

MURPHY STRIKES AGAIN!

On the night of July 9, 1972, I fell asleep in my tent under the starry skies of Les Méchins, Quebec. Great expectations filled my soul, as, tomorrow, the shadow of the Moon would sweep down on me, creating a total solar eclipse. My plan was to provide television coverage, by means of video-tape, for the many people back home in Hamilton. Assured by my Technical Director, Al Bauld, that the equipment was in perfect order, slumber came easily.

I had forgotten, however, that Gremlin, Murphy, who interferes in every conceivable way with astronomers and their doings. Murphy's word is law, and that Law states: "Whatever can go wrong, inevitably will!"

Consequently, instead of sleeping until 8 or 9 AM as usual, I awoke, full of excitement at 4 AM. It was already light! Wanting to know whether the clear weather had remained overnight, I dashed quickly from the tent, stumbled over my camp stove, and fell flat on my face! Nevertheless, the weather was clear, and with a sense of well-being, I commenced to make several cups of coffee.

When Al awoke at 9 AM, I decided that it was time for breakfast..... pancakes! I mixed up the batter according to the recipe and dumped it into the frying pan. It promptly burned! To avoid starvation, Al made the rest of the pancakes!

Since he had done the cooking, I volunteered to do the dishes. The main item of concern was the pot in which we had mixed the pancake batter. I reasoned that if I put in some water to dilute the batter, and then heated it, the batter would simply pour from the pot, leaving me with very little work to do. For some mysterious reason, the batter promptly burned, leaving the bottom of the pot coated with black!

I spent the next hour cleaning the pot with a mixture of gravel and water. Eventually, the pot was as shining as new. For a final touch, I filled the pot with water, swished it around, and promptly poured it down my trousers leg!

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Undaunted, I decided that we should go down to the village of Cap Chat to see who had arrived for the Solar spectacle. Since the road in the vicinity of Cap Chat was under construction, everything in the car, including its two passengers, became covered with dust. Fleeing the man-made Sahara, we returned to Les Mechins and cleaned up.

Throughout all these misfortunes, the Sun had been shining brightly. With optimism, we set up the television equipment and began interviewing the astronomers who had set up camp nearby. All went well until precisely one hour before totality! Then Murphy struck with a vengeance!

Thin clouds began to appear, then medium clouds, and finally, 30 minutes before totality, thick black clouds began to infest the atmosphere. Since there were holes in the cloud layer, we decided to stay put, rather than risk the heavy traffic which would inevitably result when thousands of astronomers began to race toward clear weather.

As totality neared, the cameras were turned on me, and I began to ad lib my ~~way~~ way through the darkness. Our plan was to turn the cameras upward during totality, photographing the eclipse through the holes in the clouds. Murphy, however, assured us that there would be no ~~clouds~~^{holes}, hence I had to describe what was happening during the darkness, including the ringing of the churchbells in Les Mechins.

Feeling that Murphy could do us no further harm, we packed away the television equipment, and the next day, set off for home. On arrival at Cable 8 TV, the tapes were played back. Horrors! Though the playback on the monitor at Les Mechins had shown the tape to be of perfect quality, for some mysterious reason, the tape was now covered with vast areas of television "snow", wiping out all of our material!

Murphy had struck again. The verdict was that the tapes were unusable. Hence, Al and I~~I~~ I dissolved into two lumps, weeping copiously.

Nevertheless, the 1973 eclipse is drawing nearer, and I have it on good authority that Murphy has no passport for a journey to the Sahara. We'll see!

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