

Meteor Illuminates Night Sky Over Murmansk Region (Video)

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A Russian astronomer has said that a shimmering fireball that illuminated the night sky over the northern Murmansk region last week was "a very bright meteor."

Having watched footage of the incident on YouTube, Sergei Smirnov, chief researcher at the Pulkovo Astronomical Observatory near St. Petersburg, couldn't determine the exact altitude and trajectory of the fireball, but said that it was traveling "many tens of kilometers" above the ground.

Because the object's flight "ended in combustion" and not in a collision with the Earth, it must be classified as a meteor, not a meteorite, Smirnov said, Interfax reported Monday.

It was spotted on a car's dashboard camera at 2 a.m. on Friday, and its bright blue light was seen all across the Kola Peninsula.

Dashcam footage of the meteor hurtling across the sky in northern Russia. (9plus0 / YouTube)

Astronomers have linked the "fireball's" appearance to a meteor cloud that the Earth started to travel through a few days ago.

The Earth regularly encounters these clouds without harm, because many of the rocks are too small to survive the heat of entering the atmosphere — resulting in meteor showers.

"Meteor clouds create meteor showers, 20-25 flashes in the sky over the course of several hours. Usually they are not bright, but this object was larger," Smirnov said.

Despite Smirnov's contention that the rock disintegrated before it hit the ground, a search party is being readied to look for an impact site, which the participants believe could be somewhere in the Apatitsko-Kirovsky district.

Last year a meteor entered the Earth's atmosphere at a speed of 40,000 miles per hour and exploded high above the Russian city of Chelyabinsk with the force of 500,000 tons of TNT — the size of a small nuclear bomb.

More than 1,500 people were injured, mainly by broken glass, when it crashed to Earth.

Following the incident, the Federal Space Agency, or Roscosmos, proposed an international cooperative asteroid defense project.

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