



A **NASA** Discovery Program Mission

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

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**NEAR CAPTURES AN ASTEROID'S HEART**

LAUREL, MD – (Feb. 13, 2000) – Just in time for its Valentine's Day date with 433 Eros, the Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous (NEAR) spacecraft snapped this photo during its approach to the 21-mile-long space rock. Taken February 11, 2000, from 1,609 miles (2,590 kilometers) away, the picture reveals a heart-shaped depression about 3 miles (5 kilometers) long. Scientists at The Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, which manages the NASA mission, processed the image on February 12. Photos taken from closer in during the next few days will help the NEAR team unravel the mystery of this shadowy feature.

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**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.

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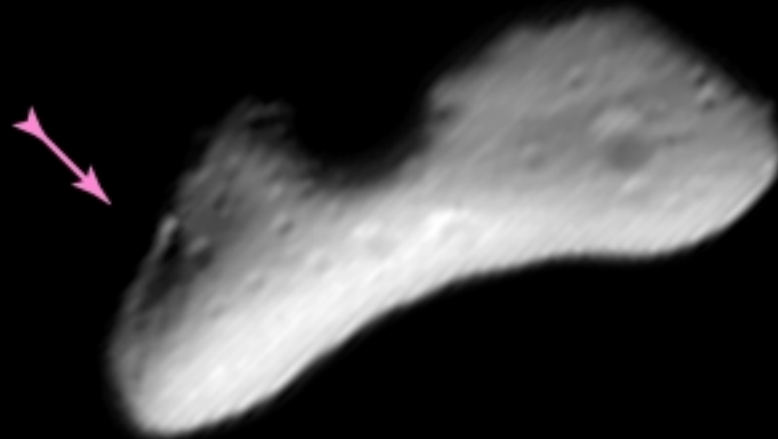
*For more information visit the APL NEAR Web page: <http://near.jhuapl.edu>.*

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# NEAR-EROS APPROACH



NEAR imager snaps picture of heart shape on Eros, February 11, 2000, from 1,609 miles (2,590 kilometers) away.