

SOLAR WIND SPARKS DAZZLING LIGHT SHOW

December 27, 2001 Posted: 7:35 AM EST (1235 GMT)

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CNN Sci-Tech



Northern Lights over North Dakota on December 24

**powerful gust of solar wind collided with the
of Earth this week, producing surprising aurora
much of North America.**

As present arrived early, an unexpected display of the
lights," observed Lyndon Anderson, a photographer and
in Bismarck, North Dakota.

"I usually see a lot of the red that is pictured, what a surprise,"
Anderson said in reference to the celestial event, which took place
on the morning of December 24.

Celestial enthusiasts witnessed the spectacle in much of the northern
United States, including the far North.

"The aurora was filling the whole sky and was very beautiful," Andre Clay of North Pole,
Alaska, gushed to spaceweather.com, a NASA-affiliated Web that monitors aurora activity.

Wispy streaks of reds, blues and greens, auroras take place when intense waves of charged
particles from the sun strike our atmosphere and interact with different gases.

The displays most often take place in the most extreme northern and southern latitudes. In the
north, they rarely extend south of Canada and Alaska, but an occasional blast from the sun
will set off auroras as far south as Mexico.

The same solar gusts can rattle the magnetic field surrounding the Earth, disrupting electrical
systems in everything from communications satellites to power grids.