

UFO LIKE '50,000 SPOTLIGHTS'

RESIDENTS of the outback town of Winton saw a flash 'like 50,000 spotlights' as a huge fireball crashed to earth somewhere in central Queensland late yesterday. Authorities are trying to track down the source of a large fireball seen in the sky over the state's north and central west. Speculation has ranged from space junk to a meteorite. "We only know it wasn't an aircraft," a spokesman for the Australian Search and Rescue Organisation said. But in Winton Elsa Nelms and her partner Graeme East had front row seats for the spectacular light show, sitting on their verandah at dusk talking business with a friend. "Suddenly there was this flash, it's the only way I can describe it ^ it was so bright it was a white flash and it lit everything up," Ms Nelms said. "It was like somebody had turned on 50,000 spotlights." "We all looked up in the sky and there was a white smoke trail coming from the north-east ^ like a firecracker smoke trail but it was too high to even be an aircraft." Ms Nelms said she had gone into her backyard to lock her dog in a pen when the house shook. "While I was putting him away there was a rumble like thunder a long way away. "I missed the action up in the house but my partner said the eaves shook and the roof rattled." She said the whole of Winton either saw or felt the event, with phones ringing all over town and people coming out of their houses to see what was going on. "The neighbours came over and they were white-faced," she said. Ms Nelms said she later spoke by phone to friends living 130km outside Winton who had seen the flash but not felt the rumble. "There's probably is a big hole somewhere ^ but had this fallen on Winton we probably wouldn't be sitting here talking about it," Ms Nelms said. [AAP] *Sydney Herald*, 1 April 2004. [Z-158]