Solar Eclipse Workshop: Closing Comments

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I want to thank Voyto Rušin, Pavel Kotrč, and Eva Marková for organizing this excellent workshop in preparation for the 11 August 1999 total solar eclipse and for giving me the opportunity to make these few comments. First of all, let me say that I have never had the pleasure of viewing a total solar eclipse and have only been able to do so vicariously through the efforts of eclipse observers such as yourselves. For this I thank you in allowing me (and countless others) to partake of one of nature's sublime spectacles. I am in awe of what eclipse observers do - working to refine instruments and experiments, charting weather patterns, planning logistics, securing visas, coordinating with local governments and institutions, and then praying for clear skies - all in hopes of a few minutes glimpse of the Sun's outer atmosphere. It is clear that scientific eclipse expeditions encompass a broad range of the human experience.

But I am only saying what you already know. There is less than a year before a notable eclipse will bisect Europe - a fitting last eclipse for this millenium because the first scientific eclipse expeditions were organized by Europeans during the middle of the 19th Century. To me the great themes of this eclipse underline are: (1) the science (as always); and (2) the unprecedented opportunity for public education. To understand the importance of eclipse observations for coronal science, one need only look at the detailed observations of earlier eclipses presented here by Serge Koutchmy and others. Instruments and techniques developed for ground-based viewing of solar eclipses have led directly to the golden age of coronal physics which we have witnessed during the past 25 years based on observations from the Skylab, Solwind, SMM, and SOHO coronagraphs. As for the public education aspect, one need only look at the path of the eclipse (Rušin and Rybanský, this issue, c. f. Fig. 2) to realize the potential gain for astronomy in general and solar physics, in particular. The path of totality passes near Munich and directly over Bucharest. I am confident that the careers of many future solar observers will be born on 11 August 1999. Equally as important is the opportunity to educate the general public of the wonders of nature and the perspective it provides. Of course, there is much to do in the meantime and efforts by many in this room, such as Frederic Clette on behalf of JOSO and Magda Stavinchi for the Romanian Astronomical Institute, working with local educators and news media, will go far to make this reality. Their labors will also be crucial to ensure public safety - to make certain that an educated populace and their children use adequate precaution when observing the Sun in partial eclipse.

Contrib. Astron. Obs. Skalnaté Pleso **28**, (1999), 300 – 301.

As we close this pre-eclipse workshop, I would like to remind everyone of the post-eclipse workshop that is being organized by Atila Ozguc to be held in Istanbul from August 13-15. It will be an opportunity to review 'lessons learned' while they are still fresh in mind, and in the spirit of eclipse observers, to begin thinking about the first eclipse of the new millenium. My final wish to you is for clear skies and successful observations on 11 August 1999.

References

Rušin, V., Rybanský, M.: 1999, *Contrib. Astron. Obs. Skalnaté Pleso* **28**, 187