

Total Eclipse of the Sun



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Iron Butt Association (IBA) Requirements: *Solar Eclipse 1000 Gold - ride at least 300 miles to your eclipse viewing location which MUST be within the path of the eclipse and view the eclipse at the time of 'maximum view' of the eclipse for that location - 24 hours*

To 'prove that you were at your viewing location at the maximum view of the eclipse, plan to arrive there 15 minutes before that time so your phone/spot device can send a 'ping' at that location. Plan to stay for 15 minutes after the maximum view time to be sure your device sends another 'ping'.

Last October (2023), Karen and I did a Solar Eclipse ride to the 3 Twisted Sisters in Texas to view the

annular eclipse. During that eclipse, the moon's shadow did not completely cover the sun. It displayed a ring of fire effect (a thin orange ring around the moon when it centered itself within the sun).

We both looked forward to seeing a total solar eclipse at an area of totality where the moon's shadow would completely cover the sun.

Due to all the hype of this total eclipse, our challenge would be to avoid major highways where the masses would be traveling. With that in mind, I created a route that would make a big loop in Mississippi, (Hernando – Tupelo – Starkville – Winona – Hernando), then up to Jackson, Tennessee. From there, get on a not-so-well-

known four-lane highway (Hwy 412) over to Dyersburg and on to Walnut Ridge, Arkansas. This would make a total of 580 miles to the area of totality—Enough to meet the 300 mile minimum.

The return route would retrace our route back to Jackson on Hwy 412, and redo part of the Mississippi loop (Tupelo – Starkville – Winona – Hernando). This would add another 480 miles to exceed our 1,000-mile required minimum.

I went to bed early in anticipation of an early start. When I got up at 2:30 am, Karen was already up! She had been up all night with a toothache! Oh no! She told me to go ahead. She would be at the dentist when they opened.

Since it was just me, I swapped the GPS over to the GSA Adventure bike. Then, I headed to the local Circle K for my start receipt. Official start time – 3:00 am, Monday, April 8, 2024.



DBR (Dated Business Receipt)

As I headed out on I-269 eastbound, the pavement was wet due to a storm that just passed through. The

temperature was 65 degrees. All was good until I exited onto I-22 toward Tupelo. That's when I caught up with the storm! It poured down rain off and on for the next 30 miles.

The rain eventually slowed down to a light rain. By the time I passed through New Albany, MS, the rain was gone and the pavement was dry.

In Tupelo, I exited onto Hwy 45 south. It was a great ride down to Starkville. Most of the time, I had the road to myself. There, I exited onto Hwy 82 westbound. By now it was 5:00 am and people were starting to slowly get out and about.

In Winona, I stopped to use the restroom and fuel up. From there, I headed north on I-55. I was well ahead of schedule and hungry, so I decided to go off-route to Southaven for a Chick-fil-a breakfast stop. By now, it was 7:30 am. I was in and out in about 20 minutes.

Back on course to I-269 eastbound around Memphis then I-40 east to Jackson, TN. Traffic was heavy due to rush hour as I rode around I-269. When I got on I-40 the traffic wasn't too bad since I was heading away from Memphis. The sun was up and the temperature was slowly following!

In Jackson, I exited onto Hwy 412. After I made it through the city limits, the traffic died down to nothing. It was a great ride over to Dyersburg where Hwy 412 turned into I-155 to I-55. Beyond that, I-155 turned back into Hwy 412. A

nice 4-lane road over to Walnut Ridge.

I arrived in Walnut Ridge at 11:30 am. I had more than 2 hours until totality at 1:54 pm. So, I stopped at a local diner for lunch.

The Cross Ties Diner was full! There was a long line of patrons waiting to order lunch. I spoke to a family from Memphis and Atlanta that had traveled there to view the eclipse. I was in no hurry! After about an hour, I headed for the local airport.

The Walnut Ridge Airport is known for its surprise visit by the Beatles in 1964. They stopped to change planes enroute to a ranch in Missouri for some rest and relaxation during a busy USA tour.

As I was riding through town, I noticed a few places where small groups were gathering, nothing huge. Out at the airport was the same way, several groups, but not crowded by any means.

I parked the bike close to the small airport terminal. I could sit in the shade on a bench under the terminal canopy. By now, the temperature was in the 70's with blue skies above. I didn't need to get sunburned!

In the terminal were nice restrooms. Local groups were selling food. Visitors flew in from other areas to view the eclipse. One couple I talked to flew in from Birmingham. It was an active place!

As part of the IBA requirements, I pinged a few photos to SpotWalla. These photos appear on my route on

the SpotWalla website with a time/date stamp on them. I pinged one 15 minutes prior to the 1:54 pm time of totality and one 15 minutes after.



Airport Terminal

It was a real treat to be in the area of totality! Very different from the annular eclipse that we viewed in the fall. At exactly 1:54 pm, the sun was covered! It got dark! The temperature cooled down a few degrees! Night lights automatically came on!

During the 3 minutes of totality, I could take my eclipse glasses off and look, something we couldn't do during the annular eclipse. During these few minutes when you looked at the sun, it was dark with a white sparkling ring around it. Very cool!



My View

I don't believe I've ever experienced this before. I really

enjoyed watching the moon slowly cover the sun through the special glasses, then taking them off when it was fully covered.

I took pictures before, during, and after to try and capture the darkness.



Before



During



After

After I pinged a photo to SpotWalla 15 minutes after totality, I headed out. Traffic was not an issue for me as I retraced my route back on the 4-lane Hwy 412. Where it intersected with I-55 the road turned to I-155.

There, traffic increased as cars from I-55 jumped on. I assume the majority of these cars were headed to Nashville and beyond. I saw car tags from Virginia and Georgia.

In Jackson, my route took me off Hwy 412 and onto Hwy 45 southbound. As I rode through town, I could see the sky was black in front of me. I pulled over to the side of the road and zipped up all the vents on my jacket in preparation of hitting the storm.

As I pulled back onto the road, Karen called. She told me there was a bad storm in front of me according to the news. I told her that I see it! She said okay, I better let you go to deal with it and hung up. It was 4:30 pm.

I continued riding south through Jackson. By the time I reached the outskirts of town the storm caught up with me. I was riding through an older part of town. There were businesses and some gas stations. I was still on Hwy 45, a 4-lane road.

It started raining, then hailing the size of peas. I was in the left lane, traffic all around. There was one car in front of me as we stopped at a stoplight and cars on my right. In front of me, I see a black wall approaching. Inside the black wall were dark grey clouds at eye level that were slowly rotating clockwise. I knew this was going to be bad! I planted my left foot firmly on the pavement. My right foot was on the footpeg and brake pedal. Both hands were on the handlebars with both the clutch and brake levers engaged. I turned my left shoulder into the storm and tucked my head.

When it hit, it rained so hard the water immediately rose above my ankles! Then all of a sudden, the top of my hands were stinging! I looked up to see quarter-sized hail crashing down.

The wind was intense! I noticed that I was right under a big oak tree. Even though I couldn't see anything in front of me, I knew I needed to move out from under that tree! I moved the bike up and over into the suicide lane out from under the tree.

The stoplight cycled red and green a couple times while this was going on. I just held the bike up and remained in place until the rain slowed down enough to be able to at least see the car in front of me.

I slowly followed that car for half a block when it suddenly swerved to the left. I automatically swerved with it! Good thing, I did! There was building debris all over the road! Sheets of metal from a pole barn type building and busted up two-by-sixes were scattered all over. Luckily, I missed the boards with nails sticking out of them.

I continued following the car. The rain slowly subsided. As it did, I could see a layer of hail in the grassy areas on the side of the road. The hail covered over 60% of the ground. I eventually rode out of the darkness. As the rain died down, the sky lightened up. I finally sped up to highway speeds and continued on Hwy 45 southbound.

I don't know what it was. A tornado? Microburst? Whatever it was, it was bad! After the fact, the scene reminded me of the legendary

karate master Choki Motobu. As a young man in the 1930's, he was seen standing defiant on his roof in Okinawa during a typhoon testing his "horse" stance (a basic karate stance).

Karen called again. She could tell that I had ridden out of the storm. She wanted to let me know I would probably hit rain again near Corinth. I did, but only light rain for a short period. After that, the weather was nice for a while!

Prior to the storm in Jackson, the temperature was 83 degrees. On the other side of the storm, the temperature dropped to 73 degrees—Comfortable to me in my riding gear.

It was around 5:30 pm when I rode through Corinth. I continued to Tupelo and then to Starkville.

Keep in mind, this was my second trip with the auxiliary fuel tank. I really hadn't figured out the effect the added tank had on the gas gauge. Fuel feeds from both tanks at the same time. Does 100 miles of fuel remaining as indicated on the display actually mean 200 miles remaining?

Between Tupelo and West Point there are about 2 gas stations and both are closer to Tupelo than West Point! I had been watching my gas gauge, but figured I had plenty of gas to make it to West Point. Well, 21 miles away, the gauge was low, real low. With 7 miles to West Point, the gas gauge said zero miles remaining! As I continued on, I figured, I would be walking soon! Luckily, I made it to West Point! I

had a similar issue with an auxiliary tank on a V-Strom—No matter how many tanks of gas you have, you can still run out! Mental note: Don't do that in Alaska!

In Starkville, I stopped for a Chick-fil-a sandwich and a short break. It was 7:30 pm and the sun was setting.

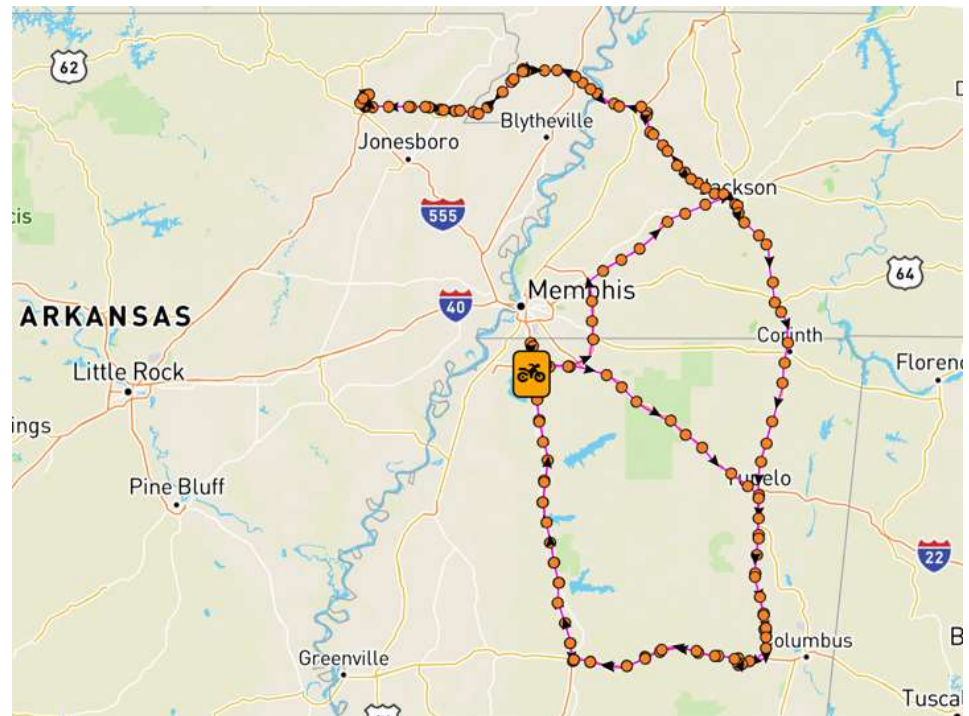
Afterward, I headed west on Hwy 82. It was the same nice ride that I had earlier that morning. But, I could see lightning in front of me.

Karen called again and told me that I should hit rain around the time I made it to I-55. She was right! It started raining by the time I reached Winona. Fortunately, it wasn't bad—Just a light rain, I was out of it before long.

The dark ride north on I-55 was a relaxing with little to no traffic. I stopped at the Hernando Circle K. Official end receipt - 9:55 pm for a total of 1,069 miles in 18 hours, 55 minutes.

It was a great ride with all the challenges that went with it! I'm glad I picked the route that I did! I heard some horror stories afterward of long lines of traffic on the major interstates along the areas of totality. I wished Karen would have felt better. I would love to have experienced the total eclipse with her! It was awesome!

Final note: Karen did have an emergency root canal the next day! It took a few days for her to recover.



Hernando, MS – Tupelo, MS – Starkville, MS – Winona, MS – Jackson, TN – Dyersburg, TN – Walnut Ridge, AR – Starkville, MS – Winona, MS – Hernando, MS