



Press Release: Adelaide, July 8 2009

Spaceward Bound: NASA Researchers and Australian/US Teachers Head Into Outback

Australian high school teachers will head into the Outback next week with the US counterparts and NASA researchers to participate in the National Aeronautic and Space Administration (NASA) Spaceward Bound (SB) program. Heading the research team will be one of the world's leading space researchers, Dr Chris McKay, a Planetary Scientist at the NASA Ames Research Center. Dr McKay is a co-investigator on the Titan Huygen's probe in 2005, the Mars Phoenix lander mission for 2007, and the Mars Science Lander mission for 2009. He is currently the Program Scientist for the Robotic Lunar Exploration Program.

The aim of the Spaceward Bound program is to allow scientists to increase their knowledge about desert conditions and further their research in linked areas, while participating teachers have the unique opportunity to assist with this research and develop an appreciation for field science and data gathering techniques, which they can then pass on to their students back in the classroom. Areas of focus in the Australian Outback will include field science supporting research into the 'evolution of life' in our solar system and engineering trials of a field robot.

The Australian program will be based at Arkaroola in the Flinders Ranges and take place between **July 11-July 16**. The team will leave from Adelaide on 10 July. There will be 7 Australian teachers, 2 US teachers and 16 members of the US/Australian science team, including Dr McKay, NASA researchers Dr Jennifer Heldmann and Dr Rosalba Bonaccorsi, Dr Adrian Brown of the SETI Institute and Dr Penny Boston of New Mexico Tech. Four expedition support staff from Mars Society Australia, including Australian Expedition Leader David Willson, will round off the Australian contingent. Full crew biographies are found at the Spaceward Bound Australia Website.

This opportunity came about after a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between Mars Society Australia and NASA Spaceward Bound in July 2007. This was the first official connection between these organisations with a field science expedition and the beginning of a series of ventures that began with an investigation of sites in preparation for the 2009 Spaceward Bound program after the annual Australian Mars Exploration Conference (AMEC) in July 2008. The 2009 program is funded and supported by NASA Spaceward Bound, CSIRO Space and Technology Division, Mars Society Australia, Australian National University, University of New South Wales, University of South Australia and the following schools: San Jose State University, Columbus High School, St Joseph's School, WA, Oatlands District High School (TAS), Claremont College (TAS), Campania District High School (TAS), Armidale School (NSW), Brisbane Girls Grammar School (QLD) and the Victorian Space Science Education Centre (VIC).

Daily reports about Spaceward Bound will be available on the Mars Society Australia Website. A **Media Day** is to be scheduled for **12 July 2009**, although requests for media interviews outside this date may be available.

Dr McKay will also be guest speaker at a **free public lecture** on **Friday 17 July** at the University of South Australia, Adelaide, one of the highlights of the 9th AMEC Conference held over the weekend of 17-19 July.

Mars Society Australia is a not-for-profit, CSIRO approved research organisation pursuing research and education opportunities to ensure the exploration and settlement of the Red Planet, Mars. Information on Mars Society Australia and AMEC 2009 can be found at <http://www.marssociety.org.au/> and information on Spaceward Bound is to be found at <http://www.marssociety.org.au/SBA2009.php> and <http://quest.nasa.gov/projects/spacewardbound/>

Media interviews can be arranged upon request. Please contact Mr Guy Murphy on 0416 794 688 or via the Arkaroola Wilderness Sanctuary (11 July – 16 July) on 08) 8648 4848.