

'Meteorite Rush' Begins as Russian Scientists Find Fragments

A **meteor** that exploded over **Russia's** Ural mountains and sent fireballs blazing to earth has set off a rush to find fragments of the space rock which hunters hope could fetch thousands of dollars apiece.

Friday's blast and ensuing shockwave shattered windows, injured almost 1,200 people and caused about \$33 million worth of damage, said local authorities.

It also started a "meteorite rush" around the industrial city of **Chelyabinsk**, 950 miles east of Moscow, where groups of people have started combing through the snow and ice.

One amateur space enthusiast estimated chunks could be worth anything up to 66,000 rubles (\$2,200) per gram—more than 40 times the current cost of gold.

"The price is hard to say yet ... The fewer meteorites that are recovered, the higher their price," said Dmitry Kachkalin, a member of the Russian Society of Amateur Meteorite Lovers. Meteorites are parts of a meteor that have fallen to earth.

Scientists at the Ural Federal University were the first to announce a significant find—53 small, stony, black objects around Lake Chebarkul, near Chelyabinsk, which tests confirmed were small **meteorites**.

The fragments were only 0.2 to 0.4 inches across but the scientists said larger pieces may have crashed into the lake, where a crater in the ice about 26 feet wide opened up after Friday's explosion.

"We just completed tests and confirm that the pieces of matter

found by our experts around Lake Chebarkul are really meteorites,” said Viktor Grokhovsky, a scientist with the Ural Federal University and the Russian Academy of Sciences.

“These are classified as ordinary chondrites, or stony meteorites, with an iron content of about 10 percent,” he told RIA news agency.

He did not say whether the fragments had told his team anything about the origins of the meteor, which the U.S. space agency NASA estimated was 55 feet across before entering Earth’s atmosphere and weighed about 10,000 tons.

The main fireball streaked across the sky at a speed of about 19 miles per second, according to Russian space agency Roscosmos, before crashing into the snowy wastes.

Treasure Hunters

More than 20,000 people took part in search and clean-up operations at the weekend in and around Chelyabinsk, which is in the heart of a region packed with industrial military plants.

Many other people were in the area just hoping to find a meteorite after what was described by scientists as a once-in-a-century event.

Residents of a village near Chelyabinsk searched the snowy streets, collecting stones they hoped would prove to be the real thing. But not all were ready to sell.

“I will keep it. Why sell it? I didn’t have a rich lifestyle before, so why start now?” a woman in a pink woolen hat and winter jacket, clutching a small black pebble, told state television Rossiya-24.

The Internet filled quickly with advertisements from eager hunters hoping to sell what they said were meteorites—some for as little as 1,000 rubles (\$).

The authenticity of the items was hard to ascertain.

One seller of a large, silver-hued rock wrote in an advertisement on the portal : “Selling an unusual rock. It may be a piece of meteorite, it may be a bit of a UFO, it may be a piece of a rocket!”

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