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The results are in, mystery rock isn't from space

By SCOTT JASON
sjason@mercedsun-star.com

It's an Earth rock. Probably volcanic basalt.

Meteorite collector Eric Whichman's conclusion came Wednesday after he received a sample of the odd rock found in a Livingston man's field.

"Before I even took it out of the package, I knew it wasn't a meteorite," he said from Escondido.

There was some speculation that the 170-pound boulder might be remnants of the fireball that blazed across the Central Valley sky Dec. 27.

With the latest earth-bound revelation, the search continues. Meteorite hunters are looking for more people who believe they felt tremors or loud booms that night.

Whichman encourages anyone with information to contact him on his Web site, www.meteoritesusa.com.

Hunters believe any meteorite pieces would be in the north Merced County area.

The mystery rock, he said, probably came from a volcanic eruption, which explains some of its unusual characteristics.

The sample had traces of copper and iron, the latter of which made the rock magnetic.

The biggest red flag, Whichman said, were the vesicles -- holes created by gases when the rock is cooling -- present on its surface.

In most cases, meteorites don't have them.

Still, how the rock coincidentally ended up in Jerry McAlwee's sandy field around the same time of the fireball remains a mystery.

McAlwee mowed the field in early December and would've hit the rock with his mower had it been there then. It was embedded half-a-foot into the ground about 10 feet from the road.

McAlwee spins a couple theories, which he admits are wild ones.

One is that it fell off a train and onto the tracks. Then a second speeding train hit it hard, shooting it into his field.

Yet there are no impact marks where the rock would've been struck, he said, repeating an argument against the idea.

The other is that the giant rock fell off a truck backing up to turn around.

The discovery will still go toward helping science, McAlwee noted. Photos of the rock will be displayed on Whichman's Web site as a meteor-wrong.

Reporter Scott Jason can be reached at (209) 385-2453 or sjason@mercedsun-star.com.

Video: Watch a video interview with McAlwee



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Merced Sun-Star photo by Brandon Bowers Jerry McAlwee looks over a boulder in a field near his girlfriend's home north of Livingston. He suspects it could be a meteorite that was seen streaking over Merced skies in late December.



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