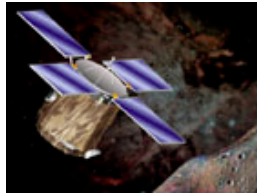




## NEAR LANDS ON EROS

February 12, 2001 5:30pm EST



**Engineers completed history's first asteroid landing today when the NEAR spacecraft successfully touched down on the surface of Eros, 196 million miles from Earth.**

**NewsHour Links****Online Special:  
Space Exploration**

*Feb. 14, 2000*  
[The NEAR spacecraft](#) reaches the asteroid Eros.

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The NEAR-Shoemaker probe sent a beacon signal back to mission control in Maryland this afternoon, confirming the spacecraft had survived the landing intact.

NEAR dropped from a 15-mile orbit, firing its rocket five times to slow its descent. Mission control engineers at the Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory estimated that NEAR, which was not designed for landings, slowed to 3 miles per hour before touching down.

The NEAR-Shoemaker space probe, about the size of a compact car, has spent the last year orbiting the 21-mile long asteroid, gathering information on its composition and size and sending back pictures. With the mission objectives completed and the spacecraft depleted of almost all its fuel, engineers decided to try to land the probe instead of abandoning it to orbit the asteroid.

**Outside Links**

[Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab](#)

NASA's chief scientist Ed Weiler said the landing "gives us a lot of practice." The space agency hopes the landing will help with possible missions to comets.

**NASA**

Officials estimate that the NEAR (Near Earth Asteroid Rendezvous) craft traveled roughly two billion miles since its launch in February 1996. After launching into a solar orbit and swinging by the Earth to pick up speed, NEAR eventually entered into orbit around Eros -- history's first orbit of an asteroid.

NEAR's mission was the first in deep space operated by a non-NASA center. The \$223 million mission was operated by the Johns Hopkins lab and took 26 months to design, build and launch.

