

Martian Meteorite makes a rare appearance at Chabot Space & Science Center

Closest Approach of Red Planet since the Age of the Dinosaurs Celebrated with special telescope viewing “costume party” on August 26, and special lecture series August 27 & 28

11 August 2003 - OAKLAND, CA: This summer, the planet Mars is closer to earth than it’s been in over 100,000 years, and closer than it will be for another 15,000. As a matter of fact, it’s in the Oakland Hills. As part of their ongoing ‘Summer of Mars’ and *Mars Encounter* exhibit, **Chabot Space & Science Center** (www.chabotspace.org), an affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, is displaying an actual piece of the red planet – one of only a handful of such samples on public display. Part of a meteorite discovered during an Antarctic expedition in 1984, this fragment – estimated to be more than 4.5 billion years old – has proven to be a piece of rock blasted from the surface of Mars, probably during an impact of a larger body into the Red Planet. However, as incredible as that fact is, it is nothing compared to what research scientists from Stanford University and NASA discovered on further examination.

“ALH84001, as this six inch long piece of rock is called, may contain the first evidence of life existing outside our Earth,” says Alexandra Barnett, Chabot Executive Director. “Using electron beam microscopy, this Martian meteorite gave up its secrets with images of what some scientists are calling the fossilized remains of simple bacteria.”

According to NASA, of the 22,000 or so meteorites that have been discovered on Earth, only 28 have been identified as originating from the planet Mars. These rare meteorites created a worldwide stir when NASA announced in August 1996 that evidence of microfossils might be present in one of them.

The Martian meteorite is the centerpiece of a series of public workshops on August 27 and 28 – the day following Mars’ closest approach to Earth since the age of the dinosaurs. That evening – 9pm August 26 into the morning of August 27 – Chabot will host a special *Mars Mania Costume Party* that will include special “Summer of Mars” programs such as *Return to the Red Planet* planetarium show, the new *Mars Encounter* exhibit, movie previews in the Tien MegaDome Theater, special Mars-related hands-on activities, and close-up viewing of Mars through Chabot's telescopes. A door prize will be given to every partygoer who arrives in Martian costume. Tickets for the *Mars Mania Costume Party* are \$11Adult / \$8Youth and Senior, and are available at ticketweb.com or by calling 510-336-7373.

Following are details on the August 27 & 28th workshops, designed to focus on the issues facing mankind in its exploration of Mars.

August 27 & 28, 11am:

“Water, Water Everywhere and Not a Drop to Drink.”

Ages 8 - 11, parents and interested adults.

Why is water so important and where and how should we look for it on Mars? During this workshop attendees will learn how scientists have searched for water on Mars from using early telescopes to modern spacecraft.

August 27 & 28, 1pm

“How Does Science Work? The Case For Life on Mars.”

Ages 10 - 12, parents and interested adults.

Science is not a set of answers in a textbook, but a method of searching for those answers. In this workshop, we’ll examine one of the hottest science issues – have we found evidence for life on Mars in a meteorite?

Martian Meteorite ALH84001 will be on display during the workshops and also to the general public from 2 – 4 pm. Workshops and viewing are free of charge with general admission but registration is recommended. To register call Denni Medlock at 510-336-7368.

Dr. Tim McCoy and **Dr. Cari Corrigan** will also present a public lecture on August 28 at 7:30 pm titled, **“Martian Meteorites: What They Tell Us About Mars and Life.”** Tickets are \$7 and are available through the Chabot Box Office at (510) 336-7373.

Special features of Chabot’s “Summer of Mars” celebration include the *Mars Encounter* exhibit in the galleries, and *Return to the Red Planet* on view in the Ask Jeeves Planetarium, as well as lectures, family workshops, viewing parties, and other programs. *Mars Encounter* invites visitors to explore Mars’ place in our culture, investigate discoveries of past missions to Mars, follow the progress of current missions, and visualize future Mars exploration when human astronauts will experience the Red Planet first-hand. The exhibit, developed by Chabot and West Office Exhibition Design, features a four-foot tactile Mars globe complete with craters and volcanoes; a Martian meteorite; a Martian Sci-fi theater; a Mars Mission Control where visitors can obtain data on current and past missions; videos of Rover missions; a wall-size mural embedded with quiz games; a vacation to Mars planning station, and a play area for the younger crowd.

Return to the Red Planet show in Chabot’s Ask Jeeves Planetarium takes viewers through a journey in time to consider how human understanding of Mars has changed throughout history. The show includes a live presentation that teaches visitors how to locate Mars in the night sky; the latest images from telescopes, orbiters, and rovers; breaking news from the NASA missions, and presents a timeline for Mars exploration. From Percival Lowell’s Martian-built canals and the Carl Sagan Memorial station of Pathfinder to the future MER and Mars Express missions, the spectacular show probes questions such as “Why explore Mars?” “Could life exist there?” and “What would such life look like?”

The Smithsonian affiliated Chabot Space & Science Center opened to the public on August 19, 2000. It is an innovative teaching and learning center focusing on astronomy and the inter-relationships of all the sciences. Its telescope and observatory complex, domed-screen Tien MegaDome Theater, Ask Jeeves Planetarium, exhibits and natural park setting are a place where students, teachers and the public can imagine, understand and learn to shape their future. Set amid thirteen trail-laced acres in Joaquin Miller Park, with glorious views of San Francisco Bay and the Oakland foothills, the \$76-million complex offers a hands-on celebration of sights, sounds, and science.

Chabot Space & Science Center is the continuation and expansion of Oakland, California’s public Chabot Observatory that has served San Francisco Bay Area schools and citizens with astronomy and science education programs for 117 years. The institution began in 1883 as the Oakland Observatory, through a gift from Anthony Chabot to the City of Oakland. The original Oakland Observatory was located in downtown Oakland, and provided public telescope viewing for the community. For decades, it served as the official timekeeping station for the entire Bay Area, measuring time with its transit telescope. For information and tickets, please call (510) 336-7300. www.chabotspace.org.

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