

Ohio fireball likely a meteor, but what was the other one?

By Lee Stratton
Dispatch Staff Reporter

The fireball in the sky Sunday night was probably a meteor, the Scientific Event Alert Network in Washington, D.C., said yesterday.

But there is no ready explanation for what lighted up the lives of many Kentucky and Tennessee folks about 11 p.m. Saturday.

Marge Summers, a geologist with the network, said descriptions of the fireball, spotted at 8:10 p.m. in Ohio and Michigan, indicate it was probably a meteor.

"That's what it sounds like to me," she said. "They get so hot they explode."

THE NORTH American Air Defense Command has yet to confirm that no spacecraft burned up in the Earth's atmosphere at that time, she said.

Summers said the reported angle of travel and its duration indicate it was more likely a meteor than a burning satellite.

The network, a part of the Smithsonian Institution, keeps

track of various unusual occurrences and tries to determine their causes. According to reports from observers in Ohio and Michigan, the fireball didn't last long and traveled about 20 to 25 degrees above the horizon.

"It was bright enough to cast shadows. Its color was from bright white and yellow to orange or reddish orange," she said. "It had a tail that trailed sparks."

Reports are not precise enough to say for certain it was a meteor, she said. For instance, some people said it traveled from northeast to southwest, but others said it traveled from northwest to the north.

Knowledgeable observers note the angle of entry, the precise direction of travel, the duration and what constellations it fell between, she said.

Summers said the bright, white light that swept across south-central Indiana, central Kentucky and northern Tennessee skies Saturday night "was definitely a different event." Reports

of that event were so varied that she had no guess as to what it was.

SOME PEOPLE said the light appeared to be the size of a car headlight. Others said it was bigger than three football fields. Some folks reported loud crashing noises; others said it was silent. The light lasted about 35 to 45 seconds.

Air Defense Command officials said it was not caused by space debris such as the Soviet spacecraft that burned and brighted skies over Texas late Friday.

The descriptions, including the sounds of explosions in Kentucky, were similar to those reported by hundreds of people across the eastern United States in August 1986.

At that time, officials said they were not caused by a spacecraft launch. Local and national weather experts and observers believed the 1986 event was a cloud of barium gas released from a satellite or military spacecraft.

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Fireball over midwest was probably meteor

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A scientific group says a fireball over Ohio and Michigan on Sunday was probably a meteor, but the group has not identified bright lights reported by some residents in Kentucky, Tennessee and Indiana the previous night.

Marge Summers, a geologist with the Scientific Event Alert Network in Washington, D.C., said reports of a ball of light spotted at 8:10 p.m. in Ohio and Michigan fits the description of a meteor.

"That's what it sounds like to me," she said. "They get so hot they explode."

The angle of travel and its duration indicate it was more likely a meteor than a burning satellite, Ms. Summers said.

The bright, white light that appeared about 11 p.m. Saturday over south-central Indiana, central Kentucky and northern Tennessee was a separate event, Ms. Summers said.

Reports of that event were so inconsistent she did not know what it was, she said.

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