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A giant asteroid crash caused an ancient ice age on Earth, but also gave life a boost

By Ashley Strickland, CNN
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Fossil Fossils created by asteroid that annihilated dinosaurs 01:02

(CNN) — Earth endured an ancient ice age 460 million years ago when a giant asteroid broke apart and sent waves of dust toward our planet over the next 2 million years, according to a new study. And surprisingly, while the massive influx of dust cooled global temperatures on Earth to plummet, it also provided a chance for new evolving species to flourish.

The 50-mile-wide asteroid was in the asteroid belt located between Mars and Jupiter when it collided with something else and broke apart, creating a swath of dust that flooded the inner solar system.

"It is analogous to standing in the middle of your living room and smashing a vacuum cleaner bag, only at a much larger scale," said Birger Schmitz, head study author and professor of geology at Lund University.

Earth is no stranger to the effects of space material, like pieces of comets and asteroids.

"Normally, Earth gains about 40 metric tons of extraterrestrial material every year," said Philipp Heck, study author, curator at the Field Museum and associate professor at the University of Chicago. "Imagine multiplying that by a factor of a thousand or ten thousand."

Fossils Fossils of trilobites that evolved following the mid-Ordovician ice age.

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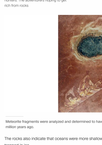

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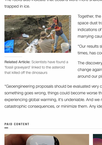

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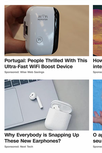

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