

**// The Lawn that Disappeared into the Ocean**  
**by Geoff Kanick**

The most amazing piece of magic I saw was on a lawn on the Oregon Coast. And I know how, in fact everyone knows exactly how, it works...but nothing about knowing the method robs any of the beauty.

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There is this place called Otter Crest on the Oregon Coast.  
This is an incredibly special place to me, and one of my absolute favorite places in the world.  
Every August my family meets at Otter Crest.  
Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, all meet for two weeks.  
Even as families moved, married, made new families, spread across the country.  
We would always return to Otter Crest in August.

There is an inn, where my family stays. With Units, rooms that have kitchens and balconies, that look out to the ocean.

Looking out from the balcony is the Pacific Ocean. A couple hundred yards from shore, large rocks stick out of the ocean. Most notable is Gull Rock, my family calls it Otter Rock, perhaps a mistake that had stuck many many years ago. If you keep looking, you can see the occasionally spout from a grey whale, lots of gulls, and sometimes pelicans. And you will hear the the waves roll over the rocks, accented by barks from sea lions.

Following the coast to the right is Cape Foul Weather. A tall cliff, which would make for a great lookout. And the name is apt, as there are often clouds hovering just off the coast, drawn in by the cold ocean water. Mornings are covered in clouds and fog, which hide the base of Cape Foul Weather, and make Otter Rock disappear entirely. As kids and among the family, the clouds hiding Otter Rock prompted the mystery, "Who stole Otter Rock?" Only to return with the sun in the afternoon.

Moving across the coast to the left, you cross the beach and end at The Devils Punchbowl. This was once a large cave before the roof collapsed and left a perfect circle of 40ft walls. And the Devil's Punchbowl was created. When high tide comes, the bowl fills with 10ft or more of ocean. When the tide is low, you can go to the edge of the beach, climb a few rocks, and enter through an archway on the side.

Looking down off the balcony, there is an open lawn where we would kick soccer balls, play tag, run around, and sometimes stargaze at night.

The lawn ends at the edge of a cliff that looks out over the ocean.

If it's clear, the sun sets right into the water.

The cliff stretches down 50 feet, maybe 80 feet to the fallen rock and ocean waves.

Two years ago, on a Monday in August, on this very lawn, I saw the sun disappear from 10:15am-10:16am. A total solar eclipse.

This exact spot on the Oregon Coast, where my family has visited since my mom was little, was in the path of totality. Not one town over, it was on this lawn. For a solar eclipse, "path of totality" means you can witness the total eclipse, without any special glasses, you can look directly at it with your naked eyes. This lawn was the first place the shadow of the moon, the eclipse touched land, before moving across the US.

The moon is the perfect distance between the sun and the earth to create this eclipse, but this will not always be the case. Every year the moon is shifting away from the earth, its orbit is loosening. It is moving away at a rate of 1.48in per year. Eventually it will not be close enough to cast a distinct shadow on the earth and eclipses will go mostly unnoticed.

However, at this point in time, the distance is perfect, and when it covers the front of the sun there is this glowing, shifting, halo of light called the corona. It is real space stuff, part localized northern lights, part cream poured in coffee, part embers floating off campfires or fireflies in swarms...far in the distance.

And the center of this eclipse is black.

Darkness

Dark black

The blackest black I have ever seen

A hole into nothingness.

Framed by distant light.

It lasted for 1 minute 50 seconds.

And people all around were silent and yelling and cheering, and crying.

And the horizon was a sunset, with the sun in the middle of the sky.

And stars appeared in the sky...in the daytime there were stars.

And when the light returned, it was like an explosion out the right side of the moon.

And it was blinding.

And I was crying.

And the stars disappeared again.

And the light came back.

Maybe what felt powerful, was the alignment. I was exactly in the right place at the right time. I was directly in line...cosmically in line...beyond the earth; directly in line with the sun, the moon, and this spot on earth. This lawn. Where my family has come since my mom was little.

And this lawn is also disappearing.  
Every year pieces of this cliff erode away.  
Break off, drop into the ocean, and are pulled away.  
And one year, I was maybe 11 years old, we arrived and maybe 15 feet of lawn had gone.  
Fallen into the ocean.  
They had to put up a new fence.  
They even included signs that read: Keep Back.  
Since then, that fence has fallen into the ocean and a new fence is up.  
There is a sign on this one that reads: Do Not Climb.

And I know the cliff will not stop eroding away.  
The waves will continue to pull little pieces,  
Sometimes big pieces, into the ocean.

There used to be much more lawn than I can remember.  
When my mom was little standing on that same grass, there used to be more.  
And after I am gone - the ocean will keep eroding away at the cliff.  
At the whole lawn, the inn, the units.

I feel lucky to be here at this time,  
Where there is the right amount of grass and cliff and ocean.

And I feel lucky to be in this room, with this group, on this night, at this time  
To tell you

I will never forget when  
I saw the sun disappear on a lawn that is disappearing into the ocean.