

# More News and Clas

West Michigan Skies

## Meteor's Fall Gave Rise to Fiery Boom

By David L. DeBruyn  
Chief Curator, Roger B. Chaffee Planetarium

Around 5 a.m. on the morning of Monday, July 12, many area residents were startled from their sleep by window rattling thunder and loud booming sounds. But the sky was clear and there were no storms anywhere near West Michigan.

A fortunate few were up and about at that hour and witnessed the beautiful phenomon that caused all the commotion. A meteor of unusual brightness, called a fireball of "bolide," plunged into the atmosphere directly over West Michigan.

Brilliant meteors of this kind are not highly unusual, but a passage of one so close by is.

Thousands of tons of space debris fall into the earth's atmosphere every day. Most is in the form of fine dust and small stones. As a typical meteoric particle meets increasing friction from the atmosphere, about 50 to 70 miles above the earth's surface, its outer surface becomes incandescent. This causes the characteristic "streak" of light in the night sky that is incorrectly called a "shooting star."

On a typical night, dozens of meteors are seen, some leaving vaporous trails caused by their rapid and fiery descent. Most are consumed to ash 10 miles or more above the surface.

Occasionally, a rather large projectile, on the order of size of a basketball, or even a small automobile, comes plummeting earthward. Its supersonic acceleration through the atmosphere generates extraordinarily high temperatures, causing the outer skin to glow almost as bright as the sun on occasion. Increasing frictional stress may cause it to break apart in one final dazzling display. Then the object burns out and abruptly disappears.

Those few people who were out and about around 5 a.m. July 12 reported phenomena that are quite consistent with the above scenario. Witnesses consistently reported that the fireball was so bright that it lit up the landscape. Some said that it was predominantly green; others said it was more orange, while others reported a mixture of these colors, and others as well.

The actual meteoroid body was probably too small and too far away (10 miles or more) to be seen. The visible phenomenon was really a surrounding halo of incandescent atmospheric gases, excited to a state of fluorescence by the projectile's rapid plunge through the atmosphere. The predominant green color reported by many observers is characteristic of oxygen in a high state of excitation.

Some said that the object emitted a sizzling or hissing sound.

## Cherry Grov

By Jacqueline Teare  
Press Bureau

WASHINGTON — Michigan cherry growers, tangled in a political rhubarb over marketing of their 1982 crop, are counting on ice cream to help them promote their product in the nation's capital.

The growers, with the help of the state of Michigan's Washington office, are planning three "ice cream-cherry socials" to focus attention on the current crop — the biggest since 1965.

"While this overproduction will be a boon to consumers, it will have potentially devastating effects on the cherry industry," three Michigan congressmen told colleagues in their invitation to a "social."

"With farm revenues falling well below the costs of production, it is expected that many of our smaller

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