

Space rock craze hits South Korea after meteor shower

March 18 2014



Illustration of a meteor shower. Meteor showers occur when hundreds of meteors—fragments of dust and rock that burn up as they pass through the Earth's atmosphere—light up the sky in a spectacular display

A corner of South Korea is in the grip of a frenzied hunt for valuable space souvenirs, following a rare meteor shower there last week.

Hundreds of people have been scouring hills and rice paddies for meteorites near the southeastern city of Jinju after the shower on March

9, some of them armed with GPS devices and metal detectors, according to media reports.

"Media hype claiming that chondrites (a type of meteorite) could bring you a bonanza sparked the fever for [space rocks](#)," an official from the Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea (CHAK) told AFP.

Local greenhouse owners have put up signs warning off trespassers after the first large chunk of rock, weighing around nine kilograms (20 pounds), was found in a greenhouse near Jinju.

A second piece weighing four kilograms was found by another local resident.

Scientists confirmed that both rocks, found in the two days after the [meteor shower](#), had come from space.

A US [meteorite](#)-hunter has been handing out business cards in the local area, asking people to sell him any shards they find, the Korea JoongAng Daily said.

Prime Minister Chung Hong-Won suggested the government should secure them for research or as a natural monument.

The CHAK official said the agency would designate any meteorites found as cultural assets to stop them from being taken out of South Korea.

Ownership of the meteorites remains a legally grey area because of the lack of relevant provisions in South Korean civil law, the official added.

A space rock was last found on its soil in 1943, when the Korean peninsula was under Japan's colonial rule.

Meteor showers occur when hundreds of meteors—fragments of dust and rock that burn up as they pass through the Earth's atmosphere—light up the sky in a spectacular display.

Meteorites are meteors that do not burn up completely, surviving the fall to Earth.

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