

Spectacular glow may have been meteor

EUREKA, Calif. (AP) — A puff of brown smoke and a brilliant silver glow that lit up the afternoon sky over 400 miles in northern California and southern Oregon might have been a meteor breaking up, a park ranger says.

"In my entire life I've never seen anything like it," said John Melvin, 38, a ranger at Prairie Creek State Park, after the sighting on Friday. "I know it wasn't a UFO. If it was anything not natural, it could have been some spacecraft debris."

Dozens of people called authorities and radio stations from as far away as Medford, Ore., 90 miles northeast of Prairie Creek, and San Francisco, about 330 miles south of the park.

Authorities searched the redwood forests of northern California for meteorites after the sighting.

Melvin said the 2:50 p.m. sighting lasted less than 10 seconds, and the object could have been 50 miles from him and about 5,000 feet high.

"It was real hard to tell how far away and how high it was," Melvin said. "It started to dissipate about treetop level and I couldn't see it after it went over the redwoods."

Melvin spotted the object while driving in his patrol car and notified other rangers to search for possible debris that could cause a fire.

"I don't know how big it was but it had to be pretty large to pass through the atmosphere," he said. "I don't think we'll be able to

find any pieces of meteorites, but it would be great if we did. It'd be sort of nice to have a chunk of something from outer space."

A Coast Guard helicopter pilot flying near Eureka, 270 miles north of San Francisco, also saw the phenomenon but said he thought it was going up, instead of down.

The Coast Guard pilot, Gilbert Sena, said he was flying at about 1,500 feet and the object appeared to be at least 7,000 feet above sea level.