

They came, they saw, they left . . .

IN AWE

By Jen Kocher
with contributions from Matt
Adelman, Phillip Harnden and
Sandra Mudd

By midmorning Monday, Sandy Chang was openly congratulating himself to fellow physicians, both of whom, like Chang and their families, had made the long trek from Connecticut to Douglas, where they were currently gathered around Chang's brand-new, state-of-the-art telescope next to a burrow ditch on the edge of the parking lot at the Hampton Inn. The telescope, purchased specifically for the event, had an attached camera and flexible viewing screen and other bells and whistles that Chang excitedly pointed out to his friends.

Though not necessarily Chang's prime choice of venue, the parking lot was a compromise for his wife and children who wanted to be near their hotel. Despite the risk of a stray rattlesnake in the tall weeds surrounding the tripod base of his telescope, the site could not be more perfect, mainly because of the blue skies overhead.

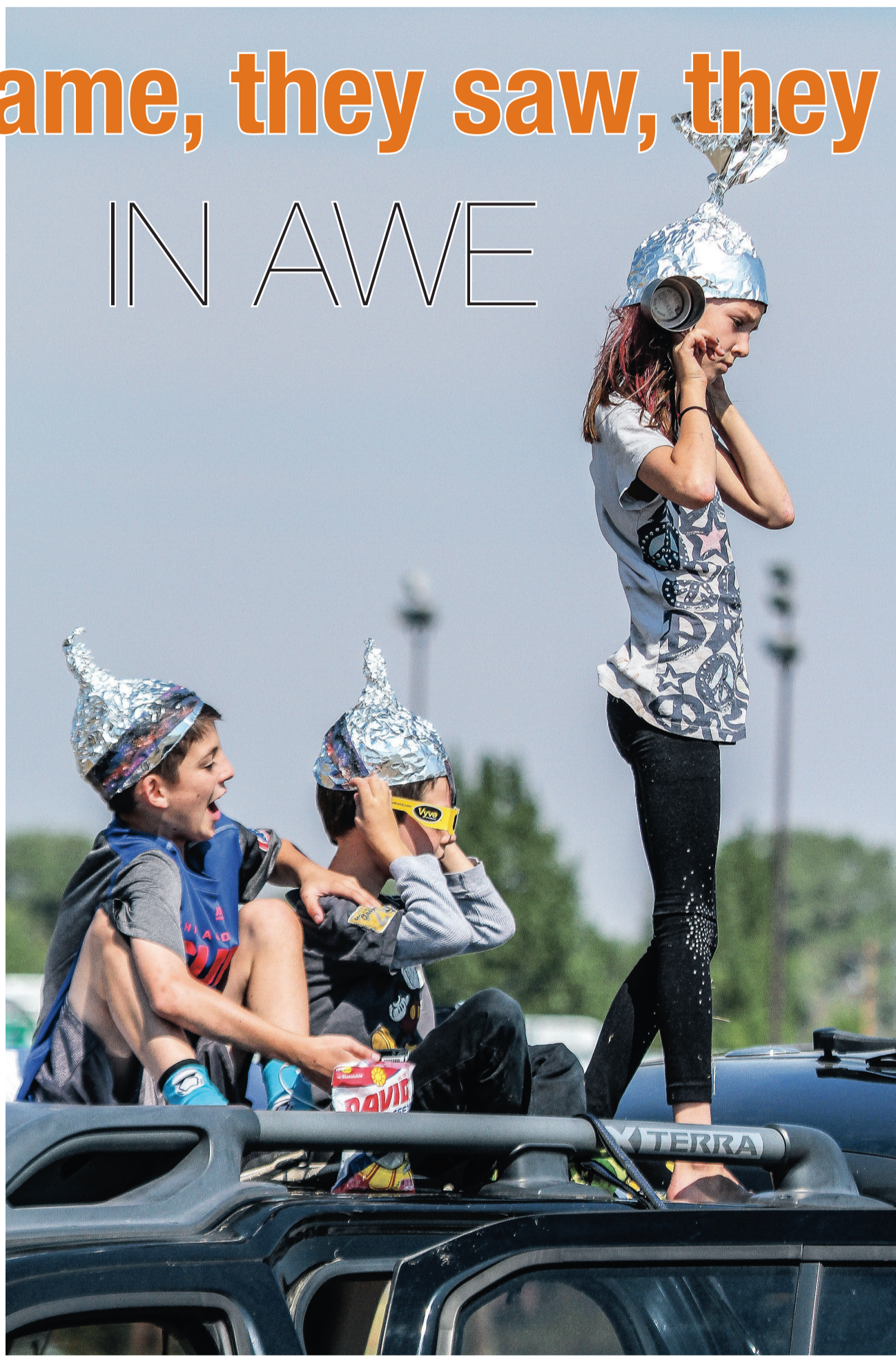
"I told you guys this was the spot," he reiterated to his friends, who nodded. Both had flown in on red-eyes and were sipping coffee as they nodded bleakly at the sky with big smiles.

For the past two years, Chang had been studying weather maps, dating back a decade, and settled on Douglas because it was predicted to have the best weather.

"I was right," he smiled beatifically. This will make his third eclipse, following Aruba in '91 and China in 2009, and already he was telling his friends to plan for the fourth in Mexico in 2024.

Across the parking lot, another group was congratulating themselves, too. Novelist Katharine Grubb and husband Marc had recently arrived in Douglas from Massachusetts after a three-day trek with their five children.

"It was quite an adventure," Grubb said wearily, as teenagers poured out



Matt Adelman photo
Amelia Rose Fisher, 9, attempts to communicate with aliens using a tin coffee cup and a metal measuring cup as her brothers, Ryan, 12, and Colton, 7, rejoice in their time atop the Thornton, Colorado, family vehicle at Bartling Park. The aluminum-foil hats add to the fun, according to their mother, Carissa Fisher. They, and thousands of others from our southern neighbor, made the trek to Douglas for the prime viewing opportunity.

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It's over. The hype, the anticipation, the planning, all over. Whether you spent the Great 2017 Eclipse in Douglas, Glenrock, Esterbrook, Fort Fetterman, Glendo or pretty much anywhere in Converse and Platte counties, you had a front-row seat to one of nature's spectacular shows on Monday.

The stories still being shared around the state – in coffee shops and convenience stores, among coworkers, on social media, you name it – carry a common thread – this once-in-a-lifetime event was awesome.

The throngs of visitors (and we mean throngs and throngs and throngs) were friendly, respectful and excited, eclipse-watchers here were heavily tilted as coming from Colorado but people came from all over the country and world; the airport was overwhelmed with 114 planes (including 14 jets), the most ever seen by far; I-25 was bumper-to-bumper coming up Sunday and early Monday morning and gridlocked the likes we have never seen here on a Monday afternoon as most visitors headed home.

We sent our staff to the far corners of the county Sunday and Monday to cover this historic moment, but we know we still missed plenty more stories and photos.



Phillip Harnden photo

David D'Amico of Boston enjoys a cigar at the Fitzhugh Ranch south of Douglas with more than 850 fellow travelers. The center line of the eclipse passed over the Fitzhughs' loading dock.



Matt Adelman photo

More than 150 members of the Griffith Observatory mill on the outfield of Bartling Park baseball field as they prepare for the eclipse.

This week's weather

	Wed.	Thur.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
High	89	86	85	87	89
Low	57	56	54	55	54

SCHOOL starts THURSDAY!

Watch for school buses and students as the new school year begins! Keep our kids safe!





Colorado Springs Astronomy Club members (photos clockwise from upper left) celebrate their arrival in Glendo with a group photo. More than 200 members made the trek to the airport staging area at Glendo, joining thousands and thousands of others there and at the state park. The Panasuk family of Douglas set up shop near Bartling Park, where they watch the eclipse and offer supplies to the thousands of gazers across the street. Kate Abalos of California hawks eclipse glasses and T-shirts at the entrance to Glendo, where vendors filled the streets from the I-25 exit throughout the small town.

Visitors to the Porter family's ranch (above) watch the eclipse Monday morning, providing the guests with fewer crowds to observe the show. The Converse County Airport became an international hub Monday when 114 planes arrived. Fourteen of them were jets, which had to remain on concrete, but the rest were spread out onto the grassy areas as staff accommodated more aircraft than any other time in history.



Bartling Park and the county property behind it (above left) are packed with campers and day-parkers. The Douglas Hockey Association rented the spaces as a fund raiser. Karli Harris of Wheatland folds flyers at the entrance to Glendo, while traffic flowing north from I-25 comes to a slow at the exit behind her Sunday evening. By early Monday morning, the exit ramp was gridlocked and extremely heavy traffic volumes were reported from Cheyenne to Casper. Eclipse glasses were a vital commodity Monday, with even Jack-A-Lope sporting a pair.



Eclipse 2017

from the front page

of the minivan. Along with seeing their first eclipse, this trip also marked the momentous occasion of their families meeting Brian and Jane Duxbury, from South Hampton, England. The couples had become acquainted nearly a decade ago on the internet after Jane found Grubb's blog.

"She was my only reader for a while," Grubb laughed, after which the Duxburys became close online friends.

Brian hatched the plan two years ago. Growing up in England in the '70s during the space race, Brian had always wanted to see a total solar eclipse. He and Jane flew to France years ago to see one, but the cloudy weather impaired the view. Brian made it his mission to see it this time. Like Chang, he made a scrupulous study of weather maps and narrowed it down to Douglas for its remote location and clear sky forecast.

"This open space is really terrific," Brian said, gesturing at the swath of blue skies in all directions. "I've been waiting for this moment for 17 years."

Other couples milled throughout the parking lot, shaking hands with strangers with less than an hour to go to totality as the sky slowly deepened to a dark blue on the edges and the air grew chilly, while the clerks at Grasslands Market hurriedly rang up bottles of water and snacks for the long lines snaking down the packed aisles so they, too, could step outside at the right moment.

LATE ARRIVALS

Last week, as the State Fair wound up its final events, residents and business owners in Douglas held their breath. And they waited, with stockpiles of groceries, ice and gas at the ready.

How many people would actually come? As more than one person began to note, it felt as if Douglas had issued an open invitation to the world, but very few had bothered to RSVP.

Predictions had been anywhere from 10,000 to up to 80,000 in Glendo. The trickle of cars thus far had many skeptical. And some business owners were worried.

Slowly, I-25 traffic began to pick up, with WYDOT counting 30,000 additional vehicles Wednesday (compared to a five-year average), 45,000 Thursday and 74,000 on Friday.

Then, a whopping 131,000 more vehicles than normal flowed Saturday. By Sunday, WYDOT cams showed bumper-to-bumper traffic on I-25 north of Denver. WYDOT above-average counts topped up to 217,000 on Sunday.

One father and daughter, who left Denver at 3 a.m. Sunday, were astounded to see a snake of red tail lights all the way to Converse County where



Ethan Brogan photo

Dozens of eclipse watchers gather atop the Rock in the Glen outside Glenrock Monday morning, awaiting the rare glimpse of totality after making the trek in the early morning hours as they staked out their claim to the prime viewing spot.

rest stops along the route took on the shape of tent camps, with cars packed tight as travelers bedded down for the short night, with cases of water stacked between cars.

Orin Junction and the adjacent rest area were at max capacity, with tents and sleeping bags dotting the grass and every available spot jammed with vehicles.

By Sunday afternoon, downtown Douglas was teeming with new faces and dozens of out-of-state license plates, most notably Colorado and California. Though some of the street parties and other planned events fell a bit short of the wild expectations, many downtown and local businesses saw hearty peaks in business.

"We did really well," Double D Liquor owner Dawn Patterson said.

Coffee and sandwich sales were way up at the Whistle-Stop Books and Mercantile downtown, which saw better-than-expected sales, including a rare Sunday opening.

"Sales were excellent," said Manager Janice Tripp, who added how nice the visitors were.

Over at Douglas Grocery, owner Bob Fenner said the bulk of purchases were drinks and snacks to day trippers, who weren't cooking their own meals.

The White Wolf Saloon and Headstrong Brewery saw steady crowds as did The Depot Restaurant and most other businesses.

The Depot owner Linda York saw banner crowds throughout the weekend. "It was crazy," she said Tuesday. "We sold out of nearly every item on the menu last night but the customers were fabulous all weekend."

Along with many positive comments about the eclipse, York said, the tourists specifically had glowing things to say about Wyoming and Douglas.

Grasslands owner Ed Pollock confirmed his sales last weekend were "over the top crazy," high praise from a self-described skeptic about the attraction of an eclipse.

GLENDO

Glendo traffic started slow Sunday morning but picked up significantly with a late afternoon surge. Travelers were backed up through town to the I-25 off-ramp, and the influx continued



Jennifer Kocher photo

Sandy Chang shows off his state-of-the-art telescope purchased for this occasion. Chang and friends traveled to Douglas from Connecticut.

all evening and night. By early Monday morning, the small town of 250 residents had swelled to tens of thousands, short of the scary prediction of 100,000 but still plenty of visitors to keep the one-time vendors lining the streets and established businesses hopping.

Numbers of campers at Glendo State Park were pretty much right on par with what they expected, according to Dillon Hoyt, assistant park superintendent. Those without reservations were being turned back at the entrance and urged to find a private camping spot near town, a scene that was repeated over and over as vehicles backed up on the access road.

As of Monday afternoon, Hoyt said they had roughly 700 campsite permits for the 568 campsites available; many campers doubled up to share space.

"It went really smoothly," Hoyt said. "They just showed up a little later in the week than we had been anticipating."

A steady cloud of dust rolled up Esterbrook Ridge Road to the west of Glendo, as many tourists headed up to the national forest and Laramie Peak. An estimated 4,000 people crossed into the forest over the weekend.

Following the eclipse Monday, the traffic coming out from the mountain and from Glendo was gridlocked for several hours as the masses tried to return home. Some estimates placed the trek back to Denver at 8-12 hours.

TWO-MINUTE WONDER

In Douglas' Bartling Park, Susan and Darrell Winn had their hands full as they pointed travelers to the make-shift tent and RV spots that Darrell and his son Brayden had mapped out for the Douglas Hockey Club fundraiser.

Susan joked that Brayden, who was turning 16 Monday, had the best gift ever from the best mom - thousands of guests and "what mom can turn the sun off for her son's birthday?" Brayden was not quite as impressed given all the work he was doing.

By Monday morning, the majority of the 300 camping spots, in addition to the hundreds of spots reserved by an astronomy group from California, were full.

Darrell had been up until 4 a.m. Sunday helping park unexpected arrivals who had fled in volume from Missouri

and Nebraska, where weather was predicted to be rainy.

Susan, who had been planning this since February, couldn't account for the wave of last minute-travelers, including the one woman from Beverly Hills, California, who showed up Sunday night looking for a camp spot.

"I took one look at her license plate and said, 'Are you sure you want to camp here?' But sure enough, she did and she's been extremely nice, even visiting (the Winns) twice since she arrived."

The Winns helped park people from the Czech Republic, China, Italy, Canada and the United Kingdom, not to mention nearly every U.S. state.

Better yet, because it was a hockey fund raiser, not only have the visitors been happy to help fund a good cause, but they've also been donating above and beyond the \$125 max fee for campsite the group was charging.

According to the Winns, the visitors were pleasant and friendly, even with crowds packed in tents and RVs amid the jumble of laughing and socializing as the minutes ticked down to totality.

Among the clusters of crowds, four people gathered around Mitch Siff's telescope sprawled out on a patch of dry ground.

Siff pulled out a notebook with precise rows of weather forecasts that he had been studying for months, slowly narrowing down the location based on percentages, which in Douglas was based on a 2 percent odds of visibility, which still had him a little nervous. When it came down to making the drive to Wyoming from his home in Colorado, it was between here and Casper, though he finally chose Douglas because "it had a better vibe" (plus his brother's name is Douglas). In the same notebook, Siff had also charted out an escape route in case traffic got too heavy.

He and his friends were happy with their selection, he noted, pointing to the nice people and "cool local stuff" like White Wolf Saloon, Headstrong Brewery and Friendz Pizza.

"You guys have got a good thing going here," he said behind his dark glasses as totality neared.

At 57, this will be his first time camping and his last time to see an eclipse, and he was excited for the occasion.

As the sky darkened and temperatures plunged, across the parking lot, someone yelled, "Here comes the moon," as the sliver of sun slid behind the moon's shadow in a fiery glow.

Glasses flew off as loud claps and cheers emitted from Matt Ventimiglia and his crew from the Griffith Observatory and cluster of scientists in yellow commemorative T-shirts. They reserved the baseball field at Bartling Park just for this moment, and through their telescopes they saw the luminous angel hair of the corona and pink flames of the inner atmosphere as Venus, Jupiter, Mars and Mercury emerged in the dark sky and the birds fell silent in the trees and the chickens headed into the coop in confusion to roost in the waning night sky.

For amateurs outside the ring, it was a mere moment of luminous glow as the sun miraculously disappeared into the dark shadow in a wink of sparkling twilight.

"I apologize if you become addicted," Ventimiglia said moments before the sky went dark. "Like me, after you see this one, you'll never want to miss another one."

THE VIEW FROM DMS

Sam Thorburn, like hundreds of others, pinpointed Douglas for its weather. He and his family had been planning to see an eclipse for the past four years. It was his first eclipse.

"I've never actually seen anything like it. It was weird but wonderful," he said. "I had no idea how dark it would get. It was incredible."

The family is from a little village

called Redding located 40 miles west of London. They have been planning to take this trip for the last four years and chose Douglas because of the best chance for clear skies.

DMS was designated as a viewing area by a Boy Scout troop. Just short of 100 people took advantage of the open fields there, but the lack of huge crowds only intensified the splendor of the event.

ORGANIZED CHAOS

By 3 p.m. Monday, traffic was bumper to bumper leaving Douglas as travelers headed home.

Apart from these delays, what might have been a disastrous influx of tourists went off smoothly, according to spokesperson Tia Troy from the Wyoming Office of Tourism.

"It's safe to say that Wyoming has never experienced an event of this magnitude and this eclipse has been the biggest one-day event that the state has ever seen," Troy said. "From the Wyoming Office of Tourism's perspective, we are thrilled with the event and are delighted that so many travelers chose to come to Wyoming for this celestial phenomenon. The eclipse put a wonderful spotlight on Wyoming and introduced our destination to a national and international audience, and we could not be happier with how all the festivals, events and communities embraced this event and welcomed travelers to Wyoming."

Chamber of Commerce Director Helga Bull was still brimming from excitement from the past week's activity. In total, from Aug. 14 until Monday, the chamber counted 1,275 people at the visitor center; 1,026 of whom were from elsewhere: Las Vegas, Hawaii, California, Germany, Poland, Australia, Holland, UK, Canada and beyond.

And though the numbers weren't the hundreds of thousands rumored, Bull couldn't say enough about the ways in which law enforcement and the emergency responders, businesses and individuals came together to make the event a success.

"Our whole town just came alive," Bull said, breathlessly, admitting despite her exhaustion she is still on a high.

"This is normally as many tourists as we see in a month, not a week," Bull said, noting that the busiest days were Sunday and Monday when they "were positively swamped."

"It was so amazing to see so many people out enjoying our town and everybody was so friendly and nice and had nothing but good things to say about our community," she said. "I've been here 20 years, and I've never seen so many people out enjoying our town and just having a good time, particularly so many foreigners."

Bull reiterated how nice it was to see the camaraderie among so many with all the negativity in the world, and the fact that it was centered around a celestial once-in-a-lifetime event, made it all the more compelling.

Law enforcement, too, was happy. "Things went really well. We were busy. Constant," Douglas Police Chief Ron Casalenda said. "The assistance we received from the Cheyenne Police Department was more than helpful. Things went off without any major hitches, and that's what we planned for so I won't complain."

Converse County Sheriff Clint Becker reiterated that sentiment.

"It went very well. 99.9 percent of the people we had contact with were pretty easy to get along with and cordial," Becker said. "We weren't really sure how things would go but it went very well."

The biggest issue CCSO ran into was people parking on private property.

"Even then, everybody we talked to and asked to move moved," he said. "The citizens of Douglas were very cordial, as well. They allowed people to stay on their property the morning of the eclipse," adding that everyone was respectful, "making things easier for us. The traffic went well, as well."

"I'm really proud of the sheriff's office and everybody who works here. They did a great job."

On their way out, Becker added, everybody (visitors and locals) were happy. Citizens were nice and visitors were impressed with the hospitality of the locals.



Jennifer Kocher photo

Matt Ventimiglia of the Griffith Observatory in California and his group rent out a spot in Bartling Park for the rare viewing.



Matt Adelman photo

Forest Service rep John Dickson directs Sunday evening tourists to potential camping spots after the campsites were full and overflowing.



Jennifer Kocher photo

Katharine and Mark Grubb of Massachusetts (from left) meet face-to-face with longtime friends Brian and Jane Duxbury from England, who they met on the internet years ago.



Jennifer Kocher photo

A rambunctious group from Greeley, Colorado, mark the once-in-a-lifetime occasion with shots of whiskey on their homemade "shot ski," which they brought along specifically for the big event.