A **NASA** Discovery Program Mission

Managed by: The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, Laurel, Maryland

On February 12, two days before NEAR's insertion into orbit around Eros, the spacecraft's Multispectral Imager recorded these pictures of the asteroid rotating once around its axis during a five-hour time span. This view, looking down toward the rocky body's north pole, is generally similar to sequences taken on February 6, 10, and 11. But the spacecraft was much closer to Eros (about 1,800 kilometers, or a little over 1,100 miles), so the pictures are much sharper.

Features as small as 590 feet (180 meters) wide can be seen. The most prominent, sharp-rimmed impact crater is on the opposite side of Eros from a huge, hollowed-out gouge, which may also have been caused by an impact. Between these features, and toward the ends of the "fat banana" shape of Eros, the asteroid's surface is covered with smaller craters.

(Images 0125726525, 0125734325, 0125742125, 0125728085, 0125735885, 0125743685, 0125729645, 0125737445, 0125745245, 0125731205, 0125739005, 0125732765)

NEAR MISSION

As the first mission launched 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 will form a base of knowledge that will be the framework for future missions. The NEAR 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's orbital mission at asteroid 433 Eros begins on February 14, 2000. From May through August 2000, NEAR 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 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 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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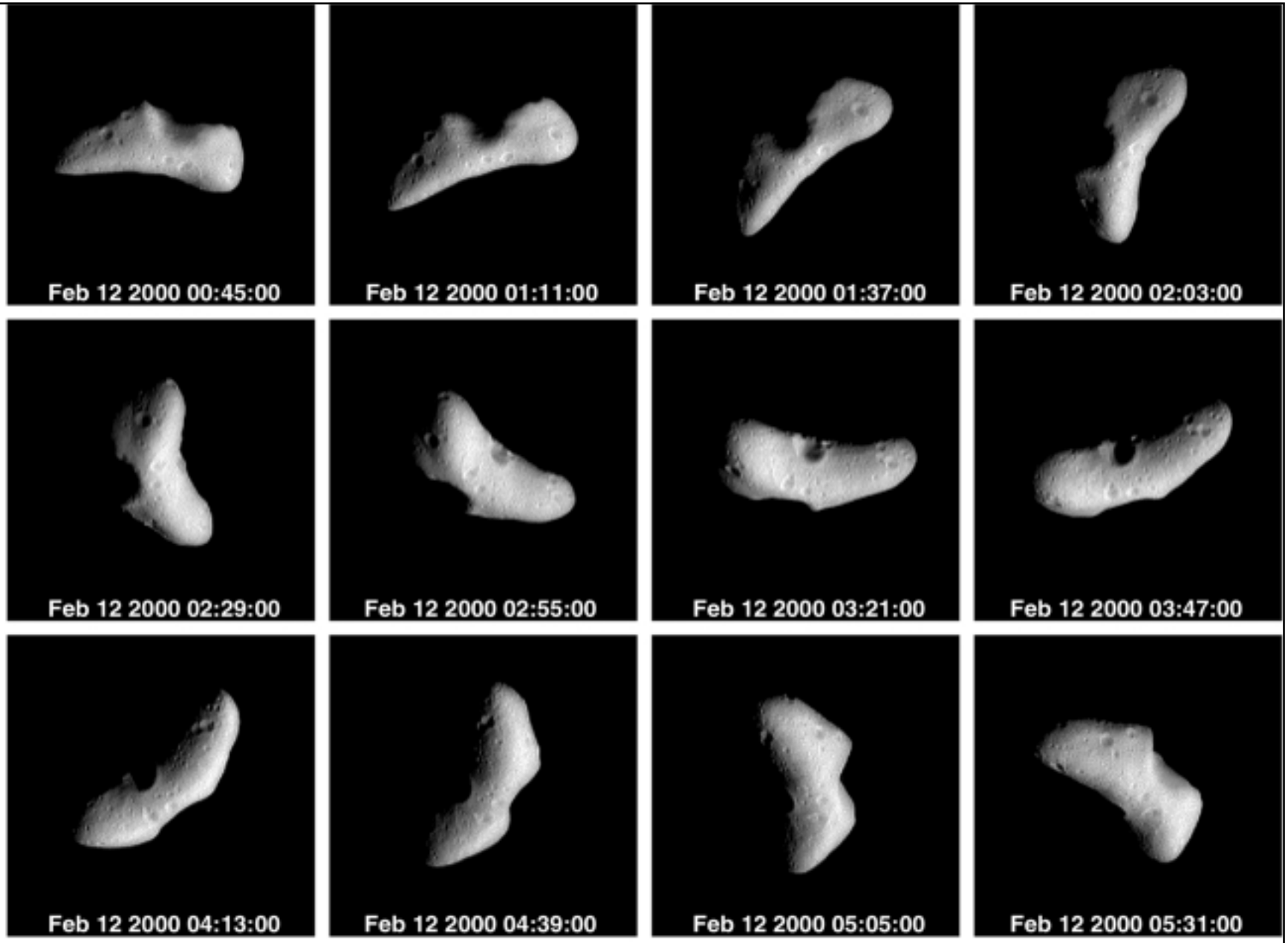
NEAR APPROACH TO EROS



On February 12, from a range of about 1,100 miles (1,800 kilometers), the NEAR spacecraft recorded pictures of asteroid 433 Eros during one full day (5 hours, 16 minutes).