

LOOKING AT METEORS IN THE SKY



If a **meteoroid** (space rock) often as small as a grain of beach sand, happens to slam into Earth's atmosphere (often about 6 to 50 miles up), its hypersonic speed causes **ram pressure** which compresses and super-heats the air in front of it into **plasma** (ionized gas) thereby causing a glowing **meteor** (which we see as a quick streak of light) while the surface only of the rock melts away (**ablation**). Most meteors are only visible for a second or less against the blackness of the night sky and background of stars trillions of miles away in deep space. Meteors are easier to see when there aren't many lights around us where we're looking up from the ground. Occasionally a sporadic meteor may be large enough to see in the daytime, but very few meteors are large enough for the space rock to drop all the way down to the ground as a **meteorite**.

