

Excitement Builds As Solar Eclipse Nears

BY RONG-GONG LIN II
Los Angeles Times (MCT)

LOS ANGELES — Excitement is building over a rare “ring” eclipse that is expected to be visible in California and other parts of the Southwest.

The Griffith Observatory is set to hold a special eclipse-viewing event Sunday, and plans to sell affordable eclipse-viewing glasses and other devices that will project images of the eclipse on the ground. Regular sunglasses will not protect the eyes, said observatory spokeswoman Susan Szotyori.

Telescopes equipped with special filters will also be set up to help the public view the eclipse, officials said.

The best view of the ring eclipse — which scientists call an “annular” eclipse, in which the moon completely blocks out the sun except for an annulus, or ring of fire, around the moon’s edge — is expected to be on the northern edge of California, coursing near Eu-

reka, Redding, the northern suburbs of Sacramento and Lake Tahoe.

The rest of California is set to still get a prime view of a partial eclipse on Sunday evening, with the moon blocking out 86 percent of the sun’s diameter in Los Angeles, according to Griffith Observatory officials.

In Los Angeles, the moon will begin to obscure the sun at 5:24 p.m. Sunday, reach its maximum coverage at 6:38 p.m., and exit the sun’s path at 7:42 p.m., just 10 minutes before sunset, observatory officials said.

According to NASA, the annular eclipse will begin at sunrise local time in southern China, then pass over Hong Kong; Taipei, Taiwan; and Tokyo before hitting its greatest extent in the Pacific Ocean near Alaska’s Aleutian Islands. After entering California, the moon’s shadow will block almost all sunlight from Reno, Nev.; the Grand Canyon in Arizona; Albuquerque, N.M.; and Lubbock, Texas.

The zone where a partial eclipse is view-

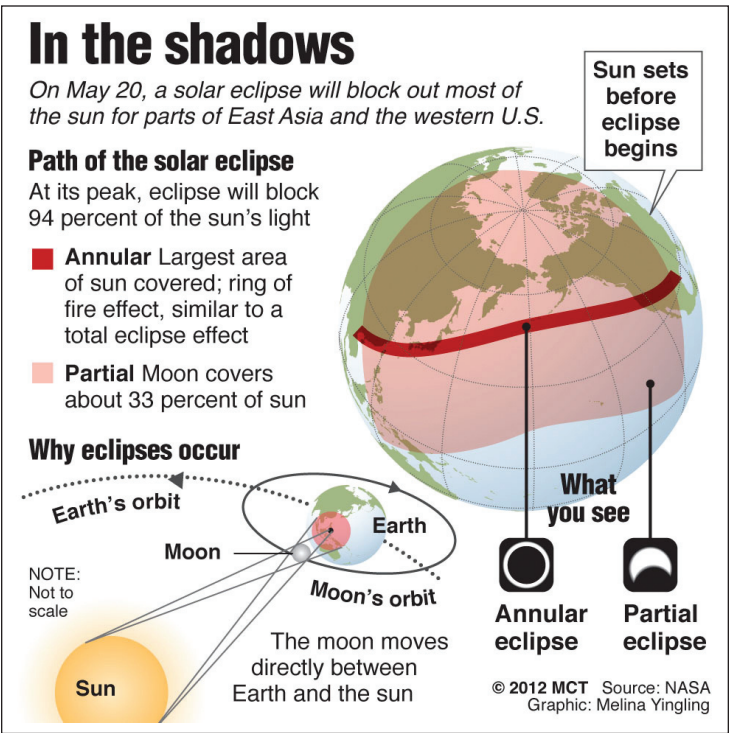
able is much wider, stretching over most of eastern China, Korea, the Philippines, Siberia, Hawaii, Canada and Mexico. NASA has posted calculations of solar eclipse times in foreign countries and the United States.

NASA has also set up an interactive Google map showing times of the eclipse — click on the map and it’ll show when the eclipse will begin and end at any given point in the world. The times are set to “Coordinated Universal Time,” which is seven hours ahead of California.

Annular eclipses are different from total eclipses, where no “ring of fire” is visible.

A word of caution: Don’t look at the sun directly during the eclipse! Experts say it’s possible to cause permanent damage to eyesight. Here’s one way to make a simple pin-hole projector to view the eclipse, and NASA also recommends using binoculars to project the eclipse on a white card.

The eclipse should be visible unless fog rolls in early Sunday night.



Expect Lower Gas Prices Heading Into Memorial Day

BY SANDY SHORE
AP Business Writer

If you’re lucky enough to live in some parts of the United States, you may see gas pump prices fall to around \$3.25 a gallon or less in the next week or two. Even West Coast drivers should get some relief from prices that are still above \$4 a gallon.

Retail gasoline prices dropped by a penny to a national average of \$3.71 per gallon on Friday. That’s 22 cents less than the high of \$3.94 per gallon reached in early April. Lower oil prices are the main reason. Weaker demand is also helping to push down prices, as consumers watch their spending in the sluggish economic recovery.

Motorists on the West Coast, in Illinois and New York are paying the most for gas — from \$3.83 per gallon to \$4.54 per gallon — according to AAA, Wright Express and the Oil Price Information Service. The lowest prices, from \$3.39 to \$3.51 per gallon, were in the South and parts of the Midwest.

Prices should continue to decline heading into Memorial Day. The national average is expected to be around \$3.60 per gallon or a little bit higher for the long holiday weekend, but a smattering of cities may see prices much lower. “You could see these prices of \$3 to \$3.25 populate the country like popcorn thunderstorms do in the spring,” said OPIS chief oil analyst Tom Kloza. “And that may happen in the next week.”

Some drivers already pay 30 to 40 cents less than the national average. That’s because the gasoline they buy is refined from oil produced in the Gulf Coast region, where prices are among the lowest in the country, Kloza said. And state and local gas taxes there are lower than in other areas.

For example, the average pump price on Friday was \$3.34 per gallon in Greenville, S.C.; \$3.39 in Little Rock, Ark., and \$3.43 per gallon in Amarillo, Texas.

Meanwhile drivers in the Pacific Northwest and California are paying \$4.25 to \$4.50 a gallon because of a shortage of gasoline supplies related to refineries. Kloza said that those issues should be under control and prices should begin to ease soon.

By July drivers may face a different situation because of the simmering dispute between Western nations and Iran over its nuclear program. The European Union is set to begin a ban on oil imports from Iran if the situation isn’t resolved by then. Some analysts think that could drive oil prices higher.

On Friday crude oil prices fell ahead of a weekend meeting in which President Barack Obama and leaders of the world’s biggest economies will search for ways to help Europe resolve its ongoing debt crisis. Benchmark U.S. crude fell \$1.08 to finish at \$91.48 per barrel in New York. Brent crude, used to price many international varieties of oil, fell 35 cents to end at \$107.14 in London.

Heating oil fell 1.9 cents to finish at \$2.83 per gallon, gasoline futures rose 1.13 cents to end at \$2.89 per gallon and natural gas increased 15 cents to finish at \$2.74 per 1,000 cubic feet.

The price of natural gas has been rising steadily from the 10-year low it hit a month ago. Friday’s increase of almost 6 percent had a lot to do with the weather. Long-range forecasts predict temperatures well above average for much of the country over the next few weeks. That means more demand for natural gas to run generators that produce electricity to power air conditioners and refrigeration units.

Feds Say Colorado Wildfire Started On Camp Stove

BY DAN ELLIOTT
Associated Press

LIVERMORE, Colo. — Warm, dry weather hindered hundreds of firefighters battling a blaze in northern Colorado that federal officials say started with a camp stove.

The fire, which has grown to cover about 12 square miles, had prompted officials to evacuate about 80 homes, but all residents were allowed to return by Friday night.

Firefighters protected neighborhoods by burning grass, shrubs and small brush to prevent the wildfire from advancing toward homes. Crews got a boost as wind pushed the blaze to an area scorched by a previous wildfire, which slowed its growth.

The fire about 20 miles northwest of Fort Collins was evening half contained Friday evening. More than 500 firefighters, two planes and five helicopters were on hand to help fight the blaze that started Monday. No homes or buildings have been damaged. Three firefighters have suffered minor injuries.

The U.S. Attorney’s Office said that James J. Weber of Fort Collins started the fire with an outdoor stove while camping in the Roosevelt National Forest.

U.S. Forest Service investigators say the 56-year-old Weber, a mental health counselor at Colorado State University, tried to stamp out the fire Monday but then fled as the blaze spread. He later reported starting the fire to the Larimer County Sheriff’s Office, officials said. There is no cell phone service in the area where

the fire started.

The Forest Service issued Weber a citation for causing a fire without a permit. He faces a \$300 fine. However, the authorities also plan to pursue restitution for the blaze.

Weber’s lawyer, Joseph A. Gavaldon, said that his client is praying with “hope that this gets under control.”

Weber “is most concerned about what’s going on now,” Gavaldon said, adding that Weber is focused on the well-being of the firefighters, residents and wildlife in the area.

Gavaldon refused to comment on how the fire started or any events that followed.

The Colorado blaze was one of several burning in the West. Wildfires charred terrain in Arizona, California, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah.

The most significant blaze in Arizona has led to the evacuation of two communities in the northern part of the state, including a historic mining town about 85 miles north of Phoenix. The blaze has grown to nearly 16 square miles and has destroyed three homes and a trailer. No significant injuries have been reported.

More than 600 firefighters supported by water-dropping helicopters are fighting the blaze.

Warm, dry weather and mountain wind have made the fire difficult to contain. But National Weather Service officials say the gusts are expected to die down considerably over the weekend, which should help fire crews make substantial progress.

Investigators say the fire started in a home on Sunday.



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Not Pictured: Jake Hohenthanner, Wayne State
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