

Account of the May 1900 Eclipse Expedition to Wadesboro, NC, by the First Class of the Citadel

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Trip to Wadesboro, or Viewing the Eclipse

To begin at the beginning: an eclipse of the sun had been predicted to take place the 28th of May. The First Class of the Citadel had been studying Astronomy quite a while, and Captain Bond conceived the idea of taking us to Wadesboro, NC to view it, as that would be a good place to witness the peculiar phenomena, being in the line of totality and only a few miles north of the center line.

Accordingly we studied with this in view, spending quite a month in preparation, by studying all about the sun, and drawing the corona, etc. Each of us was assigned a particular task.

So preparations were made to take us to Wadesboro on Saturday the 26th.

We arose quite early, had breakfast at 5:30 a.m. At about six we walked down to the A. C. L. depot and at 6:33 began our trip. On the party were Profs. Bond and Coleman, Mrs. Bond and Oliver, Mr. Dowling, and the First Class, Bradham, Bruce, Calhoun, Clayton, Cochrane, Courtney, Durant, Evans, Haynsworth, Hydrick, Law, Linley, Moore, Quarles, Rogers, Sligh, Smoak, Snelgrove, Westmoreland. It was a jolly party and they kept up their good humour all the way, laughing, talking, singing, etc.

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As this is to be mostly my personal experiences during the trip, I will confine myself mostly to what I saw and what happened to me, or in which I was connected.

One thing which caused considerable amusement all the way was a small mishap to Bruce just after leaving Charleston. His cap blew off and he lost it. One of the train-hands gave him a high brown derby, and as a ??? ??? all the way.

Not much occurred of any interest. It was a new trip for me, in a new country and consequently I was interested in what was taking place outside the cars, as the aspect of the country, the state of the crops, etc. Upon the first part of the journey there was not much different from the usual monotony of such scenery in the low country; but as the northern part of the state was reached the country became more rolling and by the time we reached N.C. it was becoming hilly. Just here I may say that the view from the house-top where I am writing is beautiful in the extreme. Away in the distance toward the north and northeast rises the mountains, looking like low regular clouds in a summer's day.

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In due time we arrived at all the towns along the way. The first stop of any consequence was at Florence where we waited twenty minutes, and had to change cars. I met four young ladies who came down to see Evans.

A short ride brought us to Darlington Evans, home. Mrs. Evans was down to see us and brought me a pretty bouquet of flowers which she pinned on my coat for me. She is indeed quite a pleasant little lady. I had looked forward to meeting Mrs. Evans. She had written me a note telling me she would be glad to meet me etc. I had received this a day or two ago. She is a rather small lady with a pleasant face and speaking black eyes.

Another thing which should not have occurred by any means was the fact that Mrs. Evans had brought a big box of misc. food, I know, for Evans, but he did not get it, and when the train moved off we could not catch it, and consequently it was left. However Mrs. Bond had brought some more food and generously invited all the cadets to share it. We had enough and to spare. We soon passed Cheraw and the various other little stations and arrived at Wadesboro at 12:35 p.m.

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The town is a considerable distance from the station – about a mile. It has a population of about 3500 people.

Getting off the train we walked up to the hotel. Soon dinner was served, and a splendid dinner it was, served in a truly North Carolina style. They do not eat much except cornbread, biscuit, chicken, beef, mutton, etc. but it was nicely prepared and our appetites being whetted by hunger we enjoyed the dinner accordingly.

After dinner we strolled ‘round a while, and, then, we went with Capt. Bond to view the preparations made by the different astronomical parties for observing the eclipse. First we went to the Princeton observatory, where Prof. Young is stationed. We met his assistants Profs. Reed and Libby and they entertained us for quite a while telling us of his telescopes and cameras for photographing the sun and corona, and for observing the spectrum to verify the “reversing layer” of the corona spectrum, which by the way, is a discovery of Prof. Youngs. Prof. Young made us a short talk telling us of his work and what he hoped to accomplish during the eclipse. Near the same place was the observatory of the Astronomical and Astro-physical Society of London, England.

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From here we went to the Smithsonian Institution Observatory. Their observatory is the best here and they are prepared to do the best work of any of the parties. One of their efforts will be to photograph the eclipse and the corona. It will be the largest photograph ever taken of a corona – fifteen inches in diameter.

We met Prof. Langley who wrote “The New Astronomy.” He was quite busy but he got Prof. Abbot to show us his instrument – his invention for measuring the changes in the temperatures – the bolometer.

We then went by the University of Chicago party. They are on a small scale, but are quite prepared to do some good work.

After walking round a little more we dispersed and went our own ways. Moore, “Rip,” and I walked down road and having met a wagon and a Negro, we got in and rode back, having some fun with the driver.

We then got in a carriage furnished by the town and rod all over the town.

Met a Miss Ingram and Miss Smith and conversed with these a while.

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After supper we went to hear a lecture by Prof. Young at the Town Hall. The first speaker was Prof Young who told us all about the eclipse in a very entertaining way. He said that the instruments pointed at the sun from Wadesboro on this eclipse was the largest ever gotten together for the purpose of observing an eclipse. He was followed by Rev. Dr. Bacon of London who spoke a few minutes, saying he was glad he came to America because he had learned some things, one of which was that America is a larger, greater country than England, and that Americans are a nobler higher souled people than British.

He was followed by Prof. Hale of the Univ. of Chicago, who spoke a few minutes.

We then went back up to the hotel, where Profs. Randolph & Ried of the Charleston College, and Profs. Bond and Coleman of the Citadel suggested that we send a telegram to the News & Courier telling them of the safe arrival of the parties from Charleston etc.

Went town and telegraphed it to the N&C, by telephoning to the Western Union telegraph. Came up and went to sleep.

A word about our quarters. They are on second floor of a large store, and our sleeping accommodations consist of a few platforms raised above the surrounding country, and loaded by a kind of bed, for which all straw eating animals must have suffered.

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Sunday May 27

I arose this morning at 6:00. Soon some fellow awoke and began about my getting up to awake them. Someone replied to him and thus after they started the entire crowd soon awoke and we had a jolly time.

Breakfast was about 8:00 a.m. I wrote a letter and some of this account and then cleaned up to go to church. After walking up and down a while I went in to see Miss Ingram and there met a Miss [blank space] a teacher at Elizabeth College, Charlotte, N.C. I accompanied her to church. We went to the Methodist church, which is a very nice church for the town. The services were short and consequently much more enjoyed. Went to hotel and listened to some talk upon scientific questions by our and the C. C. professors.

Dinner and "barn loft" – Cadets' Paradise.

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At 3:30 p.m. I went to call upon Miss Renea Ingram. After an hour and nearly a half, Rip came in, and I went out. Just at that time Mrs. Ingram, and Miss Caldwell were going to drive and I ??? go with them to see the town and enjoy a ride. We drove all over town and out or the limits in several directions. On of these predatory excursions carried us to Carr's Hill where we are to view the eclipse. Another time we stopped to "review" the preparations made by Princeton. They allowed us to see the spectrum, to view the sun-spots, to look at views. All of these were interesting. We saw six small sun-spots in a cluster.

After the drive I went to walk with Mrs. Bond, then supper, and then to church. Again we went to the Methodist church and heard a most awful presentation of the subject on sin.

Returned and went up in the Cadets' Paradise. Retiring immediately, after a while, we began talking and joking about the beds. Such a flow of jests quips and cranks we have not heard for some time, which kept us laughing all the while. Finally about one o'clock a.m. we fell asleep, and slept kind o' so-so till 5:30 a.m. when we rose to eat breakfast before going to observe the eclipse.

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The place selected was Carr's Hill and a beautiful place it is indeed to observe it. The highest hill around, on all sides one can see away in the distance gently sloping hills, and abrupt green mountains with solitary trees rising on their sides.

Linley and I are going to try to draw the corona. He is to draw the first quadrant and, I the third. The first contact came at 7:36 a.m. At this time the following is a rough sketch – 7:56.

Sketch – partial eclipse

The following notes I took while the eclipse was carrying on: (There was a large crowd on the top of Carr's Mountain where Linley and I were stationed. These kept moving around and talking, but just about the time of totality they became still and quiet, as deathlike stillness prevailed, and I heard a kind of soft murmur as of the sea – when the shadow was coming. Of course this was due to the wind, or the contrasted stillness with the noise. But this a diversion.)

First contact 7:36. Moon began to encroach upon the upper right hand quadrant of the sun. Gradually it ate its way into the surface of the sun, appearing as an immense black ball.

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8:26 the disk of light looks like a new moon. The temperature is cooler, and it is becoming perceptibly darker, 8:32 some brighter than full moon. Crescents formed by the shadows of leaves are plainly defined and observable. 8:37 just a small ring on lower left hand edge visible. Looking for shadow bands – none visible. 8:41 sickly yellowish glare. 8:42 about no light, as full moon. 8:43 shadow bands visible for an instant. 8:44 – totality. Shadow came on almost imperceptibly not as a dark cloud like I expected to see it. About dark as midway between dusk and dark. Could see to draw corona the third quadrant of which I drew. The corona was very pretty. It was bright and extended in a direction through first and third quadrants. Mercury was visible above and to the right of the sun. The prominences or streamers of light reached out in about a 45° line, as much as 2½ diameters of the moon on either side.

Sketch: a rough sketch of totality

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The most beautiful sight I saw was just at the instant the sun broke over the upper edge of the right hand quadrant. A narrow band of bright brilliantly colored light seemed to be thrown in a twinkling from the moon to the earth, as if it had been a band of ribbon thrown as a lasso. Instantly the corona faded away, and the shadow retreated, leaving more and more light – just the reverse of the first half.

Upon the whole, it was a very impressive spectacle, and one that I shall never forget. It leads one to think unconsciously of the majesty of the universe and that power or natural force which can so easily bring this heavenly bodies – huge though they are – into positions like the little boy rolls his marbles.

After the eclipse a while went round to Mrs. Ingrams to visit some Charlotte girls who were there for the day. Among them were Misses Wolfe and ????. They were both pleasant. Went back to dinner and enjoyed a walk round town afterward. At about four in the afternoon we began our homeward journey. Several times we gave the Citadel yells while traveling through the town. Finally we got off and after a long ride reached Charleston at 11:00 p.m.

One or two pleasant little things tended to break the monotony of the trip.

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At Darlington there was quite a crowd at the depot. Among them Mrs. Evans, Mrs. And Miss Dantzler. Mrs. Evans had a box of beautiful geraniums for us to bring to Agnes. Of course I brought them and sent them to her. Miss ??? and Mrs. Dantzler came down purposefully to see me they claimed, and I was glad to see them. Mrs. D. does not at all look like herself. She is worrying herself to death about the death of her husband. At Florence I met some young ladies and the half hour there was pleasantly spent.

I enjoyed a chat of some length with a Mr. Adams of the Charleston College, about different things. He is a good thinker and I believe he will one day make for himself a name.

Mr. Dowling also entertained me an hour reciting Shakespeare.

Reached the Citadel 11:30 and found everything as we left it. Soon got in bed, and to sleep.

Thus ended our memorable trip to ~~Charlotte~~ Wadesboro, and it was not at all regretted I am sure by a member of the class.

Newspaper clippings follow, p. 13-18.