



Cottonwood 'meteorite' mystery continues

By Dylan Darling
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Normally, trading a 1999 Oldsmobile Bravada in good condition for a 1995 Isuzu Trooper with a bashed-in window wouldn't be a good deal.

But this isn't any regular Isuzu, says Roy Howard, 60, of Anderson, who made the swap.

It's the Trooper that took a hit from something that possibly fell from the sky late last month as it sat in a Cottonwood driveway. Howard says he wants to preserve the sport utility vehicle until scientists determine what it was that hit it.

"To me, it's worth more not fixed," Howard said.

The SUV had belonged to Linda Lang, 46. She and her boyfriend, Richard Orsot, 61, were awakened at 4 a.m. Feb. 26 by a big boom on Frances Street. Shasta County sheriff's deputies who scoured the neighborhood in response to a series of 911 calls reporting the noise found the only damage to be to Lang's Trooper.

Something smashed through the windshield, deeply denting the dashboard and apparently melting part of the glass, said Mike Birondo, a fire investigator with the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The largest piece of strange debris found in the car, about the size of a golf ball, has been sent to the state Department of Justice Laboratory in Chico for tests.

Birondo said it appears that whatever caused the damage came from the sky, perhaps a piece of space junk or meteorite.

A New York man who has been involved with a meteorite collection for 20 years and heard of the Cottonwood object Thursday said he thinks it's a "meteorwrong," or not a meteorite.

A newly fallen meteorite doesn't have sharp edges, resemble metal or emit enough heat to melt anything or cause it to change color, said Darryl Pitt, curator of the Macovich Collection.

"It doesn't have the power to melt or change what it's hitting," Pitt said. "It can smash the hell out of it, but it won't change it."

The pieces recovered from Lang's SUV were black and gray with jagged edges.

The Macovich Collection is one of the largest private meteorite collections in the world, with artifacts on display at museums around the globe.

Pitt recently made news himself when he offered \$10,000 to the first person to turn in more than a kilogram of a meteorite that reportedly came down early last month on Rockland, N.Y..

While Pitt said he's convinced the Cottonwood object is not a meteorite, Howard said he won't know for sure until scientists familiar with the extraterrestrial objects have a look at it. That's why he's had Orsot ask for the

pieces back and the two plan to send them to the Arizona State University Center for Meteorite Studies.

Howard wasn't the only one to offer help to Lang with her SUV, which was the couple's only form of transportation. Mike Hubert of Mike's Body Shop in Anderson and Missy Patton of Platinum Auto Glass in Redding both offered Thursday to fix her car for free.

A lifelong rock hound, Howard said he became interested in meteorites when one fell near Whiskeytown on Jan. 14, 2001. Since then he's gone out in a helicopter four times searching for what he said should be a meteorite about half the size of a Volkswagen Beetle.

"I'm still looking for it," he said.

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