



Blast from the vast unknown

Bruce Montgomery

A FIREBALL that streaked across South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula on Thursday evening, followed by a thunderclap as it smashed through the sound barrier at 20km a second, was almost certainly a small meteorite speeding to Earth.

Cheryl Johnson was showing visitors the koalas and peacocks at her Urimbirra Wildlife Park at about 6pm when she saw the blazing object shoot through the sky, arcing westwards towards the towns of Yankalilla and Normanville.

"It sped across the sky like a falling star," she said.

Ms Johnson only had the object in view for two or three seconds. The visitors missed it.

Senior Constable Robert Fisher of the Goolwa police heard the blast at home.

"It shook the window and vertical blinds," he said.

"It was a loud report and then nothing. I was waiting for someone to report a gas outlet going up."

Meteor astronomer Graham Elford, a research fellow at the University of Adelaide, said that from all the descriptions he was certain it was a meteorite.

"My guess is it would have been tens of kilograms, perhaps the size of a football," Dr Elford said.

"You don't need a large mass for this effect, they come in with enormous speed."

Dr Elford said if it had landed intact, the crater would be 2m to 3m wide.