

NEWS RELEASE

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Oregon's sixth meteorite, named Fitzwater Pass, is discovered to be a rare type of iron.

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After spending over 30 years in a Folgers coffee can, a thumb-sized chunk of metal has been identified by researchers as a rare type of iron meteorite.

Named Fitzwater Pass, this meteorite adds to five other known meteorites from Oregon. Previous meteorites include Sam's Valley (found 1894), Willamette (found 1902), Klamath Falls (found 1952), Salem (fell 1981), and Morrow County (recognized 2010). Meteorites are named for the nearest geographical feature.

The meteorite was found in the early summer of 1976 by Mr. Paul Albertson of Lakeview, Oregon, while hunting for agate and jasper at Fitzwater Pass in south central Oregon with his high school teacher James Bleakney. Mr. Albertson took the 65 gram (2.3 ounce) teardrop-shaped piece of metal to a local rock shop, where a small amount was ground off. He was told by someone at the rock shop that it was probably a piece of nickel ore. Mr. Albertson placed the rock in a Folgers coffee can, where it remained until 2006.

The meteorite made it out of the can and into the hands of Dick Pugh, a member of the Cascadia Meteorite Laboratory (CML) at Portland State University, Portland, Oregon, who recognized it as a probable meteorite. Mr. Pugh was in Lakeview giving a lecture at the local library as part of an outreach program cosponsored by NASA and Libraries of Eastern Oregon (LEO).

A slice of the meteorite was donated to Portland State University for research. Drs. Alex Ruzicka and Melinda Hutson of the Cascadia Meteorite Laboratory there teamed with Dr. Stephen Kissin (Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada) to study the new meteorite. Chemical analysis revealed that Fitzwater Pass belongs to the rare IIIIF iron meteorite group, which has only eight other recognized meteorites worldwide. Oddly enough, one of the other IIIIF members is Klamath Falls, an Oregon meteorite found only 50 miles from where Fitzwater Pass was found. However, according to Ruzicka, both the chemistry and texture of Fitzwater Pass make it clear that the meteorite is not another piece of Klamath Falls.

Fitzwater Pass joins Morrow County as new meteorites recognized from Oregon this year. Both meteorites were found years ago and were identified as a result of the outreach program run by the CML. "There are probably at least a dozen more unrecognized meteorites from Oregon located on shelves, in basements, barns, and workshops", says Pugh. "I hope to flush out some more in the years to come."

Images

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About the Cascadia Meteorite Laboratory

The Cascadia Meteorite Laboratory (CML) at Portland State University was created in 2003 to pursue a program involving meteorite research, formal education about meteorites, public lectures, and a specimen identification service for the public. The Lab houses a collection of rocks that now includes over 600 separate meteorites, up from one meteorite at PSU prior to the creation of the Lab. For more information about the Cascadia Meteorite Laboratory, go to <http://meteorites.pdx.edu>

About Portland State University

Portland State University (PSU) serves as a center of opportunity for over 28,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Located in Portland, Oregon, one of the nation's most livable cities, the University's innovative approach to education combines academic rigor in the classroom with field-based experiences through internships and classroom projects with community partners. The University's 49-acre downtown campus exhibits Portland State's commitment to sustainability with green buildings, while many of the 213 bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees incorporate sustainability into the curriculum. PSU's motto, "Let Knowledge Serve the City," inspires the teaching and research of an accomplished faculty whose work and students span the globe.

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Fitzwater Pass meteorite showing the portion ground off in 1976. The numbers on the ruler are in centimeters.



A view of the teardrop-shaped meteorite showing fine surface texture. At left is a portion of a 1 centimeter cube for scale.



Image of Fitzwater Pass showing the shiny white metal of the cut surface created by Portland State University researchers. Yellowish-tan crystals of a different type (a phosphide mineral) are also visible. At left is a portion of a 1 centimeter cube for scale.