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Australian High School Teachers to Participate in NASA Spaceward Bound Program

The first Australian high school teachers to participate in the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) Spaceward Bound (SB) program will be travelling to the Desert Studies Centre, a space-related research station of the California State University located near Zzyzx in the Mojave Desert, California, on 4-11 April. The Centre provides a Mars-like environment for research aimed at exploring and studying the Red Planet and associated planetary science and the program will be led by Dr Chris McKay, a planetary scientist within the Space Science Division of the NASA Ames Research Centre.

This initiative is the result of a new arrangement between NASA and the Mars Society Australia, Inc. (MSA) under a memorandum of understanding signed in July 2007 at the annual Australian Mars Exploration Conference (AMEC 2007) held in Perth, Western Australia.

According to Mars Society Australia's President, Mr David Cooper, 'The purpose of Spaceward Bound is to provide school teachers with an insight into the exciting new fields of space science needed to carry Humans to the Moon, Mars and beyond in the 21st Century, which they can then pass on to primary, secondary and tertiary students both in the USA and Australia.

'It's a very exciting and unique program for these teachers, which has the total support of the Mars Society Australia Board of Directors'.

The teachers participating in the Mojave Expedition are Mr Mark Gargano, Science Coordinator, St Joseph's School, Northam, Western Australia, who is also Education Officer of Mars Society Australia, Inc. and Mr John Mitsinikos, Mathematics Coordinator, Strathmore Secondary College/Victorian Space Science Education Centre (VSSEC), Victoria.

Mr Gargano comments, 'It is a tremendous opportunity to be provided with these skills and activities from NASA that will then be passed onto students in science classes, enhancing standard techniques and providing a fresh mechanism to promote space and planetary science to current students. Perhaps it might even spark an interest and new career direction for students into Science and Engineering'.

Australia's participation in Spaceward Bound will then continue with the visit of the Deputy Chief of NASA Ames Education Division, Dr Liza Coe, to MSA's next annual conference (AMEC 2008), to be held in Adelaide on July 4-6. Dr Coe will then take part in an education and outreach expedition to Woomera and Arkaroola following AMEC 2008, where participants, mainly teachers, will visit the various astronomical and historic launch facilities and areas of geological significant for Mars training here in Australia. A second expedition in 2009 will involve US and Australian teachers participating under the auspices of NASA's Exploration Systems Mission Directorate (ESMD).

Mars Society Australia, Inc. is a not-for-profit, research organisation, with Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) approval by the Australian Tax Office, pursuing research and education opportunities to ensure the exploration and settlement of the Red Planet, Mars. Information on Mars Society Australia and AMEC 2008 can be found at <http://www.marssociety.org.au/> and information on Spaceward Bound is to be found at <http://quest.nasa.gov/projects/spacewardbound/>

Media interviews with Mr Mark Gargano or Mr David Cooper of Mars Society Australia can be arranged upon request. Please contact Mr David Cooper on [08] 9295 6466 or email him at president@marssociety.org.au