

Space rock gives Earth a close shave

March 3 2009



A meteor streaks diagonally across the sky against a field of star trails behind one of the peaks of the Seven Sisters rock formation in the Valley of Fire State Park in Nevada. An asteroid of a similar size to a rock that exploded above Siberia in 1908 with the force of a thousand atomic bombs whizzed close past Earth on Monday.

An asteroid of a similar size to a rock that exploded above Siberia in 1908 with the force of a thousand atomic bombs whizzed close past Earth on Monday, astronomers said on Tuesday.

2009 DD45, estimated to be between 21 and 47 meters (68 and 152 feet) across, raced by at 1344 GMT on Monday, the Planetary Society and

astronomers' blogs reported.

The gap was just 72,000 kilometers (44,750 miles), or a fifth of the distance between Earth and the Moon and only twice the height of satellites in geosynchronous orbit, the website space.com said.

The estimated size is similar to that of an asteroid or comet that exploded above Tunguska, Siberia, on June 30 1908, flattening 80 million trees in a swathe of more than 2,000 square kilometres (800 square miles).

2009 DD45 was spotted last Saturday by astronomers at the Siding Spring Survey in Australia, and was verified by the International Astronomical Union's Minor Planet Centre (MPC), which catalogues Solar System rocks.

The closest flyby listed by the MPC is 2004 FU162, a small asteroid about six metres (20 feet) across which came within about 6,500 kms (4,000 miles) of us in March 2004.

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