

## **UK FIREBALL ALLIANCE RECEIVES AWARD FOR RECOVERY OF WINCHCOMBE METEORITE**

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The UK Fireball Alliance (UKFALL) has been awarded the Royal Astronomical Society's prestigious 2022 Group Achievement Award in Geophysics in recognition of the team's work in recovering the Winchcombe meteorite.

The space rock fell to Earth in February of 2021 in a spectacular meteor fireball event that was witnessed by over a thousand observers across the UK, northern France, Belgium, Ireland and the Netherlands. The fireball was also recorded by a number of meteor camera networks as well as in security camera footage and imagery from members of the public.

UKFALL team members and their colleagues (from the UK Meteor Network, the NEMETODE meteor network, Australia's Desert Fireball Network, France's FRIPON network, Canada's Global Meteor Network and the American Meteor Society's AllSky7 Network) quickly responded to the event, establishing that meteorites from the fireball may have landed in a region near the town of Winchcombe in Gloucestershire. With the help of local residents, some of whom had actually found meteorites on their property, scientists from the group ended up tracking down over 500gs of meteoritic material. This was gathered, ensuring it was kept in its almost pristine state for later scientific analysis.

The recovery of the pieces of the Winchcombe meteorite proved to be scientifically significant, as scrutiny of the material showed that is an especially rare carbonaceous chondrite. Such meteorites are older than the Earth with ages of around 4.6 billion years. These objects can tell us about how planets like our own formed and the conditions in the early Solar System.

"Winchcombe holds important clues about the origins of oceans and life on Earth and is the most important UK meteorite fall. It's recovery only hours after landing was an incredible achievement for UKFALL and we're delighted and honoured to receive this award from the Royal Astronomical Society" says Dr Ashley King, UKFALL team member and UKRI Future Leader Fellow at the Natural History Museum, London.

Material from the Winchcombe meteorite is now being kept in specialist laboratory conditions at London's Natural History Museum. The largest intact piece is also on display there, for members of the public to see.

"This award is fantastic recognition for the amateur astronomers who caught Winchcombe's arrival on camera, quickly shared their data and helped coordinate UKFALL's quick response. Now that UKFALL is up and running, the success at Winchcombe should be the first of many," says Jim Rowe, Coordinator of UKFALL.

The full citation for the RAS award reads as follows:

"The 2022 Group Achievement Award in Geophysics is awarded to the UK Fireball Alliance (UKFALL) in recognition of the recovery of the Winchcombe meteorite, which fell in Gloucestershire in Feb 2021. The actions of the team to triangulate numerous observations of a bright fireball witnessed across the UK and into Europe allowed for an accurate fall location to be identified. Members of the team quickly travelled to the area and worked with local people to carefully recover fragments of the meteorite before it could degrade and be contaminated by the terrestrial environment. The meteorite is a rare carbonaceous chondrite and is the only one of its type to have been recovered in the UK. UKFALL has initiated multiple consortia studies enabling UK and international researchers to study its chemical and physical properties, including time-sensitive studies that can only be successfully achieved on freshly fallen meteorites. Additionally, UKFALL members are actively involved with a wide variety of public outreach and education activities and have carried out numerous media interviews and worked with local school and community groups in the Winchcombe area to publicise this scientifically rare event. The UK Fireball Alliance is coordinated by Peter Campbell-Burns, Dr Apostolos Christou, Dr Gareth Collins, Dr Luke Daly, Will Gater, Dr Jana Horák, Prof. Katherine Joy, Richard Kacerek, Dr Ashley King, Dr Sarah McMullan, and Jim Rowe."

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**NOTES TO EDITORS**

## **ABOUT UKFALL**

The UK Fireball Alliance was established in 2018 and aims to recover freshly-fallen meteorites in the UK. It is a collaboration between the UK's meteor camera networks, planetary scientists, amateur astronomers and curators of the UK's national museums.

Details and affiliations of all UKFALL team members can be viewed at: <https://www.ukfall.org.uk/>

## **ABOUT THE AWARD**

Details of the Royal Astronomical Society's Group Achievement award in Geophysics. [Source: <https://ras.ac.uk/awards-and-grants/awards/2270-group-award-g>] "The Group Award (Geophysics) recognises outstanding achievement by large consortia of academics or Professional–Amateur collaborations in any branch of geophysics (including emerging areas), where it is not appropriate to present, jointly, one of the other awards of the Society."

## **IMAGES**

Attached to this release are two images which may be used in conjunction with coverage of this story.

[1] A fragment of the Winchcombe meteorite. Credit: The Trustees of the Natural History Museum, London

[2] Members of the UK Fireball Alliance team. Credit: UKFALL.