The Eclipse of 1780: A Revisit

E M Standish (JPL/Caltech)

The 1780 expedition to Penobscot Bay in order to observe the solar eclipse has been of interest, at least partly because of the expedition's failure to see totality. There have been a number of theories about the reason for such a blunder, including the leader's mis-calculation of the eclipse track, the error of Mayer's Tables from which such calculations were made, and from a version of a map which gave the wrong latitude for the area in question. The leader did, however, make a series of seemingly accurate observations of the width of the visible crescent of the sun as it decreased during the approach of the eclipse and during the recession afterward. Even though the leader seems to have done a number of less-than-prudent things during the expedition and later in life, it seems as though he should not be blamed for the expedition's failure.

Abstract submitted for AAS [DDA] meeting

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