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Meteor produces light show in Australia

December 5, 2005

SYDNEY, Australia --A small meteor produced a spectacular light show in the night sky over western Australia, making a thundering noise as it burned up entering the atmosphere, astronomers and witnesses said.

The meteor, which astronomers said was probably sized somewhere between a basketball and half a small car, lit up the sky for hundreds of miles over the southwestern corner of Australia about 9 p.m. on Saturday.

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"We ... turned around and there was this spectacular, absolutely amazing thing flying across the sky," said witness Karun Cowper of Halls Head, about 47 miles south of the Western Australia state capital of Perth.

"It was that big, it was that startling that you were expecting it to hit the ground and for it to be some sort of cataclysmic thing, you know," he told the Channel 7 television network. "To me it was scary, almost."

Rick Tonello, of the Perth Observatory, said the meteor was a chunk of rock that was caught in the earth's gravitational pull, and burned up as it entered the atmosphere.

The thundering noise that witnesses described as accompanying the meteor was a sonic boom as it broke the sounds barrier, astronomers said.

"All of a sudden the sky lit up, it was as bright as daylight it was quite unbelievable," witness Helen Bignell told the Australian Broadcasting Corp.

"I looked up overhead and there was something silver, sort of looked like a silver ball with a trailing reddish green sort of tail almost like fireworks," he said. ■

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