Astronomical Society of Victoria Inc

AIN0022118S

GPO Box 1059J
MELBOURNE
Victoria 3001

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MEDIA RELEASE

January 2018

STARGAZERS INVITE PUBLIC TO VIEW TRIPLE WHAMMY ECLIPSE OF MOON

Melbourne's astronomers are gearing up for an exciting time on Wednesday 31 January when they will let the public view a total eclipse of the Moon with telescopes from Princes Bridge, over the Yarra River in central Melbourne, along with a 'Super Moon' and a 'Blue Moon' all on the one night!

A lunar eclipse occurs when the Moon enters the shadow of the Earth cast by the Sun. The eclipse will be most obvious from 10:48pm 31Jan to 2:11am 1 Feb.

"This will be an exciting time for all those people who have never seen a total eclipse of the Moon," said Perry Vlahos, President of the Astronomical Society of Victoria. "We hope the general public will come along to Princes Bridge to have a look at the eclipse at its very best through large portable telescopes."

The Astronomical Society of Victoria (ASV) will arrange for number of telescopes to be over the river on Princes Bridge, to let the public to view the eclipse.

Mr. Vlahos said the eclipse will actually start earlier in the north eastern sky just before 10.00pm but little difference will be seen until about 11:00pm when the Moon begins to move into the full shadow of the Earth. At this time, the bottom right edge of the Moon's disk will begin to darken. The Moon will become fully eclipsed from 11:51pm till 1:07am the next morning. The Moon will then move out from the full shadow of the Earth and it will begin to brighten again.

"This will be the easiest lunar eclipse to see for many years as it occurs during summer time when it's warm and not in the wee hours of the morning," Mr Vlahos said. "It's not at too late a time and families can stay up to watch it together."

Mr Vlahos said the Moon was not expected to disappear completely even during the period of full eclipse. Even though the Moon will be in full shadow for 90 minutes,

some sunlight is bent by the Earth's atmosphere and will dimly light up the Moon's surface.

"At full eclipse, the Moon will be a reddish or coppery colour," Mr Vlahos said. "If there is a lot of dust and smoke in the Earth's atmosphere, the eclipse will be dark. If there is less dust and smoke, the Moon will appear brighter."

Particles of dust and smoke in the atmosphere filter out some of the green, blue and violet rays in sunlight letting the yellow, orange and red rays through so things appear redder. A similar effect commonly occurs in summer during bushfire times. The setting Sun appears red because the light we see is filtered through a thick layer of smoky atmosphere.

But the eclipsed Moon will not be the only notable event that evening. The moon will also be at 'perigee' – a word astronomers use to describe the moon's closest approach to the earth – non astronomers call it a 'supermoon'. During mid eclipse the moon will be about 356,000 kilometres from us.

"Finally, there's also a third point of interest," Mr Vlahos said. "It will also be the occasion of a 'Blue Moon' meaning the second full moon in the same calendar month."

There is no charge to look through the telescopes, however, members of the public can make donations to the ASV if they wish. The astronomical Society of Victoria receives no government funding and is staffed by volunteers.

For further information contact:

Perry Vlahos
President & Media Liaison
Astronomical Society of
Victoria Inc
Mob: 0412 365 515
E-mail: perry@asv.org.au

Visit the ASV Web Site at www.asv.org.au