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April's total eclipse to skip southcentral Kentucky

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Then Munfordville Elementary School sixth-grader Hunter Sydnor watches the eclipse at Houchens-Smith Stadium.

Daily News File

Nearly seven years after a solar eclipse darted across the United States, another will move across the country on April 8.

Gordon Emslie, a professor in the Physics and Astronomy Department at Western Kentucky University, said unlike the total eclipse in 2017 this one will not fully pass over southcentral Kentucky. The only major cities in Kentucky in the eclipse's path of totality – the strip of land where a total solar eclipse is visible – are Paducah and Henderson.

Even though Owensboro is only a little over 30 miles from Henderson, it will not see a total eclipse.

“The laws of celestial mechanics are pretty immutable,” Emslie said. “(Astronomers) can define the edge of an eclipse to a few hundred yards. If you're in it, you're in it. If you're not, you're not.

On April 8, Bowling Green will see an eclipse of 97% totality. Emslie said many believe “this is enough,” but to have the full experience of an eclipse, it's not. Observers in Southcentral Kentucky will still need to use special devices to see the eclipse.

Observers will be able to see the moon “taking bites” out of the sun as it moves across, eventually leaving only a thin crescent of sunlight visible.

Emslie said for those in this area wanting to see a total eclipse, the best place in Kentucky to go is Henderson. Henderson will see totality for two minutes and 15

seconds, but if gazers want more time to watch the eclipse, Evansville, Indiana, will see totality for three minutes and four seconds.

For casual observers though, he said Paducah or across the river in Metropolis, Illinois, is an easier-to-get-to option.

“You get two and a quarter, two and a half minutes of totality (there),” he said. “For most people, that’s enough to enjoy the experience.”

There are still things people can do in Bowling Green to enjoy the eclipse. He said one of his favorites is taking a colander and watching the sun through the holes become a crescent.

Weather permitting, Emslie and a group of students from WKU will travel to the Henderson area to witness the total eclipse. If it is cloudy outside, they will head in a “different direction.”

For those in Bowling Green during the eclipse, an event will be held at the Hardin Planetarium at WKU from 12:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m. The event will have “hands-on activities and basic crafts” for attendees to monitor the sun, according to the planetarium’s website. In the event of cloud cover or rain during the eclipse, a virtual eclipse will be shown inside the planetarium.

Emslie said even though the eclipse will sweep across the country in around four weeks, not many people yet know about it.

“It starts getting exciting a week or two before, maybe a week before then the TV weather guy starts telling you about it,” Emslie said. “Then there’s an absolute frenzy about a day and a half before.”

The eclipse will chart across the Pacific Ocean and Mexico before it enters the U.S. at Eagle Pass, Texas. From there, it will sweep across major cities such as Dallas, Indianapolis and Cleveland.

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