

Witnesses report bright, streaking

by **BILL SEIL**
Staff Reporter

If Chicken Little had been in South King County over the past week, he would have found new evidence to support his falling sky theory.

Police and fire agencies since Wednesday have received reports of two meteors, or objects that looked like meteors. On Wednesday a number of people in the Puget Sound area saw what appeared to be a glowing meteor streaking across the western sky shortly after 11 a.m. This daytime sighting was very rare, according to one astronomer.

On Saturday night an Issaquah man was driving along Interstate 90 when he saw a glowing object fall at a shallow angle and apparently crash at the base of Cougar Mountain. When authorities went out to search they found nothing.

Wendell McDougald said he was eastbound on the

interstate, about two miles west of Issaquah, when at about 10 p.m. he saw a "ball of fire" with fragments breaking off come down over Lake Sammamish at a 30 degree angle. He said he had it in sight for about 30 seconds, but was unable to alert his sleeping wife. At first he thought it was a falling aircraft. He went to the Issaquah police station and officers referred him on to King County Fire District 10. The fire district had already received another call about the object.

McDougald said when he stopped at a fast food restaurant later that night other people reported that they too had seen it. He estimated that it was between four and five feet in diameter and coming in at an altitude of 150 to 200 feet.

"Daylight meteors, as far as I know, are slightly less than one chance in a lifetime — they're quite rare," said University of Washington astronomer Donald Brownlee, when asked about the Wednesday sightings.

There were variations in ways the Wednesday meteor

was described. Some, for example, thought it came in at a 30 degree angle, while others thought it was closer to 45 degrees. Some thought it flickered into a green glow from time to time, and others said it remained white. But all agreed it was brilliantly bright, like a mirrored surface in the sky. An airline pilot at high altitude over southern Oregon was among those who reported seeing the object. Judging from the descriptions, Brownlee estimated that it might weigh a ton or more.

Greg Madsen of Bellevue, was stopped at a traffic light in Renton when he saw the object. He was westbound on Airport Way at Renton Avenue when he saw a bright object streak downward to the north at a 30 degree angle.

"I was convinced it was an airplane crash at Boeing Field," Madsen said. "I was looking for a cloud of smoke and a crash."

He said the object was shiny and had a short tail, but he could see no green glow.

objects in sky

The trouble is, no one knows where it ended up — that is, unless it burned up before striking the earth. Brownlee said an object as big as this apparently was should have produced a sonic boom when it reached a low altitude. But no one reported hearing one. So either it was destroyed in the atmosphere, or came to rest much farther away. It could have touched down anywhere in a wide area covering Western Washington and British Columbia. Brownlee checked with various seismic stations, but none recorded an impact at that time. He said his best guess would be that it came down around the Olympic Mountains.

Brownlee said he didn't hold much hope of finding the meteorite (a meteor that has hit the earth) unless someone reports having heard a sonic boom. According to Brownlee, meteorites are important to understanding the early solar system. He added, however, that the object could have been a man-made satellite or something else entirely.