

Public Presentation

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Exploring Comets: New Results from the Stardust and Deep Impact Missions

Comets are giant dirty snowballs in space, remnants of the formation of the solar system. They provide a unique record of conditions in the primordial solar nebula 4.57 billion years ago. Two recent NASA missions to comets have provided new insights into the nature of comets. The Stardust mission flew by Comet 81P/Wild 2 in January 2004 and collected samples of cometary dust that were returned to Earth in 2006. These samples have provided many surprises about the early solar system. The Deep Impact mission targeted a 372 kg impactor on a collision course with Comet 9P/Tempel 1 in 2005 and then observed the spectacular results. This talk will describe these results and their importance to understanding the origin of the solar system.