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# news release

Attention: News Editors and Science Correspondents

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## JOIN THE RACE TO FIND BILLION-YEAR-OLD ROCK FROM OUTER SPACE

Every year more than 30 meteorites must fall on British soil, yet remarkably there have been only 20 finds in the UK. Somewhere out there are thousands of meteorites just waiting to be discovered – scientific marvels, used by scientists to unravel the secrets of the formation of the Earth and the Solar System, that are the oldest objects you can handle.

*Stardate,* the Open University/BBCTwo astronomy series, is challenging the public to go out and search for missing meteorites. The programme's website www.Open2.net/astronomy, live from Friday 9 August, offers tips on where to look and how to make sure they are the real McCoy.

"The website will allow the meteorite hunter to complete a series of simple and fun tests to see if their rock is from outer space. If the rock passes all the tests the hunter will be invited to take part in the recording of *Stardate* in London on September 27 in order to have the meteorite authenticated and officially named," says *Stardate* producer Mark Bridge.

Dr Richard Greenwood, the Open University's meteorite curator says: "These are rocks from space and are the oldest objects you can handle. They tell us about the formation of the Solar System and the stars that lived and died before the Solar System formed."

Dr Greenwood offers some valuable advice for potential meteorite hunters: "There are two approaches to finding a meteorite; you could either look where other meteorites have been found, as statistically there is a higher chance of finding a meteorite there, or, if you are hoping to find something unique search in a place where no meteorite has previously been found.

"One of the top places in the world to find meteorites is North America, due to its featureless landscape, which allows the meteorites to be spotted easily. Therefore, looking in similar landscapes in the UK could also be lucrative," says Dr Greenwood.

Britain's 20 meteorites have been found in: Glenrothes, Strathmore, Perth, and High Possil in Scotland; Bovedy and Crumlin in Northern Ireland; Pontlyfni and Beddgelert in Wales; and Middlesbrough, Wold Cottage, Appley Bridge, Rowton, Barwell, Glatton, Aldsworth (Cirencester), Ashdon, Launton, Hatford, Danebury and Stretchleigh in England.

Authentic meteorites are very rare and some can be enormously valuable. Rob Elliott, the UK's leading meteorite dealer, based in Fife, says: "Collecting meteorites is certainly one of the most unusual hobbies. But, holding a piece of four-and-half-billion-year old space rock in your hand can really stir up the imagination with a sense of awe and wonderment."

*Stardate* is an Open University/BBC Two series presented by Adam Hart-Davis and produced by Screenhouse. It takes an interactive look at astronomical events. The first programme in the *Stardate* series was *Stardate:Transit of Venus*, which screened on June 5 and June 8 this year.

**Editor's Notes**

Fate of any authentic meteorite found: Any meteorite recovered in the hunt will be properly classified by one of the experts and its name (usually after the nearest town) will be assigned by the International Meteorite Nomenclature Committee of the Meteoritical Society (as long as the meteorite is not from a previously identified strewn field). The meteorite will then be added to the Meteoritical Bulletin in *Meteoritics and Planetary Science* and also the meteorite catalogue of the Natural History Museum, together with the name of the finder and a description of the circumstances. A small sample of the meteorite (20 per cent of the total mass or 20g, whichever is the lesser amount) must be donated to an institution that has well-curated meteorite collections and longstanding commitments to such curation. In the UK the remainder is the property of the discoverer (and/or landowner).

The OU/BBC co-production *Stardate*, which will feature the Great British Meteorite Hunt, is scheduled for transmission in late September 2004 on BBC Two.

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