

The Murchison Meteorite



On the 28th of September 1969 at approximately 10.58am a rare type of stony meteorite showered over the township of Murchison, surprisingly causing only minor damage.

The meteorite was moving in a north-westerly direction before impact and exploded over Murchison with fragments falling over an area approximately 11 kms long and 3 kms wide. Although few people saw the fall, most Murchison residents heard it, with the noise likened to thunder or repeated sonic booms. From Kialla West it was seen as a bright orange ball with a silvery rim and a dull orange tail, leaving a blue smoke trail which lasted for several minutes. The trail was seen from as far away as Mildura.

The Murchison meteorite is one of the most extensively studied of all meteorites. It is classified as a carbonaceous chondrite type 2 - only 1% of all known meteorites are of this type.

It is estimated to be 4.6 billion years old and formed in the early history of the Solar System. Star dust extracted from the meteorite is even older – 7 billion years old, the oldest item on our planet!

One of the fascinating features of the Murchison meteorite is the presence of amino acids, the building blocks of DNA, the genetic code in living cells. Some scientists think they represent primitive life forms. Scientific study has identified the presence of sugar, salt and water.

When the meteorite was first collected many people commented that it smelt like methylated spirits. This is due to pyridine, one of the many organic compounds found in the meteorite.

Visit the Heritage Centre, 4 Stevenson Street, Murchison to see samples of the meteorite and to find out more.

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