

NASA scientists looking for meteor remnants in El Dorado County

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

It's not every day that NASA descends on your backyard, hunting for clues to extraterrestrial life.

But that is the drama unfolding this week in and around the community of Lotus, along the south fork of the American River in El Dorado County. Scientists from NASA and the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence Institute are hunting for pieces of a meteorite that plunged to Earth on April 22.

The SETI Institute, based in Mountain View, is the same nonprofit that has spent decades searching for radio signals from outer space in hopes of locating other advanced life forms.

On Thursday, the scientists flew over the Sierra Nevada foothill region in a chartered zeppelin, hoping to spot craters, burn marks or other signs of falling space particles.

The meteorite did not arrive quietly early on that Sunday morning. Residents throughout the Sierra Nevada, from Lassen to Kernville, reported hearing explosive sounds as it burned in the atmosphere. Many saw a bright white streak in the sky.

The track of that streak ended around Marshall Gold Discovery State Historic Park in Coloma, where pieces of the meteorite were found in the parking lot. It was here, in 1848, that gold was discovered in the American River's south fork, touching off the legendary Gold Rush that transformed California and the West.

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