



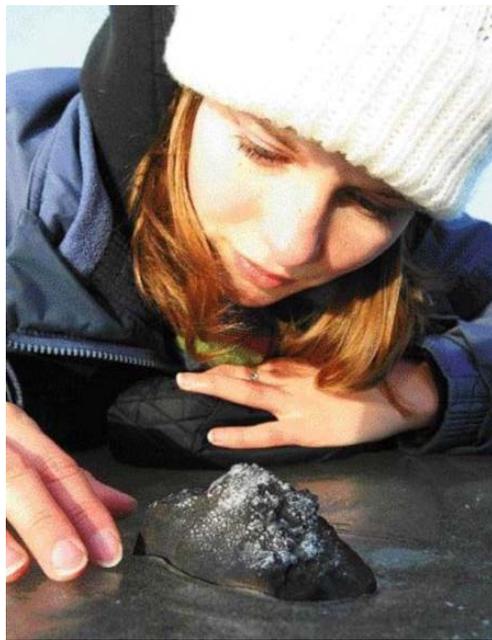
Grad student wins space race

LONE ROCK, SASK. - At first glance, the biggest discovery of Ellen Milley's life looked anything but exciting.

BY THE EDMONTON JOURNAL NOVEMBER 29, 2008 BE THE FIRST TO POST A COMMENT

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LONE ROCK, SASK. - At first glance, the biggest discovery of Ellen Milley's life looked anything but exciting.

Small, blackish lumps on a frozen pond are the kind of sight easily dismissed while driving along rural roads in Saskatchewan.

Yet the University of Calgary master's student was immediately intrigued, knowing these lumps were in the area where a meteor was thought to have exploded last week.

Stopping the car, she and her travel partner -- U of C meteorite expert Alan Hildebrand-- gingerly stepped on the ice for a closer look.

The first lump they investigated turned out to be a leaf. The second was a stone, but of inconclusive origin.

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But there was no doubt about the third. Hildebrand recognized it instantly as a cosmic treasure -- a 250-gram piece of frozen space rock.

"He looked at me and said, 'Yes, this is definitely a meteorite,'" said Milley, who found the fragment about 3:50 p.m. Thursday in a picturesque valley known as Buzzard Coulee. "Obviously, it's really exciting. It's a unique opportunity, because not many meteorites have been recovered in Canada." The sloping property a few kilometres from the Alberta border is part of a cattle ranch owned by Ian Mitchell.

Mitchell was at his son's hockey practice Nov. 20 and didn't see the fireball in the night sky, but heard news that it may have met its end somewhere above his land.

He planned to go out looking for rocks on the weekend, although it was more a chance to spend time with his son and grandson rather than a serious search, he said.

Then, on Thursday night, he learned fragments had already been found on his property when he read a note Hildebrand left on his car windshield.

"I didn't realize the odds of finding something were going to be as good as they probably are now," said Mitchell, wearing a Saskatchewan Roughriders ballcap, as he stood near the discovery site.

"I though maybe I'd find something when I was out riding a horse or fixing a fence over the next two or three years." Looking out over his pond, he said: "We call this Fish Pond, because in the summer we stock it with trout. But now I think it's going to be Meteorite Pond." Hildebrand said he has been in the Lone Rock area since last weekend, talking to landowners and fireball witnesses in an attempt to triangulate where the meteorite was last seen.

Joined by Milley, the pair concentrated their search on frozen ponds because they provide the easiest background on which to see black rocks. Hildebrand said they were lucky because while there has been no snow in the area, the weather has been cold enough to freeze the water.

"It was certainly a thrill," Hildebrand said, holding a can of tuna he planned to eat for lunch. "I've been investigating fireballs for 15 years, and this is the first in my career where we have been able to find the meteorites first." About 10 small meteorite pieces were found on the pond, plus another two a short distance away. They range in size from 10 grams to about 250 grams.

The scholars believe they will eventually come across much larger pieces, perhaps some as big as a football.

The fragments, which can be worth thousands of dollars, belong to the owner of the land on which they fall.

Mitchell said he doesn't yet know what he will do. Since 10 pieces were found on the small pond, there could be many thousands across his property.

He said he might sell larger pieces that are discovered, while smaller fragments could be donated to universities and research groups.

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"It depends what there is," he said. "If it's just what they've found so far, it's souvenirs. I'll sell if there is any amount to be made, but at this point, there's not much to go on." As Milley was the first to discover a meteorite, she will have a hand in naming it. Space rocks are typically named after where they are found, so the Buzzard Meteorite might be an idea, she said.

The fireball caused a stir in Alberta and eastern Saskatchewan on Nov. 20. Hildebrand estimated the rock weighed 10 tonnes as it descended to Earth, breaking up in a series of spectacular explosions before hitting the ground.

The fireball first appeared about 80 kilometres above and just east of Lloydminster, then moved south.

Based on this information, Hildebrand identified an area of about 20 square kilometres near Battle River for a probable impact site. It was in this search area that Milley spotted the first pieces.

A preliminary analysis shows the meteorite to be a fairly common type of space rock, Hildebrand said. It is believed to have originated as part of a larger asteroid that was formed some 4.5 billion years ago.

"We call it an ordinary chondrite," he said. "These are mostly stone, with what I would guess is about 20-per-cent iron metal." Further analysis must be done to learn more about its age, composition and place of origin. Hildebrand said he hopes to get more researchers looking for space rocks. The race is on to find as many as possible before the snow falls, he said.

Mitchell said his 12-year-old son was ecstatic to learn meteorites fell on the family's land. Mitchell knows other people are excited, too, and that makes him worried about treasure hunters on the property.

"It's a working cattle ranch, so I'm mostly concerned with how I'm going to handle what appears to be some interest people have in this," Mitchell said.

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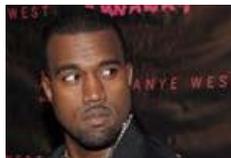
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