

February '79 eclipses

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Each year the earth experiences at least two eclipses of the sun. At most, there can be seven eclipses, five solar and two lunar; or alternately, four solar and three lunar eclipses.

Despite the high frequency of solar eclipses, the last total solar eclipse visible in the United States this century will occur on the morning of February 26, 1979. The next such eclipse will occur in the year 2017.

The path of totality of the eclipse will begin about 1000 km (600 miles) west of Seattle about 8:10 a.m. Pacific Standard time. It races eastward to pass over Portland at 8:13 a.m. and arcs gently over Helena, Montana, northward into Canada to pass over Hudson Bay to its termination two hours later in central Greenland.

Although a partial or total eclipse will be visible everywhere in Canada and in the lesser forty-eight, Alaskans will be mostly left out in the sunshine. No eclipse effects will be seen west of a line running from Prudhoe, through Bettles, Tanana, Farewell and Kodiak. On this line, the eclipse ends just at sunrise.

To the east, at locations such as Anchorage and Fairbanks minor eclipsing may be visible. Residents of the Whitehorse area and of southeastern Alaska will see a larger portion of the sun occluded by the moon.

In the Anchorage area, whatever effects to be seen will occur at and just after sunrise, about 7:15 a.m. Alaska Standard time. The same is true of the Fairbanks area, where sunrise will be about 7:28 a.m. Residents of British Columbia and southeastern Alaska should begin observing at sunrise. At Ketchikan the maximum coverage of the sun will be at 6:30 a.m. Pacific Standard time, and about ten minutes later at Whitehorse.

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