



Totality – Eclipses of the Sun (3rd edn.)

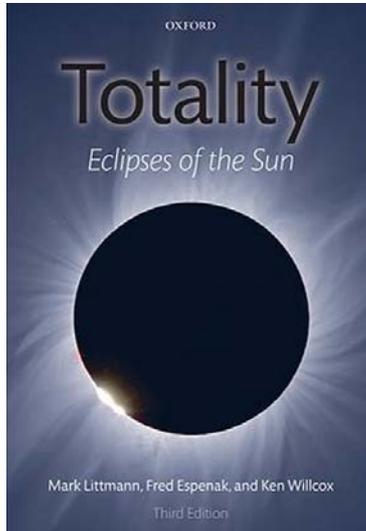
by Mark Littmann, Fred Espenak & Ken Willcox

Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-953209-4. Pp xv + 341, £16.99 (hbk).

Although this is a book for eclipse chasers, it is so beautifully written that it should be of interest to a wider audience. It contains everything you will need to help you understand eclipses: why they happen, the science, the history, the mythology, safe observing techniques, photography and, as they describe it, 'coming attractions'.

Each chapter starts with a quotation. Having seen nine eclipses myself, my favourite is:

'Some people see a partial eclipse and wonder why others talk so much about a total eclipse. Seeing a partial eclipse and saying that you have seen an eclipse is like standing outside an opera house and saying that you have seen an opera; in both cases, you have missed the main event.'



(Jay M Pasachoff, 1983)

The first of twenty chapters explains the excitement of experiencing totality, the sequence of events and the emotion felt by the observer. All the photographs have a description of the equipment used and, as with the diagrams, are clearly labelled. There are notes and references at the end of each chapter making each conveniently self contained. The book

continues with chapters covering the first eclipse expeditions, modern scientific uses for eclipses, getting the most from your eclipse photos, reports of recent eclipses, indeed everything you would want or need to know about eclipses. The chapter entitled *The Pedigree of an Eclipse* describes the family of eclipses known as a saros.

My first eclipse and hopefully my next both belong to saros 136.

This book is written by experts in their field. NASA astronomer Fred Espenak publishes eclipse bulletins which are available at no cost to anyone going to an eclipse. Mark Littmann has written many books about eclipses. Everyone involved with this book, professional or amateur, has a love of the subject and takes pleasure in sharing their knowledge and enjoyment. They haven't forgotten the excitement, beauty and mystery of seeing an eclipse for the first time.

The book is beautifully produced and is well organised. The photographs, many taken by amateurs, the diagrams and the tables are cleanly reproduced. Appendices cover details of future eclipses, total, annular and hybrid; recent events; the chronology of discoveries about the Sun; and NASA *Solar Eclipse Bulletins*. The glossary and bibliography will be useful to a beginner in the field.

It is hard for me to review *Totality* objectively – I enjoyed every page. It is a wonderful book which I recommend you to read. Perhaps after you have read it you will understand eclipse chasers and their passion, and I hope that it will inspire you to see your own total eclipse one day.

Ann Davies

Ann is an eclipse chaser and solar observer. She is sales & promotion coordinator and advertising manager for the BAA, and a founder member of Newbury Astronomical Society.

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