

West News

50 cents

The Oldest Business in West - Established in 1889

West, Texas

Meteor soars through West area sky Fireball said to be the first to fall in Texas this century

By Larry Knapek

As many area residents are aware by now, a meteor from outer space made a brief appearance in the skies near West on Feb. 15 rattling windows, shaking some buildings and leaving a trail of smoke in the sky.

This was all accompanied by a loud, explosion-like sound at approximately 11 a.m. that day which sent many area residents scurrying to see what made the noise. The meteor was even caught on video as someone was filming a marathon in Austin.

Twenty-year-old Tanner Adamson may have been one of the few eyewitnesses to the meteor as he happened to be standing outside his house on Heritage Parkway when it streaked past.

"I was standing out on the front porch and heard a wild rumbling. At first I thought it might be thunder, but I thought it can't be that because it wasn't cloudy. I looked up and saw a bright, greenish light going directly above me. Then it looked like a trail of smoke."

Adamson estimated the rumbling lasted about 15 seconds and said it shook the house. "It was pretty neat. It was just a bright streak. I thought it might have been something crashing, but I never saw anything land. It was an experience."

Another area resident, James Trussell, was out working on an electric fence near his home when he heard the noise. "It sounded like an explosion and I looked

up and saw what appeared to be smoke"

In addition to the noise, Trussell also saw a rock land close to him and another hit the top of a metal shed not far away. "I thought at first Diane (his girlfriend) was throwing rocks at me. I looked around and didn't see anyone."

He later examined the rock and another found by Diane's daughter Amber near the shed and called the McLennan Sheriff's Department, who looked at the rocks and thought they were meteorites.

Late Tuesday afternoon, Doug Dawn, a physical chemist and an amateur astronomer from Monterey, Mexico, and his team

See West meteor - Page 2



Doug Dawn (center), a physical chemist and amateur astronomer, examines the meteorite found by Amber Spriggs on Feb. 15 near West. Fellow team member Sergey Petikhov also looks at the outer space rock.

100 years old and still counting

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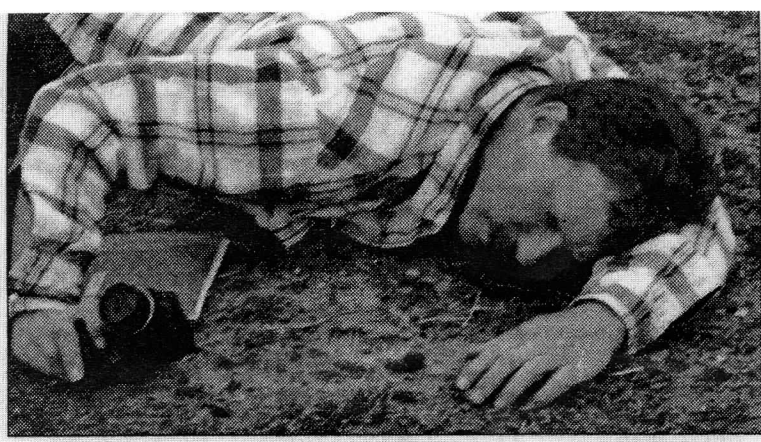
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Doug Dawn gets low to inspect a meteorite he found on Feb. 17 in the West
staff photo - Larry Knappek

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were one of the first groups to arrive (Feb. 17) in the area to investigate the meteor sighting. They talked with Trussell and the landowners and confirmed the rocks were meteorites from the Feb. 15 meteor and received permission to do their own searching.

Within less than an hour, Doug along with team members Diena Sadilenka, a Russian chemist from Moscow and Sergey Petikhov, a Russian paleontologist also from Moscow, had found two more meteorites.

Dawn said his team has found hundreds of meteorites since they began actively hunting them in 2002. This was, however, a first for the physical chemist. "It's the first time I've been on a scientific recovery team to be first on the scene of a fresh meteor."

Dawn was quick to send one meteorite to Dr. Alan Rubin, a research geochemist at the University of California - Los Angeles (UCLA) for examination. "He's an approved classifier of meteorites and I sent him a sample and I will probably send him another."

"He ran an analysis and confirmed that it is definitely a chondrite meteorite. That's one of the most common types. It's kind of a stoney-type meteorite as opposed to those consisting of iron or stoney iron."

Dawn was still enthused about the team's meteorite findings which totaled 12 stones weighing just over 10 ounces. These were found after hunting

with Sadilenko and being joined by Rob Matson, a space scientist from Los Angeles. Petikhov had to cut his hunting short as he returned to Moscow.

Concerning the meteor, Dawn said this is the first meteor to fall in Texas this century. "Last century there were about 11 which fell in Texas." He said from what information he was able to gather, he believes the meteor probably traveled along a line from near Penelope on a path to the Aquilla area before it came apart.

This outer space visitor which landed in the area is "about 4.56 billion years old. That's about the time when the sun was forming," Dawn explained. "It experienced a lot of heating in space during its existence. We can tell from its analysis that it may have traveled close to the sun at one time. We do know that."

He said the meteor has been classified as an L6, which is a scientific term for the amount of heat it was exposed to during its existence.

Right now, Dawn man said the exact size of the meteor when it entered the Earth's atmosphere is still unknown. There has been some speculation that it could have been the size of a pickup truck, however he dismisses that. "Right now there is no way to tell. With more analysis, they might be able to find out."

For Dawn, his West findings were a once in a lifetime happening. "It's an answer to a dream. I feel like we (the team) have

ever have imagined. I truly feel we have been blessed. February 17 is the most exciting day of my life. There is nothing close. We were able to play a part in its history and do a service to science."

Since word got out about the meteorite findings in the area, several meteorite hunters have converged on the city. Some are just meteorite collectors while others are in the business of buying and selling them.

Meteorite hunter Jason Phillips along with fellow hunters Rob Wesel and Patrick Thompson, both of Portland, Oregon have all been in the area for the weekend.

All three hunt meteorites as a hobby and have found this week's hunting to be a little difficult. "I walked a little over 20 miles (one day) and found one about the size of a dime," Phillips said. So far, he has found two (dime size) meteorites.

His hunting pals have been a little more fortunate. Wesel said he found five, while Thompson's count has reached seven. Wesel added that he had purchased one from an area resident, whose dog found it and brought it to the house.

The three speculated there were anywhere from 20 to 25 meteorite hunters in the area and when asked about the going price rate for meteorites, they said it could be approximately \$1,000 to \$2,000 per pound, depending on the quality.

For area residents wishing to take to their property in search of the all-elusive meteorite, it might be similar to looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack. Dawn does give area hunters some tips. The meteorites' crust are black in color and could be any size. If they are chipped, the inside would have a grayish, white almost concrete-type texture and might have flecks of metal in it. A metal detector or magnet might also be useful as the meteorites consist of various degrees of metal.

He also said the weight is heavier than a rock the same size. As an example, he said a meteorite the size of a basketball would probably weigh about 100 pounds. Also the 12 meteorites his team found weighed just over 10 ounces.

Probably a good pair of walking shoes might help as most likely there will be much walking involved.

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