

State Department of Geology and Mineral Industries

1069 State Office Building
Portland 1, Oregon

A possible meteor impact crater in Baker County, Oregon.

Wilson Creek is a tributary to Elk Creek located at an elevation of between 5000 and 5500 feet in Township 10 South, Range 39 East, sections 4 and 5 according to the U.S.G.S. topographic map of the Baker quadrangle, Oregon. Placer gold claims have been worked here from time to time in the past.

On one such claim a meteor is believed to have fallen during the Winter of either 1933 or 1934. The story behind this report is as follows:

When the claim owners returned to their claim in the spring of whichever year the incident occurred, they found a trough in the ground some 10 feet wide by 15 feet long located some 300 feet from their principal placer pit. This trough was ringed on two sides and one end with a low mound composed of chunks of still frozen ground. Furthermore, some chunks of frozen ground were reportedly nested in the branches of some small trees located adjacent to the end of the trough. These trees were also askew in a manner that suggested they had been forceably moved sometime during the course of the winter. Additionally, a sizeable branch had been broken from a large tree located on the opposite end of the trough.

These observations led the owners to believe that during the winter a meteor had hit there, first clipping the branch from the larger tree, then gouging the trough which resulted in the marginal mounds of debris and the dislocated cluster of small trees on the other end.

The claims were owned and worked at the time of this incident by a Mr. Allen and a Mr. Peterson, now both deceased. However, Mr. Allen's wife and his son, Earl Allen, and Mr. Peterson's wife, now Mrs. Freda Franzen, and a mutual friend of all parties, Mr. Paul Ostwald, all still residents of Baker, recall the discovery of the conditions as described above. Earl Allen was fairly young then and his recollection of the details are not too sharp; however the other parties all relate the basic story as heretofore described. Mr. Ostwald had a 5 x 7 picture which he is presently unable to find; however there is a possibility that Mrs. Allen may have a copy for which she is now searching. Mrs. Franzen fixes the date of the discovery as the spring of either 1933 or 1934 on the basis of the fact that she didn't come to Baker until the summer of 1932, yet they were still getting the old price for the gold they produced; hence pre-1935.

Interest in the possibility that the hole was caused by a meteor led the owners and Mr. Ostwald to take the picture and do some digging; however, as Mrs. Franzen explains, they didn't do too very much digging because of the need of offsetting the prevailing Depression conditions by getting hard cash from the mine. Today the claim is probably owned by a Mr. Steve Skakolski, East Street, Baker, whose permission would have to be obtained for any new search of the area, but Earl Allen and Mr. Ostwald feel reasonably confident of being able to revisit and identify the site should interest in doing so materialize. The branch should still be off of the larger tree and presumably some outline of the trough should still be discernable. In any event, the old placer workings should serve to localize the site.

Summarized by N. S. Wagner
April 23, 1968