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Close encounters of a sonic kind in the Clyde

By IAIN GRAY

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AN OBJECT from the outer reaches of space, hurtling through the atmosphere at the rate of 50 miles per second, may have been responsible for an earth shattering "bang" heard throughout a 20-square mile area of the west coast of Scotland late on Tuesday night.

Coastguards at Greenock received several calls from anxious inhabitants of Ardrossan, Bute, and the Cowal

one stage that an incident at the Clyde submarine base at Coulport could be responsible, while others sagely blamed the current Purple Warrior military exercises.

After it was found the bang had no military connection, the British Geological Survey's seismological unit in Edinburgh were called upon to examine the possibility of an earth tremor.

A careful check of their strategically

earth disturbance. It was not until the unit examined reports of people seeing "a bright light" in the sky at the time of the bang that the possibility of a meteor entering the earth's atmosphere was put forward as a reason.

Miss Alice Walker, a seismologist with the unit, said last night: "Our instruments did not record any seismological disturbance. Although we cannot say positively it is likely the bang was caused by a meteor entering

Dr David Clark, director of Glasgow University's Observatory, said it was quite possible the culprit was a Boloid — a meteor of sufficient size to generate a supersonic bang.

"This is the time of the year — from November 14 to November 20 — when what we call Leonid showers of meteors fall. This reaches its climax on November 17, therefore it is quite reasonable to expect that a Boloid may have been responsible for this

travelling at 50 miles per second, equivalent to about a speed of Mach 20, could have entered the earth's atmosphere. Because it would have been travelling at about 20 times the speed of sound it would have caused a sonic boom. The meteor would not necessarily have hit the earth, he said, since it is more common for them rapidly to burn themselves out.

Miss Walker confirmed that had a meteor hit the earth seismological