

Fireball observations from Saskatchewan prior to 1960

[For events after 1962 – see the Millman Fireball Archive (MFA) notes]

The following accounts are chance gleanings of fireball events being reported from Saskatchewan and from various literary sources

March 18, 1959:

Letter to Mr. John Hodges (Regina Astronomical Society) from Mr. R. B. Longpre of Moose Jaw (SK). The letter is held in the MFA and reads:

“I thought that you would like to learn about a meteor or some other phenomena which occurred this morning.... I was out in my backyard when all of a sudden there was a flash of light, the ground became quite bright ... I automatically looked up in the sky and at that very moment this tail of light became brighter as it seemed to explode, but then it continued on for about a second and exploded (as it seemed) a second time. After the second brighter flash the tail faded away to nothing, but as it ended there seemed to be quite a number of small particles (orange in color) that dribbled away lazely downward and disappeared completely. All this lasted about five or six seconds. When it was over I thought to myself that this may make some kind of noise ... and then there was a sort of rumble and in sounded like thunder a long distance away. ... [the sound occurred] between 2 minutes and 2 ½ minutes after I first saw the light....”

July 17, 1940

“Low Flying Meteor Passes Over Chaplin”

(Special Dispatch) “Chaplin, Sask, July 18 – Believed to have dropped somewhere in western Saskatchewan, a low flying meteor which made a roar like a plane, passed over Chaplin at 7.30 o’clock Wednesday evening.”

“It was seen by Albert Rudd, merchant here, and Miss Hazel Hammarness. Mr. Rudd, working in his garden at the time, watched the meteor through field glasses, after it had passed. He said it seemed to be divided into two pieces.”

“From the height it was travelling at it was believed the meteor must have dropped somewhere west of here.”

References:

The Leader Post Newspaper, for July 18, 1940. Page 8.

March 18, 1934

For Monday, March 19th, the Leader Post Newspaper carried the following article

“Odd Spectacle ‘like daylight’ – Great green skyrocket bursts into flame – explosions heard – Believed to have fallen to Prairie somewhere in eastern Alberta.”

A great green skyrocket flashed across prairie skies Sunday night, startling Regina as it broke into flames in its earthward course.

Reports from many quarters indicate the weird spectacle was caused by a falling meteor which came to earth west of the Saskatchewan border in Alberta.

'It was a weird sight, I will never forget it' said O. R. Burton, 1527 Princess street, as he described his vision of the flaming meteor. Mr. Burton was driving on Albert street just north of the city limits between 8:30 and 8:45 o'clock when he saw it.

Among other Regina residents who saw the light from the meteor was C. H. Burrows, K.C. Mr. Burrows was driving home from Regina Beach and was south of Lumsden about 8:45 o'clock when the sky lit up. 'Everything was as plain as in daylight' Mr. Burrows said. A. J. Hagget was walking home quietly about 8:45 o'clock when his attention was attracted by what he believed to be a falling star at the time. The meteor went behind a cloud in the northwest, and there appeared to be some sort of explosion, says Mr. Hagget, although he did not hear any noise.

Driving in the open space, Mr. Burton had an excellent opportunity to view the unusual occurrence. Explaining his vision, Mr. Burton said the sky suddenly lit up in green light. 'I wondered where the cars were coming from' Mr. Burton explained, 'but when I could not see any on the road I happened to look west and saw the meteor.' 'It looked like a tremendous sky rocket,' he continued, 'and appeared to be going to fall in north Regina.' 'It had a tremendous tail of green light behind it' Mr. Burton added, 'and as it evidently came from the stratosphere into the atmosphere it burst into flames. Sparks flew from it. Then it dropped behind a cloud and the sky lit up like a flash of lightning.' 'When it hit the ground there was a slight rumble. The whole thing was very clear from where I was' Mr. Burton said."

"MOOSE JAW, March 19 - A falling meteor was seen by Moose Jaw residents. Mr. And Mrs. T. S. H. Lovis and their three children were visiting at Drinkwater Sunday and the phenomenon was witnessed by the children while playing outdoors. They described to their parents how they had seen the shooting star followed by the flash of light and illumination in the sky which depicted the colors of the rainbow."

"TERRIFIC BLAST FOLLOWS LIGHT (By Canadian Press). EDMONTON, March 19 - some where in an area 150 miles southeast of this city, a meteor, probably burned to dust, fell around 8:45 p.m. Sunday night.

From Bashaw, Alix, Stettler, Camrose, Ferintosh and Meeting Creek, reports were received of a 'great light in the sky'. It was observed as far east as Saskatoon. People in Bashaw ran out of their homes. At Meeting Creek, where the meteor was most easily seen and the explosion loudest, S. E. Westergard, a farmer told of the phenomena. 'I saw a great flash of light in the sky,' said Mr. Westergard, 'and then, about two minutes later there was a terrific explosion. It seemed to be above the clouds. The light or meteor, whatever it was, seemed to fall about 10 miles east of us.'

LIKE PLANE ON PLUNGE TO EARTH. CALGARY, March 19 - varied descriptions of the meteor which flashed across Alberta skies Sunday night were given by observers today. 'It was like a burning aeroplane plunging to earth' wired a newspaper correspondent. 'It sounded like a gigantic bomb dropped from a Zeppelin' said another observer. 'It must have exploded high in the air.'

Villagers at Meeting Creek rushed into its streets 'thinking the world had come to an end', as one of them described it. 'It sounded like an earthquake and there were

rumblings like that of thunder,' he added. 'Just like a bunch of fireworks to me,' said the telephone operator at Nanton, Alta."

"HELENA, Mont. March 19 – A meteor sped through the atmosphere over this part of Montana about 8:30 o'clock Sunday night. The meteor – reported to have fallen to earth in Alberta would appear to have been larger than the one reported on February 22 from the village of Rinconada, Spain (see note 1). There Francisco Megia described how, warned by a shout from his son, who saw a dense column of smoke dropping from the sky towards the house, he attempted to rush out of doors but was knocked down by a powerful column of air and smoke. The family said they smelled a heavy odor of sulphur and burnt coal.

Meteorites at night are usually seen as a bright head or fireball followed by a luminous train. Their appearance is sometimes accompanied by explosions and detonations. On February 17, 1930, a meteor fell near Paragould, Ark (see note 1). And split into fragments one of which weighed 820 pounds."

The Meteor News section of the Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada contains the following: "The direction of flight seems to have been from the east to the west over the central portions of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta, the meteor exploding with a loud detonation over the region of Buffalo Lake, south of Camrose, Alt. The detonation was heard over a large area in towns separated by as great a distance as 150 miles. Estimates of the brightness of the meteor range all the way from that of a crescent moon to a radiance almost equal to the sun. This is the type of meteor from which meteorites might quiet possibly be recovered."

Note 1: Grady (2000) includes the La Rinconada, Spain event in the *Catalogue of Meteorites*, but the date is given as April 17 or 19, and the event is listed as being a very doubtful meteorite fall. The Paragould, Arkansas meteorite did indeed fall on February 17, 1930 as stated in the article, and the meteorite is identified as an LL5 ordinary chondrite.

References:

Grady, M (2000). *Catalogue of Meteorites (5th edition)*. CUP, Cambridge.
Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society of Canada, 1934, **28**, 175.
The Leader Post Newspaper, for Monday, March 19, 1934. Front page.

July 24, 1922

For Tuesday, July 5th, the Morning Leader carries the following article:

"Flaming Meteor Falls In Waters of Big Quill Lake; Many houses are shaken"
(Special to The Leader). WYNYARD, July 24 – about 11 o'clock this morning a huge meteor fell in Big Quill Lake. The shock caused by the fall greatly alarmed people, for miles around, who rushed out of their homes to discover a great column of steam rising from the lake.

As far as Wynyard the shock was felt. Bottles were knocked from the shelves, houses shaken, and dishes broken when thrown from their usual place. Terrific explosions and the roar of hissing steam were the first clue to the actual cause of the shock. The steam cloud could be seen for miles around, from house tops in town and country.”

For Wednesday, July 26th, The Morning Leader carried the following article:

“Saskatchewan is visited by a shower of meteors Monday”

From four different points in Saskatchewan yesterday reports reached The Morning Leader of meteors falling, and indications are that the province was visited by a shower of these.

Following the report from Big Quill Lake Monday night concerning the meteor which fell into the lake and caused consternation for some time, many believing an earthquake was imminent, three other points reported visits from foreign bodies with slight earth shocks.

Saskatoon was the first to report a meteor falling to the east of the city some distance. The location has not been determined, but many citizens saw the flaming ball with a long tail of gas trailing behind it.

Vanscoy people heard five severe explosions about 5 o'clock yesterday morning, and each time the earth quaked. Residents of Pike Lake stated they had seen a meteor fall to the southwest and residents of Vanscoy reported another meteor to the south.

Just before noon Monday hundreds of campers at Ketepwa observed a ball of fire coming from a clear sky. The large mass plunged into the lake and for several minutes afterwards huge columns of steam rose from the lake. For fully half an hour after the plunge of the meteor, the lake was covered with dense gaseous smoke.

Gendzwil and Stauffer (1984) report several more eyewitness accounts (obtained during field research in 1981) for the July 24, 1922 fireball and suggest that the Wynyard meteorite, found in the late 1960s, may be associated with the fireball.

References:

Gendzwil, D. J., and Stauffer, M. R. 1984, *Meteoritics*, **19** (3), 145.

Morning Leader Newspaper, for Tuesday, July 25, and Wednesday, July 26, 1922.

January 29, 1914

The following fireball descriptions are taken from the research paper by Johnston and Ellsworth (1921) and possibly relate to the arrival of the Anaheim iron meteorite found on July 30, 1916.

- (1) “Mr. J. Lapinski states in a letter dated at Leofeld, March 18, 1917, that on the day mentioned [January 29, 1914] he heard a loud noise resembling thunder, but much more intense, coming from the north-west and travelling toward the south-east. Horses, cattle, sheep and pigs were startled by it and the house dog manifested much uneasiness.”

- (2) “Mr. E. Ludwig, . . . , first noticed a ball of fire disappearing to the eastward and leaving in its trail a cloud of smoke which remained visible for about half-an-hour. The apparition was followed by a noise like thunder. . . .”
- (3) “Mr. F. H. Strueby, writing from Dead Moose Lake on March 28, 1917, said that he was sitting in his house when the first sound was heard; to him this resembled the humming or roaring of a chimney; just then his daughter came running into the house saying that some unusual sounds were coming from the upper reaches of the atmosphere. On going outside Mr. Strueby noticed a cloud well overhead and heard a peal like thunder which lasted about a minute. Horses and cattle were greatly agitated and the house dog manifested a great deal of fear.”
- (4) “Mr. John Haas, writing from Annaheim on March 6, 1917, states that on the day in question he and his two boys were hauling wood when their two teams suddenly stopped, showed pronounced evidence of alarm and were controlled only with great difficulty. Next there came a loud noise like heavy rolling thunder travelling from north-west to south-east and lasting about a minute and a half. The ground shock as it would from a passing train.”

References:

Johnston, R. A. A., and Ellsworth, H. V. 1921, Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, **15**, 69.