

Five US institutions to share meteorite pieces (Update)

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Five U.S. institutions will share parts of a rare meteorite that exploded in a fireball over California last year, The Field Museum said Wednesday.

The meteor dates to the early formation of the solar system 4 to 5 billion years ago. It was probably about the size of a minivan when it entered the Earth's atmosphere on April 22, 2012 with a loud boom. It was seen from Sacramento, California, to Las Vegas and parts of northern Nevada.

Field Museum curator Philipp Heck said the institution will preserve the meteorite for "future generations of scientists who will be armed with analytical tools which we can only dream of today."

The Smithsonian cut the 205 gram meteorite into five sections that will go to five institutions: The Field Museum in Chicago; the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History in Washington; the American Museum of Natural History in New York; Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona; and the University of California-Davis.

Scientists plan to use the pieces for research. They used a CT scan to determine the meteor's age and chemical composition.

Private collector Robert Haag owned the meteorite and contacted Meenakshi Wadhwa, director of Arizona State University's Center for Meteorite Studies. She contacted the other institutions to discuss sharing the piece.

After the explosion it was possible that bits of the meteor were strewn over an area as long as 10 miles (16 kilometers), most likely stretching west from Coloma, where James W. Marshall first discovered gold in California, at Sutter's Mill in 1848.

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