NEAR Shoemaker Mission

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

Launched February 17, 1996, NEAR Shoemaker's orbital mission at asteroid 433 Eros begins on February 14, 2000. From May through August 2000, NEAR Shoemaker will travel in a circular orbit at a radius of 31 miles (50 kilometers) from the center of Eros. It will then be boosted to a higher orbit to view Eros from the direction of the sun. In the second half of December 2000, NEAR Shoemaker will descend to a 22-mile (36-kilometer) orbit and will operate at that level or lower for the remainder of the mission. By February 2001, the NEAR Shoemaker mission will provide the first comprehensive knowledge of the physical geology, composition, and geophysics of an asteroid.

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

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This picture, taken August 4, 2000, from an orbital altitude of 52 kilometers (32 miles), shows craters on the paw's southern rim.