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Meteor Impact Jars Sleepy Australian Town

By [Stewart Taggart](#)
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GUYRA, Australia -- Until late last year, this sleepy hamlet about 250 miles (400 kilometers) north of Sydney was itself a bit like outer space -- largely unvisited.

But then, on December 7, a cricket-ball sized [meteorite](#) slammed into the town water supply. Ever since, local officials have been trying to make the most of their windfall or -- more accurately -- space-fall.



A map shows the location of Guyra

Last week, a local businessman pledged \$3,000 to [dredge the rock out](#) of the reservoirs mud bottom so it could either be put on display, given to a local university or donated to the Australian Museum in Sydney.

No ones keener to get the rock out than the town government, according to spokesman Jeff Brooks. The water was tested and found to be safe to drink. But ever since the meteorite fell, officials have been busily discouraging visitors from going up to have a look at the reservoir, located on a rough road outside town, for safety's sake.

"The water supply is located along a gravel route largely used as a stock route," Brooks said. "You pretty much need a four-wheel drive vehicle, and even then need some experience."

The day after the meteorite fell, a council employee noticed a huge area of flattened reeds in the reservoir, deducing that the swath was caused by the meteorite. Police divers were brought up from Sydney. While they couldn't free the meteorite, they were able to mark the spot precisely.

Since then, a dredging expert from Australia's capital of Canberra has visited the site -- and agreed to dig out the meteorite from roughly 10 feet (3 meters) of mud. Ross Pogson, the Australian Museums curator of rocks, minerals and meteorites, said he'd be happy to get his hands on the specimen.

"Every meteorite is scientifically important for the clues it gives us about the [origins of our solar system](#)," Pogson said, noting that meteorites are usually comprised of varying amounts of iron, nickel and various silicate minerals.

Scientists believe the hurtling meteorite struck the water supply at a speed of about 18,640 miles (30,000 kilometers) per hour. The meteorite was likely shredded as it passed through the atmosphere en route to Guyra, entering the waterway at a roughly 45-degree angle.

The bang was big enough to be detected as a seismic event measuring about 2 on the Richter scale by the Australian Geological Survey, which had monitoring equipment located 25 miles (40 kilometers) away in Armidale, New South Wales.

Most [meteorites that fall on Earth](#) have been jolted out of the asteroid belt between Mars and Jupiter, although occasionally bits of rock torn free from the moon or Mars land on Earth, as do rarer meteorites believed to be pieces of passing comets. Literally hundreds of meteorites [fall into Earth's atmosphere every year](#). Most either crash into the ocean or hit land undetected.

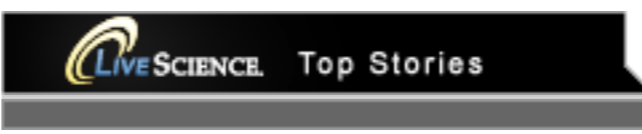
Since 1879, only about 15 meteorites have been [retrieved in Australia](#) after physically being observed falling here. The most recent example was on December 14, when a very small meteorite smashed into several pieces after blasting a hole in the roof of a home in Port Macquarie, a coastal town about 125 miles (200 kilometers) southeast of Guyra.

No one was hurt in the meteorite impact in Port Macquarie. But the startled homeowner -- who kept his identity secret -- shipped off pieces of the rock to Pogson, who confirmed it as a meteorite after finding iron, nickel and certain silicate minerals.

The town of Guyra has a population of about 2,200 people, and the surrounding shire has about 5,000 people. The areas economy relies largely on production of wool and beef, and is located along Australia's continental divide, which separates its largely temperate coastland from its vast arid interior, better known as the Outback.

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