

## Recent eclipses in the Middle East

by Ed Woerner

New Year's Eve revelers saw a partial eclipse of the moon about 30 minutes before 2010 began. Only about 10 percent of the moon entered the Earth's umbra, but the moon's southern limb was in shadow.

We observed this event from our home in Salalah, in Oman. Here, at 17° North latitude, the winter constellations were overhead, and the moon itself was slightly north of the zenith in Gemini. Mars was lower towards the east and Saturn had not yet risen. To the South, the second brightest star in the night sky, Canopus, was above the horizon. Sirius and Canopus have almost the same right ascension and they point towards the South Celestial Pole – below the horizon from where we are.



Half a month later, the astronomical alignments that produced the lunar eclipse gave us a solar eclipse. From our location the moon covered about half of the sun's disk. I set up my six-inch f/6 Newtonian reflector in front of our place around 9:30 a.m., Friday, January 15. Maximum eclipse occurred shortly after 11 a.m. The eclipse had just started. There was also a nice group of sunspots on the sun's surface.

Several neighbors came around to see what was going on. I always enjoy showing people the sky through a telescope. Many people have never looked through a scope before, and they are amazed by what they see. I give a one or two sentence explanation to help them understand what an eclipse really is. Several tried to take pictures through the eyepiece with their mobile phones, and some of them obtained images that weren't too bad.

Friday is a weekend day in Oman. Many people go to the mosque at noon on Friday. So that's when I put the telescope away.

The solar eclipse was annular from parts of North Africa, India, and China. Two days later day we went to a favorite Indian restaurant for lunch. There people were reading the Indian newspapers from their home country. In particular, one paper, written in Tamil, had pages of pictures and articles about the spectacular eclipse that they saw firsthand. I don't even know the Tamil alphabet, but the ideas behind the articles and pictures were clear, and it was fun to know that we had participated in this same event in our own way.

The next eclipse will be in late June. It will be a partial lunar eclipse. On December 21 there will be a total lunar eclipse. Both of these will be visible from Northeast Kansas. Hopefully they will be well observed by NEKAAL members.