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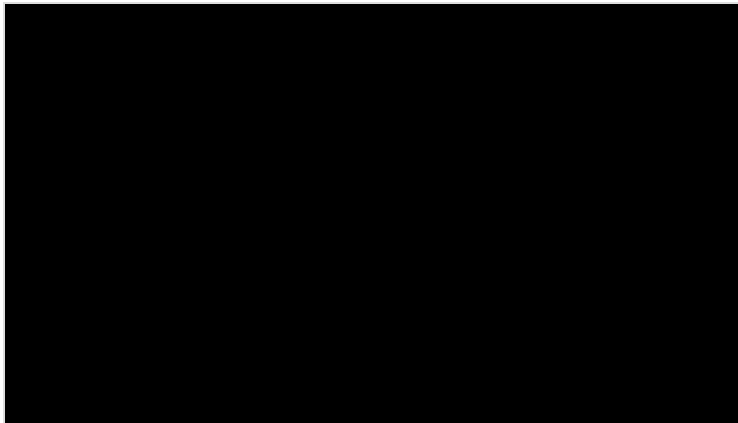
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Scientists find fragments of 10-tonne space rock



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CTV.ca News Staff
Date: Fri. Nov. 28 2008 2:02 PM ET

University of Calgary researchers say they have found fragments from the 10-tonne space rock that caused a late-night light show near the Alberta-Saskatchewan border last week.

In a written statement, planetary scientist Alan Hildebrand and graduate student Ellen Milley said they found meteorite fragments in a rural area near the border town of Lloydminster, Alta., late Thursday.

They are currently searching the area to collect additional fragments, which they believe are strewn across a 20-square-kilometre area near the Battle River.

CTV Edmonton reports that the researchers found 10 fragments on a frozen pond, the biggest being a fist-sized meteorite.

The researchers believe there may be thousands of fragments on the ground.

Hundreds of people across the Prairies reported seeing the blast of bright light on the evening of Nov. 20.

Richard Herd, curator of the National Meteorite Collection of Canada, said Friday that the discovery of multiple fragments confirms that the mysterious fireball was indeed a meteor, which resulted in a meteorite shower.

"When fragments are found, we've got a meteorite shower," he told CTV.ca in a phone interview from Ottawa.

"The meteor resulted in a meteorite shower," he said. "It resulted in meteorites falling, and since there's more than one, it's not just a meteorite fall, it's a meteorite shower."

Meteorite showers tend to have specific characteristics, he said.

"They usually tend to be over a limited area, in an elliptical zone a few kilometres wide and a few more kilometres long, with the largest fragments falling further along the original path and the smaller fragments trailing off back," Herd said.

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Herd said the light show that accompanies a meteor is caused by a meteoroid -- a small piece of a space body or debris -- passing through the Earth's atmosphere.

The incoming meteoroid is slowed down by the much thicker and denser atmosphere, a type of friction which releases intense amounts of heat.

Bits and pieces of the meteoroid start to fall away, he said, it starts to become smaller.

"It's kind of like an onion," Herd said. "You're taking layers of this material off and exposing more and more and more of the inside of this thing to heat."

Eventually, the incoming meteoroid loses most of its cosmic speed, stops breaking apart and simply falls towards the Earth like any other falling object.

What is left on the ground, is called a meteorite.

"In some cases they just catastrophically disintegrate into dust," Herd said. "So there's always the possibility that even with a spectacular light show that there's going to be nothing on the ground."

Canada's largest meteorite shower took in Bruderheim, Alta., when more than 700 fragments were recovered in 1960.

*With files from The Canadian Press*

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