
Glossary

Ablation is the violent heating process brought about when any object enters earth's gravitational field and falls through the atmosphere. The heating effects can be so pronounced as to result in fusion and stripping away of considerable surface material

Asymmetric Uneven—in the sense of being unevenly shaped or balanced, especially comparing one side to the other. One side quite differently shaped compared to the other

Australite The local name for a tektite, especially in Australia. Many of these australites display the flight shaping features such as flanges and ringwaves

Escape Velocity The velocity which any object (or a space vehicle) must attain if it is to escape from the earth's gravitational field. Such an object will probably not behave like a satellite, but may simply go up and then down again

Exfoliation Peeling away of surface layers to expose underlying material. As when previously heated glass peels or flakes off the protected and unheated core of a tektite

Flange The generally rolled circle of melted glass which accumulates in the sheltered zone behind a falling tektite when it undergoes ablation

Fulgurite The siliceous tube left in sandy ground surrounding the entry point where the electrical plasma of a lightning discharge earthed itself

Geomagnetic field polarity reversal The exchange of the north and south magnetic poles, which has occurred several times in history, and is recorded by magnetised minerals in many different kinds of rocks

- Impactite** The name for any material produced from local rocks or soil by the heat and pressure generated by a meteorite impact. This results in fragmentation and melting of local rocks and formation of a glass
- Impactor** The name for an extraterrestrial object (meteorite, asteroid or comet), which has penetrated earth's atmosphere, and slams into the earth, travelling at very great speed
- Lechatelierite** The name given to silica glass, sometimes called "quartz glass". It is non-crystalline, and is only formed when silica (eg quartz) is rapidly heated to over 1700 °C, and then also rapidly cooled
- Limiting velocity (also known as Terminal velocity)** The maximum speed at which any object can fall in air solely under the influence of gravity. Compared to space velocities such speeds are very low
- Paleosol** A very ancient soil horizon, often called a "fossil" soil horizon because it is so old. These are found in arid environments where they have been unaffected by erosion or weathering
- Polymorph** A substance which appears in various different forms depending on temperature or other physical conditions. The forms are however chemically identical
- Refractory** Implying difficulty in melting. The oxides of silica and alumina are both especially notable in this respect
- Ringwave** The circular or spiral wave of molten glass, which is formed by ablation on the anterior (the front or nose of a tektite). It is pressed outward away from the heating centre as the next wave forms
- Salina** The geological term describing a surface evaporation basin. Sometimes called salt-lakes, these are quite common in regions of low rainfall and high evaporation rates, and will also usually contain minor salt and gypsum in a sandy sediment
- Strewnfield** The geographical area over which a particular group of tektites is scattered, and consequently the area in which they might be expected to be found
- Tektite** Natural body of glass formed by the melting of rocks by the intense heat developed at the impact point of a giant meteorite or asteroid

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