

THE EXPERIENCE OF TOTALITY

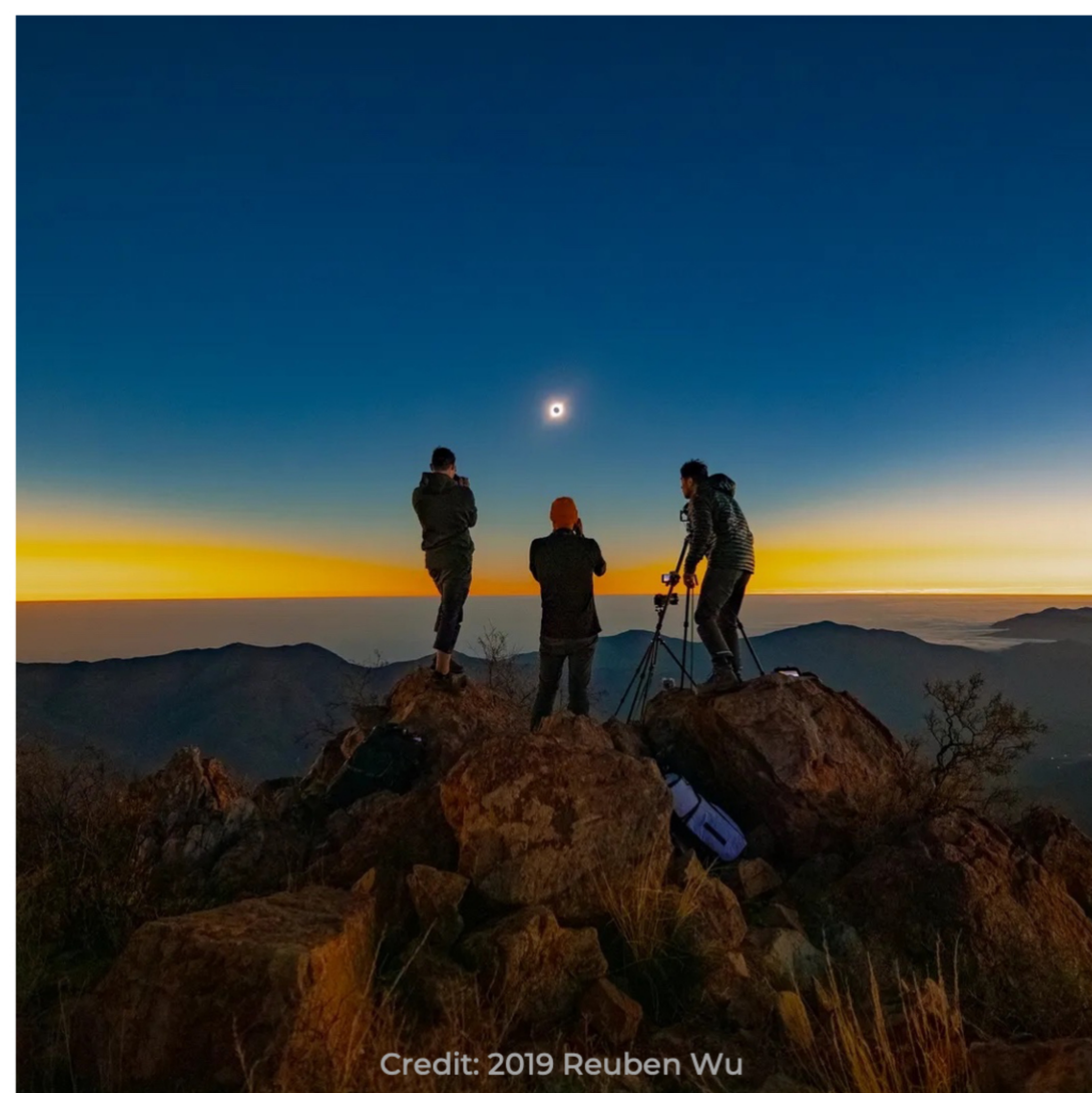
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ABOVE YOU

The only time you can see the ethereal solar corona, and some beautiful features such as the diamond ring, Baily's beads, prominences, and chromosphere



AROUND YOU

The temperature drops as the Moon's shadow dramatically casts an eerie darkness, with gorgeous sunset colours on the horizon



WITHIN YOU

A range of unexpected and intense emotions occur over a short period of time. For some, the experience is profound.

The crowd would cheer whenever the Sun would appear from behind the clouds.

I felt a sense of calm during totality, almost as though everything 'stopped' just for that two minutes.

The vibe from the 10,000 or so people could be felt and their energy and expectation was almost palpable.

I did feel small and insignificant yet at the same time a part of it all.

The total solar eclipse was a very serene experience. I can't explain it any more simply, and I think to try and explain any more would be to overstate it: it was a very serene and peaceful moment.

I have felt in awe before, but this was something else entirely.

It was similar to the build up to an approaching cyclone but without fear for one's life.

I watched it on a hill with 10,000 other people. At first I didn't think I would feel comfortable but the feeling of sharing something so beautiful with so many people was overwhelming.

I felt at one with the world - belonging to a greater good. A feeling of being connected.

It's just really difficult to describe. It does give you all of those feelings - the goosebumps, and the intense emotions that everybody said it would. It was there.

I was so excited in the build up to the eclipse. I loved it, but was left a bit empty afterwards.

At the start of totality I got goosebumps.

The totality experience is **INEFFABLE** - difficult to describe coherently using words, and impossible to convey in short media soundbites in a way that can be easily understood. As an eclipse-chasing psychologist, I continue to collect experiences and share my research widely.

TOTAL ADDICTION: THE LIFE OF AN ECLIPSE CHASER (Springer, 2012)
I interviewed experienced eclipse chasers, with the diagram below attempting to visually capture the totality experience.

TOTALITY: THE TOTAL SOLAR ECLIPSE OF 2012 IN FAR NORTH QUEENSLAND (2013)
I captured the experiences of everyday people experiencing totality for the first time, with some quotes included here.

BEING IN THE SHADOW: STORIES OF THE FIRST-TIME TOTAL ECLIPSE EXPERIENCE (2017) These are detailed in-depth accounts from totality first-timers who were able to coherently describe 'the ineffable'.

SENSE OF WRONGNESS
PRIMAL FEAR
AWE
CONNECTEDNESS
EUPHORIA
DESIRE TO REPEAT

Fig. 13.1 An visual overview of what it is like to experience totality

The slow build up during the partial eclipse was as much an excitement in itself. Then I wondered if it will go wrong, will some cosmic force intervene and will we see the Sun again?

If we weren't aware of the eclipse, you would think something cataclysmic was happening. A very eerie feeling.

The very last shining light was a surprise, as it really does send out a very bright diamond flash of light before it's finally covered.

I felt some fear in the way that all this is massive beyond our comprehension and out of our control. I was exhilarated and wanted it to last forever but at the same time I wanted the Sun to hurry back out.

I was surprised that it was dark, but not the same way that it is dark at night. It was also unlike dusk because I could see stars, and it felt like a really eerie kind of darkness.

I imagined how terrified ancient civilizations would have been if they saw this happen.

Looking at the total eclipse and seeing the darkness of the Moon with the halo of sunlight behind was an incredible sight.

I was surprised by how light it did stay, how large the corona was, and the sudden change in contrast.

I had never seen the Sun before - it was a beautiful sight through the solar filters.

It was such a rush of emotion. Everything was happening so quickly. When total darkness started, the change in light was dramatic and the wind sprang up. It was very eerie.