

“Travel Club further solar eclipse experience”

Platte County Record Times: Sept. 13, 2017

Periodically I visit my youngest and family for grandparent duty in California. When he sends me a flight ticket, I go by plane. Other times I pack up my dog and travel by car, which means at least one overnight stop along the way, usually in Salt Lake City or vicinity. Inasmuch as I am part of a travel club, I select hosts able to accommodate Abby and her collapsible carrier.

The travel club is “atc,” the “Affordable Tavel Club.” It works like this: When you sign up as member, your name and pertinent information is added to its directory. Before you hit the road, you contact fellow participants for overnight stays en route. Gratuity is \$20 per night per couple and \$15 for individuals, which includes breakfast. Both as host and traveler I’ve experienced a variety of interesting people.

Thus, when the Great American Total Solar Eclipse happened on August 21, 2017, I hosted two sets of travel-club guests. They arrived late afternoon on Sunday, having stopped for a bite at an “incredibly busy” eatery. We had a glass of wine and chatted until bed time.

Monday morning I served a hearty breakfast and invited them to stay at my house for the viewing, but they wanted to head further north. My three-member group was on the way to a class reunion and would take in the solar eclipse “on the run,” while Doug and Donna, a couple from east of Denver, wanted to reach Glendo Lake and head home in the evening. They told me later that, after they heard of the crowds at the lake, they scrapped their plans but were lucky to find a rest stop that had been expanded into a viewing area.

Thanks to ISO eclipse glasses, the view was spectacular from my house south of Wheatland. Coverage was about 95% so I failed to see the totality; still, it was nice to stay put and enjoy the event in peace and quiet. My house sits on a knoll with a view of the draw transected by I-25. Now and then I glanced at the steady stream of vehicles heading north. The south lanes, by contrast, were completely empty.

After daylight returned I settled down to practice guitar. Then the phone rang. The Colorado couple had left a knapsack behind. They said they would stop by to retrieve it on their way home, around 4 PM.

Needless to say, once they returned to my home we spent time comparing notes. Doug showed me the pictures he had taken, which were impressive. Donna took out her tablet to find routes alternative to I-25, where the south-bound traffic was heavy. We talked for about half an hour, then they decided they'd better get on the road.

Forty minutes later the phone rang again. Donna called in a panic. "I can't find my purse," she said. It didn't take me long to spot the purse on the coffee table where she had set it. As they got ready to leave, none of us thought to glance at the purse.

"Where are you now?" I asked. Donna explained that there were east of Cheyenne.

We debated what to do. Should I fed-ex the purse the next day? But she needed it before then.

"If you can get back on I-25 I could meet you halfway," I suggested. "For example, at the Little Bear Exit."

Donna hated to impose on me but I assured her that the rest of my day was open. We settled on meeting at Little Bear.

Which is how I found myself driving in the eclipse traffic that, earlier in the day, I was determined to avoid. There were times when the cars slowed to a crawl. That kind of log jam is familiar to me from the Bay Area of California, but I'd never experienced anything like it in the fifteen years of my Wyoming life. Was I ever happy to spot the Little Bear sign! My dog, who had settled in the backseat, was wagging her tail, picking up on my upbeat mood.

Doug and Donna were equally glad to see me. Donna embraced me and slipped something into my pocket I later discovered was money. "You need not have done this" I texted her later.

"You went above and beyond," she answered.

I'm happy to report, driving north that late afternoon was a good deal less eventful than the thirty miles south half an hour earlier. Abby and I were

glad to be home again, just as we were last time we returned from one of our California stints.