This mosaic, the last such set of “optical navigation” images inbound to the asteroid, was taken in the early hours of October 26, 2000.
Last Stop ’Til Eros

Before and after NEAR Shoemaker’s low-altitude flyover of Eros, the camera took image mosaics of known landmarks to accurately fix the spacecraft’s location. This mosaic, the last such set of “optical navigation” images inbound to the asteroid, was taken in the early hours of October 26, 2000. It is shown here in simple cylindrical map projection, centered near the equator on the 180-degree longitude end of the asteroid.

NEAR Mission

As the first launch in the National Aeronautics and Space Administration’s (NASA) Discovery Program, the Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) mission is setting the stage for asteroidal exploration and forming a base of knowledge that will be the framework for future asteroid missions. The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory (JHU/APL) designed and built the NEAR Shoemaker spacecraft and manages the mission for NASA. The Mission Team is drawn internationally from universities, government agencies and private industry.

Launched February 17, 1996, NEAR Shoemaker began its orbital mission at asteroid 433 Eros on February 14, 2000. From May through August 2000, the spacecraft traveled in a circular orbit at a radius of 31 miles (50 kilometers) from the center of Eros. It was then boosted to a higher orbit to view Eros from the direction of the sun. In late December 2000, NEAR Shoemaker will descend to a 22-mile (35-kilometer) orbit and operate at that altitude or lower for the remainder of the mission. By February 2001, the NEAR mission will provide the first comprehensive data on the physical geology, composition and geophysics of an asteroid.

For more information visit the NEAR Web site: http://near.jhuapl.edu.