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Burning Ball Lights Up Valley

From: Gerry Lovell <ed@farshore.force9.co.uk>
Date: Fri, 28 Aug 1998 19:45:54 +0100
Fwd Date: Sat, 29 Aug 1998 20:44:15 -0400
Subject: Burning Ball Lights Up Valley

Source: The Modesto Bee [CA]
Date: Aug 28 1998
Header: Burning ball in heavens lights up valley imaginations
Byline: Michael G Mooney

A big blue burning ball of light really did streak across the sky above the Northern San Joaquin Valley and Sierra foothills as dawn broke Thursday.

But the object did not -- we repeat, DID NOT -- crash to earth just east of Claus Road on Modesto's outskirts.

Nor did it strike Calistoga in the upper reaches of California's wine country or slam into Sacramento or scorch the casinos in Reno or smack upside Battle Mountain, Nev.

Big-blue-burning-ball reports emanated from all those locations Thursday. And while no one can be certain, the people who happened to be up and around or out and about at 5:30 a.m. are most likely to have witnessed the spectacular passing of a meteor.

The Stanislaus County Communications Center received a number of telephone calls after the meteor made its brief, but brilliant, appearance.

Among the callers were a woman from Oakdale, who thought the celestial light might be someone shooting off an emergency flare in the Knights Ferry area; a Waterford police officer, who figured it was a meteor; and a line supervisor at a cannery who wasn't sure what he saw.

"I'm just glad someone else saw it," said Joe Eulate, a 64-year-old cannery supervisor. "People were wondering what I put in my coffee this morning."

Eulate's close encounter came as he was driving along Scenic Drive in Modesto. "It looked like a big ball, like a light bulb. It was coming down real fast. I saw something like sparks coming from the back of it. It was moving west to east, toward Claus Road."

Eulate said the object looked so big and appeared so low in the sky, he thought it might crash near Claus or maybe in a farm field to the east.

"I never saw it hit," Eulate said. "There was no sound."

Lona Lema and her sister, Joanne Duncan, were delivering copies of The Bee early Thursday when they crossed paths with the big blue burning ball.

"It was low, really low," Lema said. "It was coming down. It made a sound like an airplane crashing. I thought it was going to crash around Empire."

Lema, 51, said the object looked like a big blue ball surrounded by a reddish-yellow glow. "It had a tail, with sparks coming out of the end. That wasn't no falling star."

Despite Lema's doubts, Bill Trublood of the Bay Area's Lick Observatory said the meteor theory, aka falling stars, was the most likely explanation.

The observatory, atop Mount Hamilton east of San Jose, got just one call about the big blue burning ball of light -- from a woman in Calistoga. "She thought it was moving toward Fresno," he said. "Her husband thought it was going to hit Mount St. Helena, which isn't too far from (Calistoga)."

Trublood said the woman believed the object was just another shooting star until there was "some kind of explosion. She said it turned bluish-green after that."

Scientists at Fleishmann Planetarium at the University of Nevada at Reno also came to the meteor conclusion. They said there was no evidence the object struck the ground.

"We just went through the Perseid meteor showers," Trublood said. "That peaked about two weeks ago. This probably was just a straggler."

-- end --

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