

2013 HARCOURT C. "ACE" VERNON MEMORIAL LECTURE

October 17, 2013 | 7:30 PM | Clayton Hall Conference Center



A New Look at the Comets



DAVID JEWITT

Professor of Astronomy
University of California Los Angeles

Dirty iceballs the size of a small town hurtle through space as if flung by some gargantuan extraterrestrial. These huge hunks of frozen gas, rocks and dust are comets, and they have long held the fascination of world comet expert David Jewitt.

"Comets were known to us long before our species tamed fire and previously were interpreted as omens of disaster," Jewitt says. Only in the last century have we come to recognize the true nature of comets as leftovers from the planets' formation.

Jewitt will provide a sweeping overview of comets and share plans for future comet measurements, as astronomers look for the Comet ISON in the night sky this fall.

Free and open to the public. Please register online at mountcuba.org

Sponsored by Delaware Asteroseismic Research Center at the University of Delaware (www.physics.udel.edu/darc) and Mount Cuba Astronomical Observatory (mountcuba.org)

NASA's Hubble Space Telescope provides a close-up look of Comet ISON (C/2012 S1), as photographed on April 10, when the comet was slightly closer than Jupiter's orbit at a distance of 386 million miles from the sun. Credit: NASA, ESA, J.-Y. Li (Planetary Science Institute), and the Hubble Comet ISON Imaging Science Team

Rosetta, the Comet Chaser

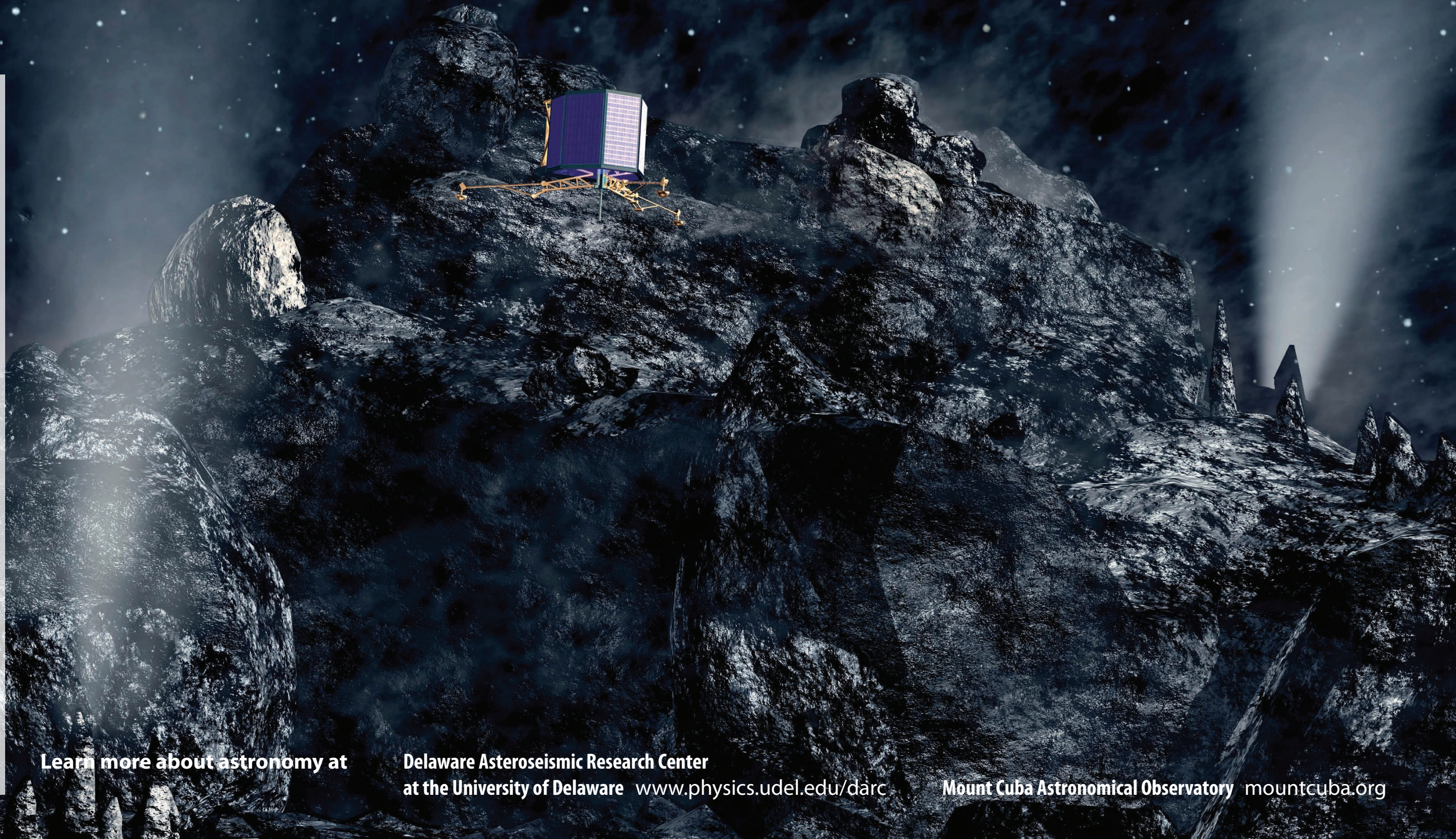
Chasing comets

The European Space Agency (ESA) launched the Rosetta spacecraft (below) in 2004 to begin chasing a comet for scientific research.



In 2014, Rosetta will make history when it enters the orbit around Comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko en route to the sun. Rosetta will then release a lander, Philae, that will touch down on the comet's icy nucleus to begin carrying out scientific experiments over the next year, as depicted in the artist's illustration at right.

Credit: ESA, image by AOES Medialab



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