

WORKING GROUP ON SOLAR ECLIPSES (GROUPE DE TRAVAIL POUR LES ECLIPSES SOLAIRES)

CHAIRPERSON: Jay M. Pasachoff

MEMBERS: Iraida Kim, Fred Clette, Hiroki Kurokawa, Jagdev Singh, Vojtech Rusin, Fred Espenak & Jay Anderson

Additional members for the period of the African eclipses (2001 and 2002) were Peter Kalebwe (Zambia) and Francis Podmore (Zimbabwe)

The Working Group on Solar Eclipses tries to help solar astronomers make arrangements for observations of total solar eclipses. Sample assistance includes requesting the appointment of National Liaisons and getting information about eclipse sites and customs clearance.

The Working Group maintains a homepage at www.totalsolareclipse.net (which links to www.williams.edu/astronomy/IAU_eclipses) that provides links to maps, information about observing eclipses, and information on eye safety at eclipses, including filter evaluations by Ralph Chou. Fred Espenak and Jay Anderson, authors of the NASA Reference Publications for each eclipse, are members of the Working Group. The Reference Publications are available on line; see <http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/SEpubs/bulletin.html>.

The total solar eclipse of 21 June 2001 swept across southern Africa, and provided partial phases for all of Africa south of the Sahara. In spite of the best efforts of all professionals and educators concerned, confusion reigned about when to look at the eclipse through filters and when directly. The growing popularity of solar viewers of Mylar in eyeglass form has probably contributed to the confusion. We are working with the makers of such glasses and viewers to label the products more clearly, assuming people do not read accompanying instructions. In spite of numerous newspaper interviews, newspapers continued to print incorrect information how to observe eclipses.

Solar filter material was distributed at low cost or no cost to universities in Zambia and Zimbabwe, and representatives of many countries in the zone of partial eclipse were advised on safe observing methods. National liaisons were appointed in Zambia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa, and they did their best to provide accurate information.

The annular eclipse of 14 December 2001 in Costa Rica provided partial phases from northwestern South America through Central America to all of the United States except for the east. The 10 June 2002 annular eclipse provided partial phases for viewers in western Asia (including Japan, China, Russia, and Korea) and western Australia and then ranged across the Pacific Ocean to western Mexico, United States, and Canada. Annularity was viewed in certain Pacific Islands and near Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, usually through clouds. Images can be seen in links from www.eclipses.info or from www.totalsolareclipse.net.

The 4 December 2002 total eclipse provided partial phases across all of Africa except its northern rim and, at sunset, western Australia. Information about safe watching of partial phases of eclipses was widely disseminated in those regions, though, as usual, the local ophthalmological society sent out some misleading and overly harsh warnings.

Maps for future eclipses are available on the Web site, www.totalsolareclipse.net, as well as on www.eclipses.info, the coordinated site of the Program Group on Public Education at the Time of Eclipses of IAU Comm. 46 on Astronomy Education and Development.

Jay M. Pasachoff
Chairperson of the Working Group