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News — Space

Black Diamonds Born in Deep Space

Larry O'Hanlon, Discovery News

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Jan. 18, 2007 — A new analysis of the world's toughest diamonds suggests they may not only be the most ancient objects on Earth — they may also be visitors from deep space. It's even possible they are the unaltered chunks of a long dead, exploded star.

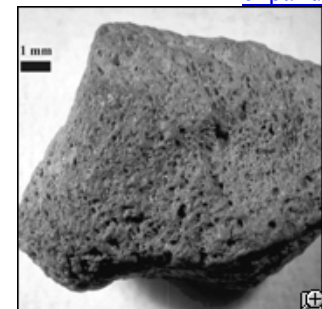
The evidence comes in the form of telltale traces of nitrogen and hydrogen in black "carbonado" diamonds, which don't match any terrestrial signature.

Instead, the molecules seem to reflect a mixture of gases seen in interstellar space, says Steve Haggarty of Florida International University. He and colleagues Jozsef Garai, Sandeep Rekhi and Mark Chance have published a paper on the matter in a recent issue of *Astrophysical Journal*.

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"There is absolutely nothing to compare with these objects," Haggarty told Discovery News, adding that "600 metric tons of carbonado diamonds have been mined, stolen, bartered and adorned in the last century."

That's but a small fraction of the world diamond supply and it all comes from just two places: the Central African Republic and Brazil. Oddly enough, neither place has any of the expected geological signs of being a diamond-bearing region.

Interest in carbonados is more than academic.

These diamonds are particularly prized because they are just as hard as regular diamonds but far tougher under stress. That makes them extremely sought after for industrial drilling and cutting uses.

Finding out how carbonado diamonds were created would not only help geologists search for more, but help diamond makers figure out how to synthesize the useful gems, Haggarty explained.

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