

Tulane duo chases history for total solar eclipse

August 18th, 2017

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Roger Dunaway roger@tulane.edu

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On Aug. 21, the moon will pass between the sun and Earth, causing a total solar eclipse that will last nearly three hours over the United States. The last time the United States saw a total eclipse was in 1979. (Photo from iStock)

The historic total solar eclipse on Aug. 21 has taken the nation by storm with thousands, if not millions of Americans flocking to cities centered along the direct path of the eclipse, or the path of totality. Among those making the trek to these areas are Tulane alum David Katz and current student Chase Schober.

Katz and Schober met at Tulane through a mutual acquaintance and have been friends since. The duo will load up two other friends and make the 13-hour drive to Gallatin, Missouri, and take in the phenomenon on Lake Viking, Missouri, which falls in the path near the northern edge.

"Engineering physics has taught me a lot about the physics of the sun, moon and pretty much everything else," Schober said. "I think my understanding of physics has given me a lot more appreciation for my everyday life, and I'm ready to have my mind blown by a total eclipse."

Katz, who hails from Overland Park, Kansas, received his degree from Tulane in psychology and linguistics with minors in French and Spanish in 2017, while Schober is a native of Lopez Island, Washington, and will graduate in December with a bachelor's degree in engineering physics.

Both have their special eclipse sunglasses in hand and will be among a crowd watching from a lake house. The inspiration for their trip came from the excitement of a conversation about the eclipse and a desire to watch from the path of totality.

The celestial event occurs when the moon passes between the sun and Earth and blocks the sun for nearly three hours, depending on the location. The first point of contact in the United States will be at 9:05 a.m. PDT in Lincoln Beach, Oregon, while the final point of contact will be at 4:09 EDT over Charleston, South Carolina. Although Louisiana is not in the direct path of totality, there will be a partial solar eclipse in New Orleans at 1:29 p.m. CDT.

The longest duration of the eclipse will be 2 minutes, 40 seconds over Carbondale, Illinois. The direct path of totality will take place over the course of an hour and a half over Oregon, Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky, Tennessee, Georgia, and North and South Carolina. The last time the continental United States saw a total eclipse was in 1979.

"Apparently, the minutes leading up to the total eclipse are incredibly eerie and surreal. In the middle of the day, the environment goes dark as night and animals react accordingly. There's supposedly an odd clarity to the environment around you due to the strangeness of the light quality. The temperature may drop and you get to see the sun's corona during totality, which are the bright shifting loops that spring off the sun's surface. Normally, those are outshone by the brightness of the center of the sun's disk," Katz said.