



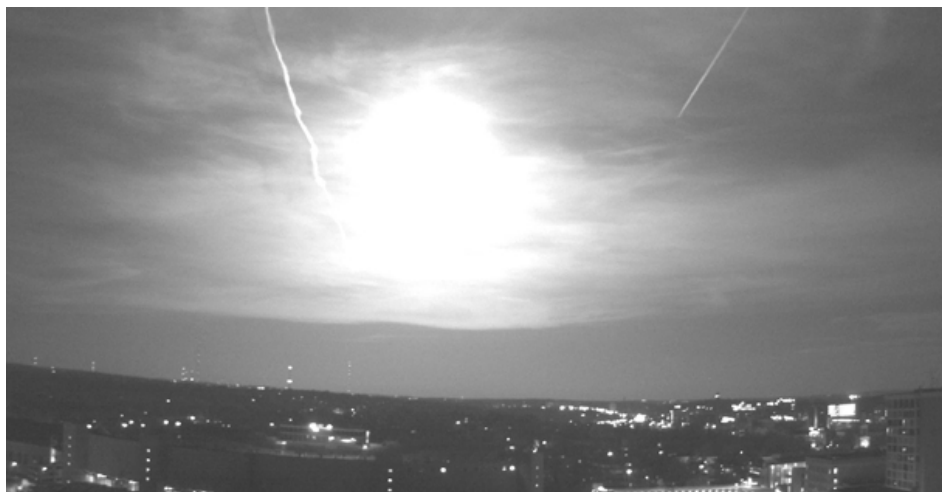
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Meteorite hunters make rare find in Wisconsin

April 17, 2010 12:29 AM | 15 Comments | **UPDATED STORY**



The flash of what is believed to have been a meteor over Madison, Wis., about 10 p.m. Wednesday, as seen from a weather observatory at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. (University of Wisconsin-Madison, Department of Atmospheric and Oceanic Sciences photo)

As dozens of meteorite hunters converged on southwest Wisconsin on Friday, a [Lake Forest](#) man and his two teenage sons stumbled upon what all of them had traveled hours to find.

After they stopped to talk to a farmer, he showed them a small rock that had bounced off his shed roof the night before, shortly after a fireball exploded in the sky.

It was one of two such finds that made the Boudreaux father and sons the first to report the recovery of pieces of meteor that fell near this tiny rural town after lighting up the night over much of the northern Midwest on Wednesday.

One of the specimens, weighing 7.5 grams, was analyzed by a geologist at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, who confirmed it was only the 13th known meteorite ever found in Wisconsin and the first in 50 years. (Click [HERE](#) to see researchers studying the meteorite and [HERE](#) to see video of a researcher discussing the meteorite.)

The other, at 11 grams, was bought for \$200 by Terry Boudreaux, 49, a retired health care industry executive who often shares his finds with the Field Museum's Pritzker Center for Meteoritics and Polar Studies.

"I do this for the thrill of holding something that has traveled for billions of years in space," said Boudreaux, who had stayed up all night Wednesday studying radar maps so he and his sons could be among the first on the scene.

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Terry Boudreaux holds one of the first recovered pieces of a meteorite that broke up over Wisconsin. (For the Tribune / Mark Hirsch)

At least two dozen other meteorite hunters -- professional scientists and amateur collectors looking to cash in on the valuable treasure -- have arrived in the area from as far away as Arizona. After zeroing in on this chunk of farmland using radar and computer readouts, many of them gathered for reconnaissance at a gas station-convenience store off state Highway 80, just north of town.

Until darkness Friday, the hunters canvassed a private farm a few miles outside Livingston, scavenging for tiny fragments of rock as the sun set overhead. Armed with metal detectors and powerful magnets, they planned to pick right up again at dawn on Saturday.

"There are probably hundreds to thousands of pieces scattered out there," said Boudreaux, adding that the big prize would be the intact center of the meteorite. "Finding a meteorite (fragment) is rare enough. Finding the main mass is much, much rarer."

For many of them, the motivation was knowledge that a golf ball-size rock in good condition could fetch \$10,000 or more on the open market. For others, it was pure science.

"Meteorites are the building blocks of planets, so yeah, this is a pretty big deal," said Paul Sipiera, an adjunct curator of meteorites at the Field Museum, who also had rushed to the scene from his home in Galena. "The interest is trying to understand how the Earth came to be."



Photo of the meteorite found in Wisconsin. (Provided by Dr. John Valley of the University of Wisconsin department of geology)

Boudreaux's finding of the two small pieces was an important clue about the location of the strewn field, the impact pattern made on the ground as fragments of the exploding meteor fall to Earth. A meteor is a piece of space mineral orbiting the sun, and a meteorite is a fragment of the meteor that survives the fiery plunge to Earth.

John Valley, the University of Wisconsin geologist who analyzed one of the recovered chunks, said he and his team were thrilled by the sky fall. They confirmed it was a 7.5-gram meteorite.

"To have it filmed as it fell and picked up on Doppler radar as it came down is a really exciting thing," he said. "We hope that we can eventually keep this sample or get another one for our permanent collection, allowing us to do far more detailed analysis on it."

Boudreaux said that when a friend alerted him in [Lake Forest](#) to news of the fireball Wednesday, he sat up much of the night collecting information, then took his sons, Christopher, 17, and Evan, 13, out of school Thursday to drive to Wisconsin.

They spent six hours crisscrossing rural roads, stopping to examine likely-looking rocks, talking to farmers, shopkeepers, police officers and anybody they met, he said. They asked them to be on the

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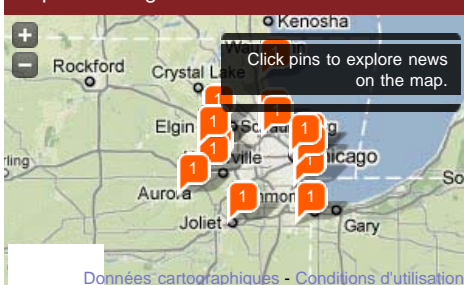
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alert for meteorites and handed out fliers on what to do if they thought they had found one. At 4 p.m., they stopped to talk to a farmer exiting a shed.

"You see those chairs over there?" Boudreaux said the farmer asked him, pointing to yard chairs by his driveway, "About 10:10 last night, I was sitting there having a beer with a friend, and the sky exploded over my head. The entire sky was like daylight.

"About 20 seconds later, a rock hit the roof of the shed next to me. We got a flashlight, looked around and found it."

As they talked, the farmer's neighbor drove up and asked Boudreaux to look at another rock, he said, but it was a piece of asphalt. That farmer went back and found an actual meteorite, beside his garden hose.

That second farmer agreed to sell his specimen to Boudreaux only on the condition that Boudreaux bring it to a local school next week for a lecture to local children fascinated by Wednesday night's fireball. Boudreaux told him he'd do one better: bring along specimens from "all kinds of meteorite falls from all over the world from my own collection."

Among the other hunters on hand was Tim Heitz, 58, a retiree and amateur collector who had rushed up from St. Louis. He said he hoped only "to find enough to pay for my trip. The old joke in meteorite hunting is people telling you, 'Don't quit your day job. You'll be a starving son-of-a-gun.' "

Also there was Joe Kerchner, 31, who said he has made meteorite hunting his full-time job since losing his job months back. Based on eyewitness accounts from farmers and radar readings, he believed that meteorite fragments could be spread out over nine miles.

Kerchner said the hunters often cooperate, but only to a point. "We all work together and share information until one of us gets a hot lead," he said. "At that point, you just stop hearing from them."

Boudreaux and Sipiera said they expect to canvass about 1,600 acres of farmland over the next several days as interest in meteorites intensifies in this area.

"Because this is a fresh fall, there's already a tremendous amount of interest in it," Sipiera said. "Every time you find one you're hoping it gives you clues to the origins of life."

Joel Hood reported from Livingston, William Mullen from [Chicago](#).

-- William Mullen and Joel Hood

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Chad Hastings on [April 16, 2010 9:23 AM](#)

I was standing outside around 10pm in Joliet, IL and a buddy and I saw this falling from the sky. It looked like a fireball with flames peeling off of it. It was definitely bright. We wondered at first if it was some kind of a firework, but it definitely had a different look to it. It was very cool to see in person.

Minne on [April 16, 2010 9:30 AM](#)

This part of Wisconsin/Iowa/Illinois is the most beautiful part of the Midwest. Hopefully no damage will be done by "searchers" in the name of science.

Dave on [April 16, 2010 10:52 AM](#)

I know where one landed in the ILLINOIS area if someone wants to know where it was seen and we split the find. Contact Me.

Jim on [April 16, 2010 3:44 PM](#)

Saw it from my car in Carol Stream around 10pm in the nw sky. Like Chad, thought it was some kind of firework at first but the fireball was far larger and slower-moving than anything I had seen in the sky before. To think that it was over 100 miles away, which I did not realize at the time, makes it even more stunning.

Frank on [April 16, 2010 4:29 PM](#)

"to drive to southeast Wisconsin"...um, that should be "southwest".

JohnH on [April 16, 2010 4:39 PM](#)

It's fine that Mr. Boudreaux "never sells meteorite material", but that doesn't excuse gipping some farmer out of a meteorite that might be worth 10x the \$200 he paid. Even twice the 30grams x \$3/gram he quoted hardly equates to a fair price for one that was SEEN by thousands across 3-4 states!

Rico on [April 16, 2010 4:44 PM](#)

and I threw those tings away from my driveway... they cracked my driveway pretty bad, two chunks

Fred on [April 16, 2010 4:46 PM](#)

Wow, people really have no life if they pull they're kids out of school to search for rocks. Come to my back yard, its full of rocks. Maybe you'd homeschool your kids if you had as many rocks as we do in our back yard.

Good grief folks. Its not even a rare meteor, its so common as the article alluded to that 95% of meteors are like this one.

Go out with the wife instead of digging for rocks and talking to hill-billies about rocks.

SS on [April 16, 2010 4:59 PM](#)

So the father and son are getting the credit for finding the meteorites, but the farmers are really the ones that found them, identified them as meteorites, and gave them to them?

ih8idiots on [April 16, 2010 7:35 PM](#)

SS:

What about the phrase "reported the recovery of" don't you understand?

Fred:

That's what separates the scientists and inventors who advance human understanding, and incurious idiots such as yourself who benefit from the intelligence and hard work of others while giving nothing in return but bitter whining.

elizabeth m on [April 16, 2010 7:58 PM](#)

Good for them to offer to share with the kids at the area grade school. sounds like a fair deal. How can "Fred" criticize them for it not being a rare meteor? "rare" is relative to meteorites themselves. Good for the dad also to involve his sons in something so amazing and beyond their tiny little lives.

DaveK on [April 16, 2010 7:58 PM](#)

@Fred --

Wow, Fred. I have to marvel at your unique sense of awe and wonder about the mysteries of the Universe. But then, we on this thread have never met your wife. Probably far more interesting than some common 4.5+ billion year-old "common meteor".

You're right -- the guy should have brought his wife along too. Leave the kids on school -- to learn to spell better than you.

Bada Bing on [April 16, 2010 9:53 PM](#)

ih8idoits, your ripping of Fred is wrong. I just hope the guy who bought the meteorite from the farmer didn't purchase it for financial gain or fame. He's a 49 year old retired health care executive who took his kids out of school to comb the area? Big fan of organizations like the Pritzker Center, and I'd be disappointed to learn that money is changing hands here. Fred was wrong with his hill-billies comment though.

Bert on [April 16, 2010 10:05 PM](#)

I was visiting my mother that night and right as i got in my truck put it in reverse i noticed the sky light up not thinking to much i then turned and looked over my right shoulder to look out the back window as i pulled out and thats when i saw what i call my unfound piece of this meteor. At first sight the thought of a shooting star came to mind just cause it was so bright and the way it fell. But i pulled right out and went home thinking stupid kids must be doing fireworks. 2 mornings later im listening to the morning sickness and then i hear about the meteor. They didnt say where exactly or evan what day. But right away i thought about the night going home. I called a guy in madison and he confirmed the time was the same and location was right on. Today after work i went and looked around i found a few tiny black rocks? with silverish shiny specks who knows if its a piece. Is there someone that i can call that might want to come look for it i dont know if they have special tools or what ever obviously they know how to find things like this. Like i said when i saw this come falling down it made it about twenty feet above the ground before the fireball finally went out. no more than 50 feet from the road. More than willing to share the location with someone who knows what they are looking for. Its sandy like soil little grass and it happens to be cut very short what little grass there is. I just hate for there to be a piece out there and not be found that would be sad. any advice guys? bertparker@hotmail.com

southsider on [April 16, 2010 10:28 PM](#)

I would have taken my kids out of school too. How many times is something like this going to happen? Also, this gets the conversation going between the dad and the sons. Good for him. He sound like a great father. Also, I think those kids up there will be thrilled for him to come to their school. Another good lesson for his sons. I say go dad.

ih9idiots on [April 17, 2010 12:50 AM](#)

Sorry, but my ripping of Fred was on point. Not only does he not understand the scientific significance of meteors and the importance of instilling wonder in children, but he (and apparently you) are totally unaware of the huge importance of amateurs in the field of astronomy. If it wasn't for the dozens of amateurs who've descended on SW WI, it's likely these meteor fragments would have never been found and/or never be made available for study. The amateur in question here is a major collector who freely shares his meteors with the people at the Field and other scientists for study.

stoplying on [April 17, 2010 12:30 PM](#)

That was no Meteorite that was 'THE MOTHER PLANE'

Lisa on [April 25, 2010 9:20 PM](#)

What would one do if you had one of these meteor rocks? Who do you contact so they can analyze it to see if it is real? I know someone who had one hit their roof in Illinois last week.

Sharry on [May 15, 2010 6:57 PM](#)

If you live in Michigan, and have something you need to get identified, can someone tell me where to find an expert? I had an address of a Center in Chicago, can't find it. Thanks

Interesting about the meteorite, I wonder if any of it got accross the lake like it did way back when we all got it?

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