

Stunning meteor showers light up California sky (Update)

October 18 2012



In this photo taken Oct. 17, 2012 and provided by Phil Terzian is a shooting star above the Montebello Open Space Preserve in Palo Alto, Calif. Streaking fireballs lighting up California skies and stunning stargazers are part of a major meteor shower, and the show is just getting started, professional observers said. (AP Photo/Phil Terzian)

(AP)—A streaking fireball lit up California skies and stunned stargazers Wednesday night, and professional observers say more meteors are on the way.

The exploding streak was visible over the San Francisco Bay area and

other parts of Northern California, and there were also reports of a loud boom.

"It looked like a plane crash or rocket," said Philip Terzian, an amateur astronomer who happened to photograph the meteor while atop a ridge around Palo Alto.

Terzian had gathered there with a group of other astronomy enthusiasts. The group had not met in some time and just happened to be there for the meteor.

"It was a 'Holy Cow!' moment," he told The Associated Press.

Other observers described the streak as crescent shaped, and reddish orange in color.

The sound people reported could have been a sonic boom from the meteor traveling faster than the speed of sound, said Jonathan Braidman, an astronomy instructor with the Chabot Space & Science Center in Oakland.

"It's like a jet fighter," he said.

Braidman said the meteor was likely metal and rock from the asteroid belt. Astronomers at the center estimated its size as that of a car although Braidman said it probably broke into much smaller pieces before hitting the ground and then scattered over hundreds of miles.

Wednesday's light streak comes as astronomers expect a more dramatic light display this weekend that is part of the large, fast Orionid meteor shower, so-named because it has the Orion constellation as a backdrop. The Orion meteors are space debris from Halley's Comet, and they become visible as the earth crosses through their trail, according to the

Sacramento Bee.

Braidman said he does not think Wednesday's meteor and this weekend's Orionid shower are connected.

The shower's peak is supposed to be Saturday night and Sunday morning.

Wednesday's meteor sighting was at least the second in Northern California in recent months. A meteor that exploded April 22 was seen over a large part of the region and Nevada.

That explosion prompted a group of scientists to go up in a slow-moving airship and look for meteorites.

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