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Odessa Meteor Crater

The Meteor Crater is approximately 550 feet in diameter, is the second largest in the nation. The crater is the result of a barrage of meteors crashing to the earth some 20,000 to 50,000 years ago. It is approximately ten miles west of Odessa; via Interstate 20, exit 108. Enjoy a self-guided tour and visit the Thomas Rodman Museum and Visitor Center on site. Museum hours Tuesday- Saturday: 9 AM-5PM; Sunday, 1 PM-5 PM. Crater Trail is open for self guided tours everyday from 9 AM-5 PM. (432) 381-0946. Free admission. Gift shop.

From the Handbook of Texas Online www.tshaonline.org
 Julia Cauble Smith:

The Meteor Crater at Odessa (also known as Odessa Meteor Crater), the third largest meteor crater in the United States, is located ten miles southwest of Odessa and three miles south of Interstate Highway 20 in south central Ector County. Three craters make up the depression, which was formed in prehistoric time when thousands of iron meteorites known as octahedrites fell on the site. The largest crater covers ten acres. Two smaller and now-filled craters flank it. The rim of the largest crater rises from five to seven feet above the general level of the surrounding plain. The largest crater is filled by wash and wind-blown material to within nine to fourteen feet of the rim. The roughly circular depression is 500 to 650 feet wide from rim to rim. The impact of the meteorites displaced Cretaceous limestone, lifting it forty-five to fifty feet above its original position, folding it into a vertical position, and faulting it. The principal meteorite mass has been determined by bore holes to be near the center of the largest crater at a depth of 164 feet.

In 1892 Julius D. Henderson, a local rancher, discovered the depression while searching for a lost calf. He only noted that the depression was different from the surrounding terrain. In 1920 Virgil Graham, an Ector County resident, found a volcanic-like rock near the depression. He gave the rock to Samuel R. McKinney, who used it for a paperweight until A. C. Bibbins, a Baltimore geologist, saw it in McKinney's office. Bibbins recognized it as a meteorite fragment and sent it for analysis. Although several people realized that the depression and its fragments were unusual, no one recognized the site as a meteor crater until Elias H. Sellardsq went to Ector County in 1922. As director of the Bureau of Economic Geology, Sellards was looking for potash when he came upon the crater in the field. After his discovery scientists from many places came to study the crater. In September 1939 an excavation project was funded by the University of Texas, Ector County, and several businesses and individuals. Machinery and lumber were bought for construction and operation of a shaft and a road. The Work Projects Administrationqv provided workers. Several unsuccessful attempts were made before and after World War IIqv to build a park at the site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Ronald Dewayne Godard, "The Odessa Meteor Crater," in Odessa, Texas, U.S.A.: Diamond Jubilee, 1886-1961 (Odessa: Permian Historical Society, 1961). E. H. Sellards and C. L. Baker, Economic Geology of Texas (University of Texas Bulletin 3401, Austin: Bureau of Economic Geology, 1934). E. H. Sellards and V. E. Barnes, "Meteor Crater of Ector County, Excursion 9," in The Geological Society of America and Affiliated Societies' Excursions, December 26-28, 1940 (N.p.: Geological Society of America, 1940). E. H. Sellards, "Odessa Meteor Crater," Bulletin of the Geological Society of America 51 (1940). E. H. Sellards, "Odessa Meteor Craters," Bulletin of the Geological Society of America 52 (1941).

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