned to normal."



Beckham off, but the kettles came on

The eclipse now tops the all-time list of power surges on the UK's network.

Other notable power rushes include the Prince of Wales's wedding to Princess Diana in 1981, the soap wars between EastEnders and Coronation Street and David Beckham's sending-off in England's World Cup game against Argentina last year.

Much of the nation broke its daily routine to watch the skies.

Trials at the Old Bailey in London were even adjourned to allow jurors and lawyers, though not defendants, to watch the eclipse.

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Tuesday, August 24, 1999 Published at 13:16 GMT 14:16 UK

Wildlife fooled by double dawn



An event for humans and animals

By Environment Correspondent Alex Kirby

Along the path of the total solar eclipse, many creatures reacted to the darkened skies entirely naturally - by settling down to sleep.

Hayle in Cornwall is home to a bird sanctuary, Paradise Park. It has a big parrot collection, and several other rare and exotic species.

One of the park's directors, Nick Reynolds, said the morning turned out very much as he had expected.

"All the birds settled down when the darkness came. It was very quiet for a time, with heads tucked under wings, and the flamingoes on one leg ready for sleep.

Gulls left behind

"When it got light there was a real dawn chorus, though perhaps not quite as loud as it would normally be.

"The only surprise was that the owls didn't start hooting. They probably didn't have time to wake up.

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Not dark enough for owls

"The gulls? They had no idea what was happening."

At Paignton zoo in Devon, the birds went back to their nests during the darkness. But there was no dawn chorus, except for a song from the Bali starling.

Kate Bankier, the zoo's press officer, said the gulls were the most confused of all.

"There was a large flock, flying out to sea and back again, obviously looking for somewhere to roost until they

realised they didn't need to.

"The baboons got agitated in the dark, and then became very confused when the light quickly returned.

"The Sulawesi crested macaques (a species of monkey) and the Asiatic lions both split along gender lines.

"The females settled down to sleep with their young. The males just wandered around looking confused."

Bagpiper outdid birds

Andrew Lawson, head gardener at Tresco Abbey gardens on the Isles of Scilly, found it was a day to remember, but not because of the wildlife.

"There were about 70 yachts between us and the next island", he said.

"On one there was a bagpiper playing Amazing Grace, and another had a trumpeter on board, playing the Last Post.

"So I heard very little from the birds, except for the gulls. They didn't seem to know what was going on."

The Royal Society for the Protection of Birds described the morning as "a bit of a non-event".

"The birds round here seemed to go about their business as usual", said Mike Everett, a press officer at the RSPB headquarters in Bedfordshire.

"We asked our wardens round the country to report anything unusual. But we haven't heard a dicky-bird from any of them."

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Wednesday, August 11, 1999 Published at 11:53 GMT 12:53 UK

Picture gallery: All eyes skyward

Cloudy skies across much of northern Europe did not dampen the spirits of millions of eclipse watchers who turned out to witness an event many call nature's greatest spectacle.



Totality bites: South-west England falls into darkness as the Sun is obscured.

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At 1113BST Cornwall's famous St Michael's Mount disappears into the shadows.



As the skies darkened across France, eclipse watchers followed advice and kept their eyes protected.



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Meanwhile, the eclipse shadow sped eastwards as watchers in Austria prepared to get their view.



Even in areas with thick cloud, the awesome sight was captured on camera.



But in Munich, the heavy rains broke just at the moment of totality, making the event a washout.



Just minutes after totality, the Sun begins to re-emerge.

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