

The Park Forest Illinois Meteorites of March 27, 2003



[Channel 7 Chicago Video of Meteorite Damage](#)

[Channel 7 Chicago Video of the Fireball](#)

From Channel 7 Chicago

Flash in the sky caught on tape

Meteorites land in Park Forest



By [Ben Bradley](#)

March 27, 2003 (Park Forest) — A meteor shower lit up the skies last night, and parts of the meteor damaged several homes in the southwest suburbs.

A chunk of the space rock fell through the roof of Noe Garza's Park Forest house, swiped a window, and rolled across the floor before breaking a mirrored closet door.

One of the meteorites recovered by police in Park Forest.

"I thought somebody was breaking in. It was a big bang. I can't really describe it. I mean it was too quick to think," said Noe Garza, house hit by meteorite.

Garza and his family didn't know what was happening until they turned on a light. That's when 13-year-old Robert realized a five pound meteor fell just a few feet from where he was sleeping.

"As soon as I heard the big noises, I just curled up in a little ball and stayed there had until it was all over, and then I yelled for my dad," said Robert.

A news photographer shooting a fire scene on the Southwest Side caught the flash of bright light before midnight that experts say were meteor fragments streaking across the night sky. People as far away as Ohio reported seeing the light. Reports of small meteorites actually making their way to the ground have come in from Park Forest and Olympia Fields.

"Lit up the whole room. Sounded like a plane crashed or lightning going off. It was bad," said Chris Kasco, house hit by meteorite.

A Harper College astronomy professor is collecting meteor fragments that punctured the roof of the Park Forest Fire Department. He's like a kid in a candy store.

From the Chicago Tribune

Meteor blazes path to Park Forest

By Joseph Sjostrom and Nancy Ryan

Tribune staff reporters

Published March 27, 2003, 1:20 PM CST

Chunks of rocks believed to be the remains of a meteor that lit up the Midwestern sky as it exploded rained down across the southern suburbs early this morning, damaging homes and other buildings but injuring no one.

The meteor streaked across the sky about midnight before apparently blowing up with a bright flash and a thundering boom. About 100 fragments ranging in size from small stones to softball-size chunks were recovered from yards, driveways, streets and even the insides of houses in Park Forest, Matteson and Steger.

One piece reportedly struck a Park Forest fire station. Another grayish, five-pound rock landed in the second-floor bedroom of Noe and Paulette Garza, of the 400 block of Indiana Avenue in Park Forest.

"I could have gotten hit in the head by that thing," Garza, a 48-year-old steelworker, said as he surveyed the damage caused when the rock crashed into his home about 12:30 a.m.

The rock punched a hole through the roof and ceiling, shredded a set of venetian blinds, ricocheted off a metal window sill, shot about 15 feet across the bedroom and shattered a floor-to-ceiling mirror before coming to rest on the floor.

Garza said he was in bed when heard his dog barking and what sounded like thunder. He got out of bed and was downstairs when the meteor hit.

This morning, he called his boss and told him he wasn't coming into work today. "I told him what happened, and he said, 'Okay, but don't use that excuse again.'"

The fall could be a boon for local scientists. Most meteors, also called "shooting stars," burn up in the atmosphere. The few that survive all the way to the ground are called meteorites. For one to cause damage is almost unheard of.

Park Forest police said the National Weather Service was notified, and officials there confirmed a meteor shower had taken place over the Midwest and the sky had brightened just before midnight.

Residents of Illinois, Indiana, Ohio and Wisconsin reported seeing the flash of bright blue light as the meteor streaked overhead. Some people expressed fears the apparition might have something to do with the war in Iraq.

Tia McConathy, a next-door neighbor of the Garzas, said she was standing by a window of her home and was startled by an intense light, brighter than lightning and lasting much longer.

"I thought, 'Is it God? Is it an attack? Are we going to die?' The light freaked me out. It felt really funny, like it went through me," she said.

Several witnesses called the Tribune, including Lauren Ellis, 18, of southwest suburban Plainfield.

"About five of us were in the car, and we were driving down the street in Plainfield near our house around midnight, and the sky just lit up. We were in shock. We pulled over because we thought it was a bomb," Ellis said.

"With all that's going on in Iraq, we were wondering what it was," she said. "We all heard a sound about two minutes after. It was like a sonic boom."

Chris Zeilenga, 42, of Beecher, said he and his wife Pauline were "watching Iraqi stuff on TV when a couple minutes after midnight, the entire sky lit up. It was like daylight, and it lasted maybe two to three seconds. We said, 'What the heck was that?'

"A minute to 2 1/2 minutes later, we heard a trembling sound, like a train," Zeilenga said. "The rumbling lasted about a minute, and then we heard pieces hitting the house. The whole thing was strange. I've never seen anything like it."

Jim Kaplan, of the Romeoville office of the National Weather Service, told the Associated Press he was outside checking a rain gauge when he saw a flash of light in the sky.

"First, it got very bright and the sky lit up," Kaplan said. "You could see something streaking across the sky and breaking up into glowing chunks as it went from west to east."

Lauren Bishop, 19, a freshman at Loyola University on Chicago's North Side, was in her dorm room in the Rogers Park neighborhood around midnight when she and her roommate saw the flash of light.

"We were in our dorm facing north when something lit up the entire sky. I didn't hear any noise," Bishop said. "Then we talked to a friend in Indiana who saw the same exact thing at the same time."

"This is the biggest thing to hit Illinois in a heck of a long time, to be funny about it," said Paul Sipiera, geology professor. "It's been more than 60 years since Illinois has been hit by meteorites that were witnessed as they fell to the ground."

The old story is we're getting hit every day by hundreds and hundreds of tons of meteorite, but this is only the ninth meteorite ever recovered from Illinois.

The experts say this meteor likely originated in the Asteroid Belt, nearly 300 million miles away. By the way, the man who had the meteorite smash into his house was in good spirits. He called his boss at work to say he wouldn't be coming in and told him why. His boss said, well, never heard that excuse before.

Last Updated: Mar 30, 2003

From NBC5.com Chicago

Meteorite Debris 'Pennies From Heaven' For Some

Park Forest Woman Gets Debt Relief From Falling Rock

CHICAGO -- You've heard of pennies from heaven? Now, in south suburban Park Forest, it was more like winning the space lottery, as a once-in-a-lifetime experience turned into big bucks for a suburban homeowner.

NBC5's Natalie Martinez met with the woman who's counting her lucky stars after last week's meteor shower.

She said her prayers have been answered with a gift that literally fell from the sky, Martinez said.

"It's just awesome," Colby Navarro (pictured, right) said. "(It's) an awesome blessing. God gave it to me and others got little pieces, too."

Navarro was on the computer at her home Wednesday night when a softball-size meteorite fell right through her roof to the floor, about two feet away from her. She thought it was lighting, or even a drive-by shooting. But it turned out to be a meteor shower, something that happens barely three times a year across the globe.

"Plaster blew all over me and all over the upstairs. Then I found the rock," Navarro told NBC5. She said it was warm to the touch and smelled like the sulfur from fireworks.

"A meteorite came through my house," she said. Before she knew what had hit her (house), offers for thousands of dollars began to pour in from collectors far and wide.

An Arizona man won the bidding battle with an offer of \$12,000 for the four and ½-billion-year-old hunk of rock



(pictured, right)

"When I went to bed Friday night, I thought, 'Somebody is coming to my house tomorrow (to give me) \$12,000 for a rock.' Wow," she said. "This is amazing."

This extraterrestrial chunk also thrills astronomers at the Adler Planetarium.

"From a scientific viewpoint, these things are priceless," said Mark Hammergren (pictured, left), an Adler astronomer. "They give us information about the formation of the earth and the solar system."

Hammergren explained that meteorites are chunks of asteroids and asteroids are the building blocks of planets.

Meteorites as small as Navarro's or larger move about 20 miles per second, Martinez said. As they move through the atmosphere they lose size and speed, Martinez said. Even small pieces are prized by collectors.

Navarro kept one piece for her neighbor and said she'll use her money to get out of debt. Ten percent goes to her church, "the house where she believes this gift originally came from," Martinez said.

From NBC5.com Chicago

Meteor Shower Scary, Stunning & 'Kind Of Exciting'

Scientists Call For All Meteor Fragments

CHICAGO -- A flash in the sky and the rumbling sounds of a faraway explosion alerted hundreds of south suburban

residents Wednesday night.

Reporting those details to authorities, callers flooded police departments, fire departments and various television stations overnight. NBC5's Kim Vatis, reporting from Park Forest, said it turned out to be a meteor shower "that forced a shower of panic calls" to authorities all over the Midwest.

In Park Forest, some people who were in their living rooms watching war coverage, thought the United States was under attack with the amazing light show produced by the meteors. It started with a blast of light and a thunderous sound, witnesses told Vatis. Then, chunks of meteorites dropped from the sky. One of the larger segments fell through the roof of a family home and into the bedroom where a young boy was sleeping. "Then all the sudden a big rock came down, right through that hole there," Noe Garza said, pointing to the hole through which one could see the branches of a nearby tree. "It happened too quick. I didn't know what to think and now I'm thinking, afterwards, you know? Wow."

Vatis said that the force of the meteor not only ripped through the roof and ceiling of the house, but it shattered the window, ricocheted off the windowsill and struck the mirrored closet door on the other side of the room.

"I don't think anyone's going to believe me," said the man's son, explaining why he was bringing a small bag of fragments to school with him.

Roberta Garza laughed as she showed Vatis where a meteor had gone through the plate glass of her home.

"It's kind of exciting, I guess," she said.

"Where's my insurance agent," quipped her husband nearby.

Numerous homes and cars in Park Forest were slightly damaged, Vatis said. The light show itself was overwhelming, witnesses said, and in this time of war, particularly frightening.

"I saw an unusually bright flash of light that seemed to be coming from the west. It lasted about 10 seconds and then, all the sudden, it was like instant daylight," said Officer Bob Boyle of the Park Forest police.

"At first I thought it was gunfire and then it sounded like thunder, and then it rattled everything," another officer added. Vatis said local scientists are now in a frenzy, saying that the meteorites predate earth and create a celestial light show as they penetrate the earth's atmosphere.

The energy locked up in the object itself hitting the atmosphere ... releases it in the form of heat. It's an explosion of light," explained Paul Sipiera, a meteorite researcher.

Scientists are urging people to turn over all fragments of the meteors they find, as study of them could help explain the origin of the solar system.

This is the ninth meteor shower recorded in Illinois, Vatis said, the first one being recorded in 1928.

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"With all that's going on in Iraq, we were wondering what it was," she said. "We all heard a sound about two minutes after. It was like a sonic boom."

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"We were in our dorm facing north when something lit up the entire sky. I didn't hear any noise," Bishop said. "Then we talked to a friend in Indiana who saw the same exact thing at the same time."

From the Chicago Tribune

Meteorites make for a rocky night Chunks break, enter homes in south suburbs

By Joseph Sjostrom and Deborah Horan
Tribune staff reporters
Published March 28, 2003

A hail of meteorites pelted Illinois for the first time in more than 60 years late Wednesday, poking holes in rooftops and bouncing around like pinballs inside homes in the Chicago area.

One fragment of what had originally been a single, large meteorite narrowly missed a Park Forest man, crashing into the spot in his bedroom where he had been standing only minutes before.

The meteor flashed across the sky as it burst apart at about 11:50 p.m., according to the National Weather Service, and was seen by people from Wisconsin to Ohio. Some thought the brilliant light might have been an attack.

"The sky just lit up," said Lauren Ellis of Plainfield, who was traveling in a car when the meteor shot across the sky. "We were in shock. We pulled over because we thought it was a bomb."

There were no injuries reported in Wednesday's meteorite shower, which rained at least two dozen chunks of material across the Chicago area. Police said meteorites crashed through the roofs of two homes in Matteson and Olympia Fields and hit three intersections. In Steger, a man found rocks in his driveway. And several people brought rocks that appeared to be meteorite chunks to the Park Forest police station.

"They might be out there for weeks picking these pieces up," said Dan Joyce, a scientist at the Cernan Earth and Space Center at Triton College in River Grove.

Scientists said they had not yet mapped out the trajectory of the meteorite, which exploded into small chunks as it entered the Earth's atmosphere.

A 5-pound fragment fell through the roof of Noe and Paulette Garza's house in the 400 block of Indiana Avenue in Park Forest and bounced about the room. It punched a softball-size hole in the roof and then crashed through the ceiling and shredded a set of venetian blinds. It ricocheted off a metal window sill, shot about 15 feet across the bedroom and shattered a floor-to-ceiling mirror before coming to rest on the floor.

Garza had been standing at the windowsill only minutes before the meteorite hit.

"I could have gotten hit in the head by that thing," said Noe Garza, 48, a steelworker.

A few hours later he called his supervisor to report that he couldn't come to work Thursday. "I told him what happened, and he laughed and said, 'OK, but don't use that excuse again.'"

Scientists say that every day about 50 tons of material from space falls on the Earth, most of it only the size of a grain of sand.

1938 incidents

The last time space debris large enough to be seen and recovered fell on Illinois was in 1938, when meteorites hit Benld and Bloomington in separate incidents. In Benld, a 3-pound meteorite crashed through the roof of a garage and ripped a hole in a car seat. The seat and meteorite are on display in Chicago's Field Museum.

A few meteorites have been much larger. A meteorite 100 meters in diameter landed near Flagstaff, Ariz., about 50,000 years ago and left a crater 1-mile wide. Scientists believe that a huge meteorite--perhaps 10 kilometers in diameter--caused dinosaurs to become extinct when it slammed into the Earth some 65 million years ago.

Mark Hammergren of Chicago's Adler Planetarium said the rocks that landed late Wednesday were probably formed 4 billion years ago when the sun and planets became differentiated and settled into their orbits. One mass of space debris failed to coalesce into a planet and instead formed the asteroid belt, a band of rocks that circles the sun in an orbit between Mars and Jupiter.

Over the eons, asteroids bump into each other, sending chips and chunks out of orbit. Some of them, Hammergren said, end up on a collision course with Earth.

The Adler's Larry Ciupik guessed that the original meteor may have weighed a few hundred pounds and was traveling 25,000 m.p.h. when it hit the Earth's atmosphere. Friction with the atmosphere produced heat so intense that the air around the meteor glowed, producing the bright light seen from Wisconsin to Ohio.

The pressure of air on the meteor caused it to break apart, he said, with some of the little chunks disintegrating into brilliant streams of light and a few larger ones making it all the way to the Garzas' bedroom and Brenda and Phillip Jones' basement in Olympia Fields.

"Amazing, amazing," said Ciupik, one of four Adler astronomers who stood in the Joneses' kitchen. They were scrutinizing the cantaloupe-size rock that had crashed through the Joneses' roof, penetrated the kitchen floor and hit the basement floor, where it bounced onto a table and came to rest on a pile of clothes.

"It had to be going hundreds of miles an hour to go through all those layers of roofing and floor," Ciupik said of the black and gray rock.

Scientists said they were eager to get their hands on the chunks of debris to study qualities of the meteorites--including radioactivity--that could dissipate with time.

"We can really learn a lot from meteorites about when the solar system was forming," said Meenakshi Wadhwa, director of meteorites at the Field Museum. "They are as old as the sun."

Deep questions

Several members of the McConathy family, who live next door to the Garzas Park Forest, were awake when the meteor illuminated the neighborhood with a bluish light as bright as daylight.

Shirley McConathy wondered whether an enemy was attacking from the sky. Relative Tia McConathy pondered deeper questions.

"I thought, 'Is this God? Are we going to die?'" The light is what really freaked me out," she said.

An Allstate Insurance Co. adjuster visited the Joneses' home Thursday and told them the damage to their house was covered. He said it was his first case of meteorite damage in 33 years in the insurance

From the Chicago Sun Times

Meteorites crash-land in suburbs

March 28, 2003

BY KATE N. GROSSMAN STAFF REPORTER

The three giddy meteorite buffs descended on Park Forest early Thursday morning, eager to poke and prod 10 pieces of rare gray and black rock that littered the south suburban community Wednesday night during a meteorite shower.

"This is like winning the lottery, just without the money," said an elated Paul Sipiera, a meteorite collector and educator, as he examined the stones collected at the Park Forest police station.

This was truly a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Meteorite showers with this many pieces occur in populated areas roughly every five to 20 years, two scientists said, with the last known fall in Illinois in 1938, according to the Field Museum. Showers can occur daily, but the stones usually land in an ocean or forest.

The Park Forest shower, as it will likely be dubbed by scientists, is also unique because of the number and size of the stones, with two as large as 16-inch softballs and weighing about eight pounds.

Researchers go gaga over these showers because meteorites--as meteors are called when they land on Earth--help explain how the solar system formed 4.5 billion years ago. Meteorites are as old as the solar system.

Most rocks on Earth are 100 million years old or younger.

By studying the fragments, scientists can learn about the chemical composition of the solar system, its age and the chemical processes that occurred as the solar system cooled from gas to solid planets.

"It's a window to our past," said Steve Simon, a University of Chicago professor who lives in Park Forest and was one of the three enthusiasts at the police station early Thursday.

Wednesday's midnight shower scattered stones across Park Forest, with about 12 reported to police by day's end. At least two other communities, Olympia Fields and Matteson, also reported finding one stone each. Scientists speculate stones could also be found across the Midwest.

The fireball that preceded the shower--when the meteor entered the atmosphere and began breaking up--was seen across the upper Midwest. Simon saw the sky light up about 11:50 p.m. Wednesday.

Before entering the atmosphere, the meteor was probably the size of a minivan and traveling up to 10 miles per second, said Meenakshi Wadhwa of the Field Museum.

When the meteorite hit homes, the fire station and streets in Park Forest, it was falling at about 120 mph.

A piece of it slammed through the roof of Noe Garza's house into his bedroom, smashing a window and windowsill and ricocheting across the room to a mirror, which it shattered. Noe's 13-year-old son was sleeping only a few feet

from where the meteorite hit.

In Olympia Fields, police say, another large stone crashed through the roof of a home and ended up in the basement. There were no injuries in either community.

Despite the damage they cause, these stones can be quite valuable. Dealers are willing to pay between \$1 and \$10 a gram for them, one collector said.