



News Release

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SPACE SCIENCE INSTITUTE TO LAUNCH MARS SCIENCE EXHIBIT IN FORT COLLINS

A new science exhibition that brings the excitement of exploring Mars to the public will debut Feb. 1, 2003 at the Discovery Center Science Museum in Fort Collins, Co.

The 600-square-foot national traveling exhibition, called *Destination Mars*, was created by the Space Science Institute of Boulder, Co.

Visitors of all ages can explore some of the wonders of Mars -- such as the solar system's largest volcano and a canyon as long as the continental United States -- while also learning how the red planet is in many ways similar to Earth.

Activities planned for the opening day celebration include space-related games and planetarium shows. Space science experts and educators will also be on hand to answer questions about Mars and exploring the solar system.

One of the most exciting facets of the exhibit is that visitors can see an actual piece of Mars -- a slice of the Zagami meteorite that landed in Nigeria in 1962. Scientists believe that several million years ago, a large asteroid hit Mars, blasting tons of rock into space, including one that eventually landed in Nigeria as a meteorite. Visitors can examine the meteorite slice with a microscope as polarized light shines through the rock's crystals, giving us information about which minerals are present.

Also included in the exhibit is a one-third scale model of NASA's new Mars Exploration Rover, or MER. Two of these robotic explorers are slated to lift-off for Mars in May 2003. A computer station provides visitors with MER mission updates and information on the rovers. The exhibit is scheduled to be in Durango, Co. when the MERs land on Mars in January 2004 and begin exploring that ancient desert world.

Destination Mars is remarkable for its size in the number of interactive learning activities it offers visitors. In addition to the meteorite and rover displays, visitors can explore the "Mars Weather Station," where they experiment with a dust devil and watch a Mars weather report. Other stations include a volcano simulator, a virtual tour of Mars, and comparisons between the gravity of Earth and the red planet.

Unlike many science exhibits of its caliber, *Destination Mars* was intended to serve the particular needs of small venues. The exhibit is a scaled down version of the Space Science Institute's popular *MarsQuest* exhibit, which has welcomed more than one million visitors since its opening in 2000. *Destination Mars* was designed to be assembled in a relatively small area -- making it ideal for smaller venues, such as visitor centers and children's museums.

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Destination Mars will be on display at the Discovery Science Center in Fort Collins through April. For science center hours and directions, call 970-472-3990.

Destination Mars was funded by the National Science Foundation.

The Space Science Institute is a nonprofit organization with the unique mission to integrate world-class scientific research with education and public outreach; using traveling exhibits, workshops, instructional materials and the Internet to bring science to educators and education to scientists.

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