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### Yukon Meteor Event Not A UFO

From: Nick Balaskas <[nikolaos@yorku.ca](mailto:nikolaos@yorku.ca)>  
Date: Thu, 16 Mar 2000 22:31:57 -0500 (Eastern Standard Time)  
Fwd Date: Fri, 17 Mar 2000 06:43:24 -0500  
Subject: Yukon Meteor Event Not A UFO

Hi everyone.

On January 18 a bright glowing object exploded in the sky over The Yukon near the Alaska border. The energy of the explosion was estimated to be in the order of a few kilotons of TNT.

We have now been informed that the search for the debris has been successful and several fragments of a rare type of meteorite have been found which are currently being tested. Below is a forwarded e-mail from NASA with the details.

Nick

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Donald Savage  
Headquarters, Washington, DC March 16, 2000  
(Phone: 202/358-1547)

Ann Hutchison  
Johnson Space Center, Houston, TX  
(Phone: 281/483-5111)

Jean-Claude Paradis  
Natural Resources Canada, Ottawa, ON  
(Phone: 613/992-9426)

RELEASE: 00-41

YUKON METEORITE MAY PROVIDE "NEW WINDOW INTO THE UNIVERSE"

A meteorite that exploded over a remote area of northwest Canada in January may offer "a new window into the universe before the solar system was created," said a NASA scientist who has begun analyzing some of the meteorite fragments.

The very primitive composition and pristine condition of the 4.5-billion-year-old meteorite "offers us a snapshot of the original composition of the entire solar system before the planets formed," said Dr. Michael Zolensky, a cosmic mineralogist at NASA's Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston. "It tells us what the initial materials were like that went into making up the Earth, the Moon and the Sun." The age of the solar system is about 4.5 billion years.

"These meteorite fragments are of immense scientific value and

interest," said Dr. Richard Herd, Curator of National Collections for the Geological Survey of Canada. "This rare find potentially will contribute to a better understanding of the nature of the universe." He added that finding previously undetected compounds in the fragments will have implications for both planetary and biological sciences worldwide.

The scientists described the fragments -- lumps of crumbly rock with scorched, pitted surfaces -- as resembling partly used charcoal briquettes: black, porous, fairly light and still smelling of sulfur.

Several factors combined to make this meteorite a cosmic bonanza for scientists. First, it is a carbonaceous chondrite, a rare type of meteorite that contains many forms of carbon and organics, basic building blocks of life. Carbonaceous chondrites, which comprise only about 2 percent of meteorites known to have fallen to Earth, are typically difficult to recover because they easily break down during entry into Earth's atmosphere and during weathering on the ground.

Zolensky said the last time a carbonaceous chondrite like this fell to Earth and was recovered was 31 years ago. "This is probably the only time in my career this will happen," he said.

The location and timing of the fireball also contributed to the scientific value of the samples. The fragments are part of a meteor that blew apart over a remote area of the Yukon Territory the morning of Jan. 18, 2000. The resulting sonic booms startled residents as far away as British Columbia and Alaska. The frozen, snow-covered ground of the remote Yukon provided near-ideal conditions for preservation, Herd said.

The finder, a local resident who has requested anonymity, collected the fragments in clean plastic bags and kept them continuously frozen. These are the only freshly fallen meteorite fragments recovered and transferred to a laboratory without thawing. Keeping the fragments continuously frozen minimized the potential loss of organics and other volatile compounds in the fragments.

About 2 pounds of meteorite fragments have been recovered so far. Of those, Zolensky has about a pound of fragments provided by the Canadian government and the University of Calgary. The finder loaned them to the university and to the National Meteorite Collection of the Geological Survey of Canada, Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN) in Ottawa, which provided the still-frozen samples to JSC for study and analysis. NASA is working closely with NRCAN scientists and is providing results of the analysis to them. "We are very sensitive to the fact that these are Canadian meteorites," Zolensky said. Any future studies will be done in cooperation with scientists worldwide.

Scientific analysis of the fragments has just begun. Tests have been limited to two non-destructive activities: making a thin section to analyze the mineralogy of the fragments, and measuring induced radioactivity. Tests for induced radioactivity, which are being carried out by Dr. David Lindstrom of JSC, measure the object's exposure to space radiation. This can be used to determine the size of the original meteoroid in space, estimates of which range up to 50 feet in diameter, with a mass of more than 55 tons.

The next step in the study of the fragments will be baseline analyses of the organics in the meteorite. This would require the destruction of some samples, and negotiations are under way with the finder for permission to do such tests.

"The nice thing about having a sample like this is that you don't really know what you're going to find or where it's going to lead," Zolensky said. "You can tuck samples away for the future when new questions come along that people can't even think up now." - end -

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